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**SOCIAL CONSULTATION; A PERSONAL EXPLORATION OF WORKING  
RELATIONS AND CHALLENGES FACED BY SITE DEVELOPERS,  
ARCHAEOLOGISTS AND LOCAL COMMUNITIES: USING DZATA SITE AS A CASE  
STUDY**

**By**

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**A minor dissertation submitted in *partial fulfillment* of the requirements for the award of a  
degree of M. Phil with a specialisation in Public Culture**

**Centre for African Studies,  
Faculty of the Humanities  
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**16 February 2004**

**DECLARATION**

I the undersigned hereby declare that this work has not been previously submitted in a whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature.....Date.....

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**DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my neighbour and my 'old' friend, the Late Mrs. Masindi Ramunyandi. The idea to conduct a study on the site Dzata was born from our discussions and your concerns about the site you and many of your peers, once regarded as sacred. Although you did not live to see this idea accomplished, all you told me remained embedded in my thoughts throughout the research and writing of this thesis. Thank you.

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**ABBREVIATIONS**

1. **ARPA** - Archaeological Resources Protection Act
2. **MTDSC** - Mphephu Tourism Development Sub- Committee
3. **NAGPRA** - Native Americans' Graves Protection and Reparation Act
4. **NHPA** - National Historic Preservation Act of 1990
5. **NHRA** - National Heritage Resources Act N0. 25 of 1999
6. **NHS** - National Heritage Site
7. **NMC** - National Monuments Council
8. **NMCA** - National Monuments Act of 1969
9. **SAHRA** - South African Heritage Resources Agency
10. **SGB** - Standards Generating Body
11. **UNIVEN** - University of Venda
12. **US National Parks** - United States Nationals Parks
13. **VDC** - Venda Development Corporation
14. **WHS** - World Heritage Site

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## DEFINITION OF TERMS

Indigenous –local communities; the word Indigenous has been widely used to define inhabitants of particular places encountered by European explorers, adventurers and seaman. Banks (1999: 49) defines Indigenous people as ‘non- westerners’ who have been domiciled in the same region or nation state for several generations. His description is further supported by Thompson (1995). He uses examples such as that of Australian aborigines, American Indians and others to illustrate his point. According to him, the term ‘Indigenous’ can be used to define a group of people who are born in a place or a region, thus descendents of the earliest inhabitants of a region (Thompson 1995: 4-5). In this context, the words indigenous or local communities has been used with reference to people who were born, and have lived at or around the sites in question with little movement to other places. As a result, these people are seen as the main sources or carriers of ‘valid’ knowledge about the history of a particular site.

Westerners versus Natives; These terms have over the years been formally used with particular reference to European Explorers, adventurers and travelers in contrast with Africans, Asians, Australians, and others who were found and have lived in particular countries for years. Oxford English dictionary, 9<sup>th</sup> (ed) defines this terms synonymously for what is in the literature referred to as the professional and non- professional. The term ‘Western’ is said to be an adjective or word referring to a person or people who is not of African descent but rather of European descent. Meanwhile ‘Native’, like Indigenous people, refers to people who belongs naturally to a certain place, and have lived there for a long time (Thompson 1995). Here these terms were used in more general sense to define people who are of European descent, holds morals, values, customs, beliefs and methods that are typical European, not belonging to what would “ethnically” be defined as “white”.

The general public; The term ‘general public’ is capable of a range of interpretations. In this thesis, it is taken simply to mean all those people who do not regard themselves as ‘professionals’ either as archaeologists, social anthropologists, researchers in a museum education institution, and therefore constitutes the majority of the population. A general definition of the General Public is offered by Mavhungu (2003). According to him, these people can be described as variety of audiences, interested parties, organised as collections of individuals whose members share similar viewpoints and objectives. Mavhungu (2003: 6).

Indigenous versus Western knowledge; Indigenous knowledge refers to knowledge that is unique to certain group of people, culture or society. It is seen to contrast knowledge generated in the interaction systems of universities, research institutions and other private sectors, which in this context is referred to as 'Western knowledge'. Communities in developing countries mainly use this knowledge at a local level as their basis of their decision- making pertaining to humans, histories, health, natural resources management, education and other activities. Western knowledge however, is knowledge generated using western scientific methods such as archaeological excavations, research, etc. In this thesis, western knowledge refers to the ever increasing scientific-archaeological body of knowledge mainly acquired using the above methods such as field survey, radiocarbon dating and others.

Oral knowledge/ history; Mbulwe-Samba (1994: 105) argues that it is no longer news to state that the customs, beliefs, values and opinions of the African society have been handed down from their ancestors for posterity by word of mouth or by practice since the earliest times, until the advent of European Colonization and its stress of literacy and written word barely 200 years ago, changed the trend. Oral or Individual knowledge is therefore, in most cases seen as that which is created by 'oneself' with little if not no, scientific evidence. Unfortunately this knowledge is mostly likely seen as untrue or of less value as compared to scientifically generated information. In this context, oral knowledge refers to information gained from up-bringing and further through social interaction with peers and other members of the society. For this thesis, besides my own personal knowledge, experiences and observations, this information was generated through interviews with various people including members of the public, local communities and representatives of the Mahesh- Ramabulana royal family.

'Black', 'White', 'Colored', and 'Non-white'; these terms were used with a deep understanding of contestations and emotions attached to them in contemporary popular discourses. Under apartheid South Africa, ethnicity became the key factor to classify all people out of the 'white' race. One of the apartheid policies, The Population registration Act registered all people in terms of their racial groups, e.g. Black, Colored, white, and Indians (Ashcroft 1999: 17). Terms such as the one above, were used and accompanied by explicit racist theories which was aimed to explain and justify social inequality. The term, 'Non- white', is in this context, used to distinguish people of other races from those of 'white' or 'European' descent. In post-apartheid South Africa however, there is no doubt that one cannot use of these terms without resorting to critical notions

of race and culture. A very challenging issue that remains to be resolved nevertheless, it should be noted that these terms are not in any way used in a derogatory manner; however, they need to be understood as sociological terms rather than for biological categorization.

Sacred Sites; The concept “sacred”, and what it means to people in different cultures, has so far been broadly defined. Archaeologists, legislators, and those involved in Heritage management, sometimes come into conflict with local population over sites which these communities consider to be sacred (Carmichael et al 1994). Abercrombie (1994: 365) asserts that sacred includes phenomena which are regarded and experienced as extraordinary, transcendent, and outside the everyday course of events. In my interview with him, Ralushai (2002), defines sacred or what he, in TshiVenda language refers to as ‘*Zwifho*’ as places where ancestors rites and others involving offerings are performed. In Venda, these sites or places are believed to be inhabited by the living-dead. Their presence of which makes these place holy or sacred compared to other places. The same belief persists at many sites in Venda including at the case study site of Dzata.

Significance; Significance can be social, historical, symbolic, experimental, and sensory or reactional values associated with the site or a place. As defined in the National Heritage Recourses Act of 1999 (Act No. 25 of 1999: 8-vi), “Cultural significance means, aesthetic, architectural, historical, scientific, social, spiritual, linguistic or technological value or significance. (NHRA: 1999). All people have, according to (Swindler 1997: 9); connections with places where they live, work, play, and consequently form relationships with these places. They would define these places as good, powerful, safe and find comfort in living in these places. Consequently, these places are then referred to as significance places. There is a sense of belonging that is valued. In this context therefore, the term significance has been used in particular reference to similar values indigenous communities attached to Dzata site. The argument being that all these values, regardless of what needs to be done, need not be compromised, but rather be protected, conserved and preserved for generations to come.

Indigenous –local archaeologists; Unless where the context clearly states that I am referring to solely to ‘archaeologists’, I have used the term archaeologist simply to describe professionally trained archaeologists, physical anthropologists, either working on sites, as museum curators, heritage practitioners and in other areas. The term Indigenous Local Archaeologist has been used exclusively with reference to scholars who belong, either culturally, ethnically, historically, to a

nation or a group of people or have lived and grew around sites where respective research is conducted. I tend to personalize this, by constantly referring to myself as an Indigenous-local archaeologist. In fact, this is due to the fact that the case study site Dzata, is situated in Nzhelele, Venda, Ha- Mandiwana Village. This is the land where I was born went to school, and spent my entire childhood and adult life, till 1999 when I moved to Cape Town. Contrary to other archaeologists who only came there merely for research purposes, I still regard Venda as my first home, my knowledge of the place, language, and my constant visits since this move; give me the perspective to claim that I am an Indigenous- local archaeologist.

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Given the complexity of this research study, it is very important that before engaging in the debate, I should give some personal background: my childhood experiences, my studies and my profession. This information could help the reader understand the position from which I am raising my arguments and the factors that have influenced me to take the bold step of writing a thesis – i.e. - my position as an archaeologist and an “indigenous-local person”<sup>1</sup>.

### **A PERSONAL BACKGROUND**

I was born in 1973 in the rural homeland of Venda, South Africa. My parents, like many black adults, were forced to migrate from their rural Venda homeland to a city, in this case Johannesburg, in search of a better life. Consequently, I, just like many children, spent my schooldays in the rural areas and my holidays in the city visiting my parents. These events led to my childhood experiences that are complex and filled with memories of conflicting cultures and of moving from one area to the other and mixing with people from different backgrounds. Although I was young at the time, and probably had a poor understanding of what was going on around me, the impact of apartheid racial policies on both socio-political and economic status were to have a huge effect on me. Little did I know at the time that the experience of moving around the country with little sense of stability, i.e. a permanent home, friends, schools and language, would contribute to and influence my current understanding and analysis of previous and current socio-political, economic and academic discourses, developments and transformation within various disciplines such as archaeology.

Although I did mathematics and physical science and later agricultural science in high school, my interest or desire to study social history in an academic context can be traced back to the very early stages of my life. Approximately 3 miles from my family house in Venda lies a very significant historic site named Dzata (Hanisch: 1980), also known as “Dzata Ruins”. It is an Iron Age archaeological site in Venda situated on Nzhelele District in the Northern part of South Africa now called Limpopo Province. Archaeological evidence has it that this site was occupied for a period of 60 years from AD1700 to AD 1760. This site remains the closest and the most

easily accessible archaeological site to me. Memories of how the site used to look and my sense of pride towards it as well as all the taboos and symbolism surrounding it are still imprinted deep inside me. I remember the sound of a horn being blown from the royal homestead, a call for all the elderly people to go and work on the site. I remember how my grandmother, together with other people from our village and from neighbouring villages would narrate stories about the ruins, ancestral worship, rituals and everything that adds to the site's significance to the VhaVenda<sup>2</sup> nation. It was for these reasons that even before my "encounter" with archaeology in 1993 when I enrolled for a BA degree at the University of Venda, I had already developed a deep interest on social history and respect for cultural or traditional history and beliefs.

I acquired my early education under the apartheid Bantu Education Act, which I shall describe later. I cannot ignore the barrier that both my primary and secondary schooling imposed on my desire to study archaeology in an academic context. I can therefore trace my study of archaeology at tertiary level not only to my pursuit of an academic career, but also to my childhood experiences, respect for those who have left us distinctive histories, and also pride in the traditions of VhaVenda people.

The magnificent stonewalls of Dzata Ruins, which happened to lie along the route I took to my high school, always fascinated me. Since I could not see any evidence of the remains of houses, I used to wonder how people had lived there and why and when the site was abandoned. My interest in the history that lay behind who built the walls would leave my 77 -year old grandmother and Miss Masindi Ramunyandi, our neighbour who passed away in 2002 at the age of 101, struggling to answer some of my questions. I bombarded them with these questions since I believed that the occupants of this site might have been their peers or people they had once known<sup>3</sup>.

Earlier I referred to my introduction into the discipline of archaeology as an "encounter". This is because I only heard of social science disciplines such as archaeology when I reached a tertiary level education. Although I had an early interest in history and with archaeological evidence

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<sup>1</sup> I am referring to myself as a person who was born and grew up around the site I am researching.

<sup>2</sup> VhaVenda refers to a group of people who occupy the area called Venda in the Limpopo Province, Northern region of South Africa

<sup>3</sup> The ages of these two women are estimates since there is no proper documentation to validate their exact dates of birth. Another sign of how apartheid legacies continue to impact especially on the poor, illiterate, and old citizens of South Africa. As a result to this, some elders and needy people cannot even get government grants allocated for senior citizens because they cannot remember when they were born.

around me, the chances of my ever entering this field as a career were limited. Furthermore, my encounter with archaeology only happened as a result of not having received admission into the School of Agriculture where I wanted to do my B.Sc. in soil sciences. This assertion could be shocking to some people. It was however, commonplace for most black scholars who studied under the Bantu Education Act to only have become aware of disciplines such as Archaeology, anthropology, museology and other social studies once they reach tertiary level education. I remember sitting in my first archaeology class in 1993 and thinking: “What is this course all about? What am I going to do with it once I have graduated?” The concept of discovering information through excavations was somehow foreign to me. What is excavation? What is the relevance of these artefacts to the present? What is an artefact anyway? Little did I know that this would be the beginning of a journey that would take me back into the life and experiences I had longed to forget.

How could I ignore the past when its legacies continue to haunt and confront most people not only in social and public spaces, but also in academia? As a result, I have begun to view how these experiences have set foundations for critical research such as this. These legacies have fuelled discourses that are aimed at highlighting problems that some choose to ignore or brush away, and others continue to endure silently.

One should bear in mind that the site in question holds a certain cultural significance, and that issues to be explored are complex and contested. It is therefore important to set a platform by giving a brief historical background of the area where the site is situated. The following section, therefore, examines the history of the Republic of Venda under the Nationalist Party government, and its transition into an independent state. I will talk briefly about issues of leadership and the role of the chiefs in relation to the apartheid government and the VhaVenda people. Were there any socio-political and cultural implications as a result of this change?

I will draw from historical events that took place at Dzata, power contestations, and significance of the site to the local VhaVenda. Furthermore, I will refer to the current events regarding the VhaVenda chieftaincy and the opinions of those who once stayed and lived at Dzata. As will be shown in the literature review, it should be noted that there have been few scholarly works published work on Venda historiography. This left me with limited sources of reference to support this study. Most of the information used in this section therefore, was drawn mainly from personal knowledge, oral history and archival materials. These issues are of great relevance to

this work as they bear evidence of continuity in power contestations and political conflict in contemporary Venda, and most importantly, the aims behind the initial proposal of the development of Dzata. What does the site mean to me?

### **DZATA TO ME: SIGNIFICANCE**

As I mentioned earlier, Dzata site is situated approximately 3km from my family house, making it the closest and the most easily accessible site to me. As a result of socio-cultural and political issues like those mentioned earlier, there is no doubt that this site holds a strong significance to the Singo's and the Vhavenda nation as a whole. According to Ralushai (2001), like Mapungubwe, Dzata is a sacred site. It is a "sacred grove" or "*Zwifho*" in Venda, he said. Therefore, for fear of punishment by ancestors, no one, except when accompanied by a member of the royal family, was allowed to walk around the space, cut trees, collect wood or pick anything up around the site. These rules come from oral history, some of VhaVenda's cultural beliefs attached to the site.

As I was growing up, I heard a lot about the site: issues regarding its previous occupants and beliefs and taboos were dominant issues whenever Dzata was mentioned. From as early as the 1960's, local traditional leaders used Dzata as a base for ritual performances and other traditional ceremonies. This would take place during December. Annual traditional ceremonies were held on the site. Only older people were allowed to participate in these ceremonies. As young people growing up close to this site, we never had the opportunity to see or understand what the ceremonies were all about. However, the feeling of respect, fear and connection with the symbolism of the site persisted. Even without supervision, we would not even think of walking nearer to certain part of the ruins themselves as it was prohibited by tradition.

It was during the early 70s that the late President of the then Venda Homeland, His Majesty Thovhele Patrick Ramaano Mmbulaheni Mphephu, would request elderly people to come and participate in the ceremony, which was called "*Thevhula*<sup>4</sup>" and where men and women would perform traditional dances like the *Tshikona*<sup>5</sup> and "*Tshigombela*". Only those from the royal

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<sup>4</sup> *Thevhula* is a Venda word that refers to a ritual that each clan or royal family performs once a year. There is no set way of performing it; each clan knows has its own way of communicating with their ancestors.

<sup>5</sup> *Tshikona* and *Tshigombela* are both traditional dances. *Tshikona* is a male dance where boys from as early as 5 years can be trained to play flutes and join the group, whereas *Tshigombela* is meant for women and young girls. These dances are meant for entertainment and to honor the Kings or leaders.

family known as "*Vhakololo*" were allowed access into the ruins in order to perform their sacred rituals.

According to Mr. Phaswana, an old man I briefly interviewed (2002) during the 60s, no commoner knew what was done during the ritual and how it was done as every clan had its own way of worshipping its ancestors. It was every local person's duty to act as a guardian of the area, to make sure that there was no vandalism. When animals and natural forces had forced some of the stones to collapse, villagers saw it as their duty to rebuild the walls themselves. Community projects or what is referred to as *Dzunde* in Tshivenda, were the other ways in which people in local villages would get involved in conservation and preservation of their heritage. During this process, people would voluntarily or under instruction from their respective leaders, go and work on public spaces without demanding any remuneration or compensation. Thus, traditionally, local leaders have rights to instruct people living around particular areas to get involved in community work. More often than not, it is elderly people who are called to render this kind of service, especially in the case of sites that have religious or spiritual symbolism and are regarded as sacred. In other rural parts of Venda, instead of waiting for local municipality to offer their services, local communities prefer this practice to maintain sites and other places like graveyards. Thus, as far as indigenous heritage practices are concerned, this process can be seen as another device adopted by indigenous communities to maintain and keep spaces of cultural significance in good condition. It is a way of showing that sites can be used, and conserved over the years without any vandalism and other deterioration factors causing it to decay. In the case of Dzata, "*Dzunde*" was the only method that was used to keep the space tidy and clean by removing weeds, cutting overgrown vegetation and rebuilding the walls. No one demanded any payment for their work as they regarded the site as sacred. The work was part of respect and honour to the ancestral spirit. Ever since the abandonment of "*Dzunde*" practice, the site has become overgrown, making it difficult to walk and see previously excavated areas. (See Figure 1) To demonstrate the level of significance this site has to the VhaVenda nation in general, out of ten public holidays during the homeland Venda, there was one holiday called Dzata Day. This day used to be celebrated on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February each year. According to Dzivhani (1992), until the Public Holiday Amendment Proclamation Act gazetted in 1992 abolished Dzata Day as a public holiday, this day was significant to many VhaVenda people. It was the only official day during which they could remember and celebrate a once very united nation in South Africa. Abandonment of "*Dzunde*" practice at Dzata is another key problem that signifies the importance

of the need to adopt an integrated approach in site development processes. These matters and others to be stated below are the core issues of concern in this thesis.



**FIGURE 1:** These two images portray an open view of the site Dzata and overgrown weeds' covering stonewalls and previously excavated areas. **Photo by, Irene Mafune, January 2001**



## **“HOMELANDS” AND THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL LEADERS IN APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA**

When the National Party came into power in 1948, their election victory was based on a platform of separate development, better known as apartheid. Amongst the pillars of apartheid was the 1952 Group Areas Act which separated people according to race, the Population Registration Act, which classified people according to their “ethnic” groups such as Venda, Xhosa, Zulu, Tswana, the Mixed Marriages Act, which was meant to prevent “multi-racial” marriages and, lastly, the Bantu Education Act of 1955 which provided for separation in education. Together these acts not only separated people, but also aimed to socially and economically privilege the white society (Solani 2001: 9)

The homelands plan, referred to as the “Bantustan” policy, called for the establishment of ten purportedly independent black states. Enacted into law in 1959, these states were divided along tribal lines and scattered across South Africa. (*Rand Daily Mail*: 1979)<sup>6</sup> Thus, the South African government unilaterally decided that its black population consisted of a group of “nations”, each of which was based on ethnic origins or cultural lines, and entitled to a homeland. When complete, this scheme would crowd all the black people, who made up more than 80% of the South African population, onto a mere 15% of the land. Butler (1979) argues that homelands were reserves created by the apartheid regime to dump unworthy subjects who were mostly unemployable in towns and cities. His argument was supported by the work of Smith (1992) and in Christopher (1994). The two argue that as a result of these policies, the rest of the country, most of its mineral wealth and all industrial regions, would remain in the hands of 4.5 million Whites.

Of these ten homelands set up under the apartheid plan, four accepted full political independence from South Africa, motivated by ethnic nationalism, a desire to be free of white control, and the opportunity for effective power given to the local chiefs. The first one was Transkei, which under the leadership of Kaiser Daliwonga Matanzima took its independence in 1976. Bophuthatswana, under Chief Lucas Mangope followed in 1977. These were followed by Venda, led by Chief

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<sup>6</sup> These are the notes extracted from news clips found at Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archive. Unfortunately the names of authors of most articles used were not provided, but rather identified as Political staff or Reporter. (See list of references.)

Patrick Mphahlele in 1979, and lastly under the leadership of Lenox L. Sebe, Ciskei in 1981. (Butler: 1979)

Not everyone was convinced by such developments. Strong conflicting views in response to this policy emerged. The dominating argument was that these “Bantu homelands” were the logical extension of racial segregation. (*Rand Daily Mail: 1979*) Others argued that they were just the remnant of those territories that were either not settled by white farmers, or were reserves set aside by early colonial governments, thus colonialism. As Mamdani (1996: 6) puts it, the context in which apartheid came into effect, “One first had to push Natives back into the confines of native institutions”. Thus the particularly harsh features of apartheid were implemented by the rule of “natives” through their own institutions.

The only value of the separate political existence of homelands was that they allowed the continuance of structures of tribal government and culture that could not have survived in the larger industrial society, or so it has been argued. However, these homelands were economically still thought of as part of South Africa by most South Africans and by the outside world. Regardless of the power given to traditional chiefs, the homelands remained economically dependent on what Mamdani defines as “urbanized or detribalized natives”, which were deemed to be productive, by the state (Mamdani: 1996:6)

#### **LEADERSHIP ROLES AND TRADITIONAL VERSUS OTHER POWER STRUCTURES**

During the apartheid period, chiefs were more than just an inextricable part of the political set-up in the homelands. Their local tribal powers were considerable, and could be decisive in such matters as the allocation of land or pension distributions. Because chiefs were so closely identified with the homelands’ power structures, the African National Congress (ANC) and other revolutionary parties frequently accused them of propping up apartheid. Contrary to this, it has been argued that although most chiefs strongly opposed apartheid and white domination of South Africa, they also mistrusted the ANC, whose aim, as far as the chiefs were concerned, was to sweep away most of their traditional powers. (Akhilwaha: 1979)

As one of the affected Bantustan Homelands, socio-political, cultural and other power-related conflicts had become a problem in Venda, as in other homelands. These included the social and political roles played by chiefs, issues of citizenship by Venda speaking people who were

would never be viable. Chief Mphephu was not to be excluded from this discourse. Consequently, he was labelled as “Pretoria’s man” with an autocratic record bolstered by conservative tribal support. His leadership and the way in which he came to power were also questioned. The discussion below develops this issue.

### **THE ROLE OF CHIEF P.R. MPHEPHU**

Chief Patrick Ramabulana Mphephu, as he was known, was the President and later inaugurated as the paramount Chief of the Venda “nation”. Not only the most significant figure in the apartheid homelands period, he was also known for the roles he played both politically and traditionally as the VhaVenda “King”. He was installed by the minister of manpower utilization of the Republic of South Africa, Mr. Fannie Botha, sent by the South African Nationalist Government. The manner of his coming to power remained contested, from the time of his reign and even after his death. In his speech, Mr. Botha said, “In contrast to other nations where there were bloody coups from time to time, in addition to having one language, one history and one culture, the Venda nation will have one leader, recognized by all, a symbol of unity and stability.” (*Rand Daily Mail: undated*) Little did he know that this statement would provoke critical debates and conflicts amongst those who sought to gain the authority and status that Mphephu received?

According to those who were in opposition to his power, Mphephu was said to have lost the poll, which was based on a multiple vote, and to have had to rely on the traditional leaders’ nomination to become Chief Prime minister. (*Citizen: undated*) He was held up to scorn as a man who allegedly grabbed power by ignoring the popular vote of the electorate and by detaining 11 successful opposition candidates and scores of their supporters.

### **CONTESTED TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP AND THE SITE OF DZATA**

Drawing from Venda historiography, it is said that until his mysterious disappearance in the early 1870’s, Thohoyandou, the last king who ruled the united Vhavenda nation, was significant in the development of Venda monarchy. However, after his disappearance, conflicts erupted between his sons. According to oral histories, before the abandonment of Dzata, two sons of this prominent Venda king were at loggerheads as to who would be his successor. As a result, Dzata, a once famous capital of Venda, was evacuated and small kingdoms, independent of each other, came into being. (Nemudzivhadi: 1977, and Ralushai: 1987) While Mphephu, one of

working in urban areas, and the manner in which their work and status as Venda citizens was going to be affected by their sudden acquired “migrant” status in urban areas. After a joint cabinet committee meeting, chaired by the Prime Minister, Mr. P. W Botha, an announcement was made that Venda would become independent on 13<sup>th</sup> September 1979. (*Lawrence: 1979*) This change was not to receive the expected positive reception. The United Nations Committee against Apartheid denounced independence for the Venda as “another crime against the African People of South Africa and a serious challenge to the international community”. What was this “independence” going to bring to the Venda nation? What is independence all about when such a small country is granted freedom? How can it ever become viable? How can it ever achieve international recognition, they asked. (*Post: undated*)”

Moreover, Venda independence was opposed by other independent homelands such as the Transkei and Bophuthatswana. (*Tsedu: 1979*) Thus critiques not only emerged from political analysts, but some traditional leaders expressed their concern as well. Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi for example, accused Chief Patrick Mphephu’s homeland government of defrauding and fragmenting the South African nation and making blacks stateless. (*Akhalwaya: 1979*) Together with Chief Mangope of Bophuthatswana, they saw ‘independence’ as a tragedy and treacherous to the cause of black people, a trapping of power which was meaningless. After making such statement, it is still questionable as to how he at the end accepted independence for Bophutatswana. The two openly articulated their grievances, attacked the social order of South Africa and tried to persuade the South African Government to improve the quality of life for all black people. Buthelezi further argued that he would not under any circumstances allow such ‘independence’ to be imposed on KwaZulu. As far as he was concerned, it was an unfair act imposed on black people with no consultation. To demonstrate his strong resistance, he went on to say that if his Zulu nation ever chose ‘independence’, he would rather resign. (*Akhalwaya: 1979*)

With such opposition, the chances of Venda being recognized by the outside world as an independent, legitimate free state were very slim. Political analysts argued that whatever the good intentions behind the independence, the VhaVenda were to wake up to austerity and a diplomatic freeze on September 14<sup>th</sup>, a day after independence was granted. (*Rand Daily Mail: 1979*) Quoting from a statement made by Nigerian Diplomat, Mr Akporode Clark, Venda independence was another way of depriving Africans of their inalienable rights, a crime that should be denounced by the international community. It was argued that for as long as Pretoria was still controlling the purse strings, by funding all homeland-state projects, the so-called independence

Thohoyandou's great grandsons has since passed on, the chieftaincy of the VhaVenda nation remains a publicly contested position of power. This is an ongoing situation, which, as indicated throughout this discussion, has worsened two centuries after the abandonment of Dzata. The current questions regarding the rightful candidate for this position (*Tsedu: 2003*), two decades after his death, is evidence that the problem, that dates back to 200 years ago, is far from over. Questions such as whether Chief Mphephu was the rightful Venda King, who should have been his successor, and who should actually be the King of the Venda Nation, are still part of a critical discourse amongst political and traditional groups.

The appointment of his son, Toni Ramabulana Mphephu, in 2000 as the "king" after the sudden death of his elder brother Dimbanyika on Christmas Eve, December 1999, has come under public, political and traditional scrutiny. The most controversial or rather significant opposition emerges from one of Thohoyandou's descendants, "King" Tshivhase, also known as "His Majesty" Thovhele Midiavhathi Kennedy Tshivhase. Although the two historically belong to the same ancestor, their dispute over this powerful chair is a consequence of the same feuds that date back to the time of Dzata. In a quest to re-establish a respectable Venda monarchy, 28 Venda chiefs gathered to select one Chief to take over the throne as King of the VhaVenda (*Tsedu: 2003*).

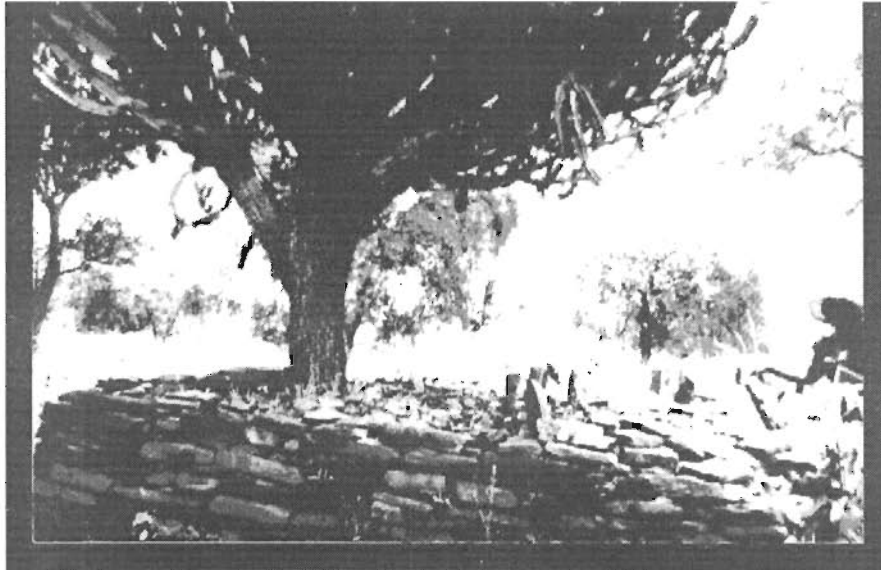
Toni Ramabulana Mphephu came out as a favourite for this position. Interestingly, the same approach used when his father was appointed to this traditional position and which resulted in so many tensions, was repeated. Thus using the voting strategy, 23 out of the 24 chiefs who showed up for the meeting were in favour of Toni Ramabulana's leadership. (*Tsedu: 2003*) This has sparked a dispute that will see the case contested in the high court. Kennedy Tshivhase argues that he is the rightful person for this position. As a result, he has threatened to take legal action and fight until the decision is overturned. My interest in these historical events is aimed at showing the significance of the site of Dzata. I want to show how such conflicts are continuing to influence debates and tensions surrounding the developments of Dzata into a major tourist destination in Venda. I also want to demonstrate contestations surrounding suggestions for it to be nominated as a National Heritage Site although it has already been declared a National Monument under the National Monuments Council (NMC) in 1938. All of this significantly increases the significance of Dzata as a site of heritage production and cultural identification.

## **AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SITE OF DZATA**

Dzata ruins, also known as Mukondeni - "Naboom place", is a well-known Iron Age archaeological site located in Venda, Nzhelele district on the Northern side of the Nzhelele Valley. This area now forms part of the Northern Province of South Africa, which was recently renamed Limpopo province. Drawing from ethnographic and historiography (Stayt: 1968 and Ralushai: 1982), VhaVenda people are generally represented as an almost inaccessible nation, thus affording them a formidable defense against their enemies. And that they had always lived in inaccessible or impenetrable areas. This is not true of Dzata as it is situated on an easily accessible small hill on a rather flat, open area enclosed by steep mountains on all sides. Ralushai (2001) argues that the fact that Dzata was built in a clear flat area gives one the impression that by the time it was built, the Northern region was a peaceful area with no war or conflicts. This assertion remains open for contestation. There is a small rivulet called Gadabi that runs to the west near the site, except in times of severe drought. (Stayt: 1968) According to oral history this rivulet used to be the supplier of water to Dzata inhabitants and all the royal families, including the King who used to bath there. The whole site covers 2 to 3 acres with fragmentary remains of stonewall, some built from dark blue stones. (Loubser 1991: 179, 294)

## **THE ORIGIN OF THE DZATA**

According to radiocarbon dates, Dzata was occupied for a period of almost 60 years from around 1700 – 1760. (Kutama: 2002) It is an archaeological, historic site with the architectural styling that resembles that found at Great Zimbabwe and other ruins across the Limpopo area. (Loubser: 1991) According to Hanisch (1993), to date no stonewalls settlement has been found that is made out of the same dark blue stones as those at Dzata. (See figure 2) Another argument that emerges around Dzata stonewalls was made by Wilson et al. (1969:167-175). They argue that the incoming chiefs from across the Limpopo built the Capital Dzata. They further state that, though in ruins by the early 1930's, these walls clearly showed two types of technique, one being similar to that identified on Sotho settlements. (Wilson et al: 1969)



**Figure 2:** A photo depicting stonewall building technique similar to the one used at related Iron Age archaeological sites such as Great Zimbabwe and Thulamela. Few monoliths can be seen protruding on the top of the wall. **Picture By; Irene Mafune, January 2001**

Stayt (1968) suggests the stones used to build Dzata walls are local. However, he later speculated that, because of the Vhavenda's historic close contact with their neighbors, the Shona speaking people of Zimbabwe, the stones might have been carried for many miles on the heads of the commoners from Vhembe just on the other side of the Limpopo river. According to Stayt (1968), having arrived in what he thought was the promised land, the Chief wished to build himself a big city that would reflect some of the glory of far away *Matongoni*<sup>7</sup>, but had no stones with which to build it. He was afraid to use stones of the newly conquered country for his capital. Therefore he forced the "*vhakalanga*"<sup>8</sup> under his domination to bring the stones as a tribute, forcing them to carry them for long distances from across the Limpopo to demonstrate his power. "Why not let 'them' carry stones for us from the neighborhood of the Great Zimbabwe where we stayed for a while," he asked. And so it happened that the new city of Dzata was built with stones carried by the so-called conquered people. Some people take this assertion as a myth since there is no clear written record about this movement. (Motenda et al: 1940)

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<sup>7</sup> *Matongoni* is the word that many Venda people use to refer to the sacred land where their ancestors had lived.

<sup>8</sup> *Vhakalanga* is a Venda word used to refer to the Shona speaking people found in the South West of Zimbabwe where they were conquered by the Ndebele in the late 1880's.

Early history of this site is interesting and continues to be contested by various interested groups. Most people in the Soutpansberg area believe that Dzata ruins are the remains of the first permanent home of the Singo people. (Nemudzivhadi 1977) It is said that they settled there after they crossed the Limpopo in the early 1700 AD. Dzata therefore is known as an area where all Venda ethnic groups originated and a site that depicts the role that was played by the traditional leaders in the society. Many historians, as reflected in Roestoff (1996: iii), are of the opinion that the Singo people journeyed from Zimbabwe for up to one hundred years before they entered the Soutpansberg, while others consider it to have been a shorter time. Some suggest that the Singo entered the Nzhelele Valleys immediately and settled at Dzata and, while this could be true, there are legends that contradict this. According to some of these legends (Roestoff 1996: vi), the Singo first settled on top of the Tshiendeulu Mountain, where two villages were built.

Although the identity of the first chief to occupy Dzata is not clearly known, some historians are of the opinion that after Dimabanyika's tragic death in the cave at Lwandani while hunting rock-rabbits, Dyambeu and his son, Phophi, later known as Thohoyandou<sup>9</sup> descended to the Nzhelele Valley where they established their second capital called Dzata. (Nemudzivhadi: 1977 and Ralushai: 1982)

Recent accounts identify Zimbabwe pattern ruins at Mutokolwe Hill, near Tshiendeulu Mountain, as the original Dzata. According to Roestoff (1996: iii), most Singo now interpret the Mutokolwe ruins according to their knowledge of Dzata in the Nzhelele valley. For many years however, Africanist scholars have debated the relationship between Zimbabwe-ruins style, cultures and traditions in the Northern Transvaal and Venda, because the Venda chiefs traditionally lived in similar stonewalled settlements. (Pwiti: 1994, Matenga: 1998 and Huffman: 1996) Questions that remain concern Singo originality. According to Huffman (1995), Singo people are originally from Zimbabwe and conquered Venda nations two hundred and fifty years ago. Some Africans believe that pre Singo groups were small and independent before the Singo conquest. The Singo are said to have been the first to introduce sacred Kingship into VhaVenda society. (Ralushai 1977: 2)

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<sup>9</sup> "Thohoyandou" means 'head of an elephant'. Here it is used as a name referring to one prominent King of Dzata. According to oral history, as a result of family feud, Thohoyandou might have left Dzata in the 1800S. To date, the history behind his disappearance, his death and where he was buried remains a mystery.

As already stated, there are conflicting perceptions regarding the clan that built and settled at Dzata. According to Loubsher (1991) the most convincing evidence that the Singos never inhabited Mutokolwe ruins is that their annual dedication ceremonies are restricted to Dzata. Others however believe that the Singo contribution to Venda culture has been greatly exaggerated and question whether the conquest ever occurred. The Singo did not introduce Venda culture, but did unify the Venda people for the first, and apparently, the only time in pre-colonial history. (Ralushai: 1977 and Nemudzivhadi: 1977)

Drawing from his early writings and recent Commissions of Enquiry on Venda chieftaincy, Ralushai (1971, 1977), assert that because of the importance of the Singo clan, many Venda people will always associate themselves with Dzata, a site that, according to him, was once a Singo capital. Although a great deal of work still needs to be done, archaeological evidence has shed some light on these events. In comparison with other archaeological sites around Venda to date, Dzata is the third largest archaeological settlement, an indication of its significance in history.

#### **THE DECLINE OF DZATA: 1760 AD**

Though not proven, oral history indicates that Thohoyandou was assassinated at Dzata, and this led to the beginning of civil war. According to Lalumbe (2000), a fight erupted between the King's sons, Thohoyandou and Tshivhase. Tshivhase didn't want anyone to take over the chieftaincy. Ralushai (2000) on the other hand notes that oral histories throughout Venda agree on at least two points. The Singo conquered a number of independent clans, and at the time of the reign of the Singo leader, Thohoyandou, Dzata was abandoned and the nation fragmented into independent chiefdoms. This Singo capital was, according to Ralushai (1982), the only chief's settlement in Venda at that period.

Dzata was abandoned around 1760AD and indications are that this was a violent departure. Excavation and other evidence such as burned clay fragments indicate that many houses might have been burned down and many household goods left behind.

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The issue of indigenous community involvement during archaeological and other projects such as those aimed at developing sites either for construction of new roads, water reservoirs, or reconstruction of “cultural villages”, has increasingly become a concern. Site developers, architects and researchers such as archaeologists, historians, heritage practitioners and other interested groups are now faced with a great challenge regarding appropriate methods of work and procedures that need to be followed. While these relationships have recently been of great interest to many in the discipline of archaeology, there is however, still a lack of initiative in terms of learning from previous mistakes and problems encountered as a result of poor communication between the practitioners and local communities during and after projects.

As will be illustrated in the literature review, recent research has shown that there is still a major and continuous dissatisfaction on working relations between site development teams with indigenous communities both in South Africa and elsewhere around the world. Most examples to be used in this study will reveal evidence that when sites are developed, from preparatory stages to the actual construction and excavation, projects are conducted without proper consultation and clear communication with local or indigenous societies. In many cases, the latter are sidelined and left to wonder about activities taking place within the vicinity. Generally, there is little sensitivity regarding communities whose past is under threat, the impact on the site and its historic-cultural significance. It is in this context, and concerns described above that the idea to conduct this research was born.

With reference to the historical background of the site and its significance to the communities, I will examine 1) relations between archaeologists, site developers (government officials) and local communities during research; 2) the public’s perceptions and expectations with regard to archaeologists and developers that have worked and researched in the area. 3) Current situations, for example, the state of the site and future developments plans. 4) Finally, I will look at the legislation and question whether there are any policies in place that govern or guide research processes on sites such as the one in question. What does the law say about archaeologists and site developers in relation to their responsibility to indigenous communities in South Africa?

One should bear in mind that there are varying contradictions and contestations that emerge when reviewing archaeological or other sites development work done over the years by various people. My work therefore, is an attempt to focus on general problems and mistakes that continue to impact on the transformation processes of the discipline of archaeology. Moreover, this work wishes to make known conflicts that result from varying understandings of what different groups regard as significant and their impact on the site.

This work is concerned with the roles that various individuals, together with local communities and authorities, and government and heritage agencies can or should play in the development of sites, especially those that hold significance to a particular community. The main focus is on development processes in relation to contesting ideas on the methods of practice, history of the site, varying views and perspectives regarding the intangible and tangible heritage of the site. Drawing from personal experiences and observations fully described earlier, my focus will be on archaeologists, their roles, responsibilities, and accountability in relations to local communities.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following are some of the questions I sought to answer through this research: 1) what role can local people play in the process of archaeological research and site development? 2) To what extent do local communities have to be involved? 3) How can archaeologists resolve conflicts that frequently arise when archaeologically based plans run contrary to the vision and needs of others involved in the research process? 4) Is it appropriate for archaeologists to consider looking at and integrating local knowledge with scientific knowledge in the interpretation and reconstruction of the past? 5) How can notions of accessibility, ownership, accountability, use and control of heritage be addressed? 6) How can archaeologists make archaeological findings available and useful by non-scientists? 7) Most importantly, during and after the development process, how can these groups ensure that a significant site is preserved? 8) Can all these processes be balanced against the needs of communities and possible future purposes for the site?

### **STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

Chapter 2 covers an extensive literature review. Starting with a background on Venda historiography, I will also give a brief outline of South African archaeology in relation to indigenous communities and examine critical issues such as those of rights, accessibility,

ownership and control. I will further outline comparative case studies that will inform most of my arguments.

Chapter 3 details the research process and methodologies. That is the way in which information was generated and analysed.

Based on research interviews and other investigations, Chapter 4 will be concerned with the chronology of events. All the research findings will be reported in this chapter.

In Chapter 5, I shall critically examine these findings and what they mean in this context. This will be a personal interpretation of what happened and questions of power, transparency, and secrecy will be critically evaluated.

In Chapter 6, I shall summarize the study and give brief concluding remarks on all issues raised throughout the thesis.

University of Cape Town

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW: INTRODUCTION

The relationship between indigenous societies and researchers such as archaeologists, historians and anthropologists has over the years been a challenging and contested one. Numerous emerging issues of concern such as accessibility, ownership, and control over heritage, the integration of indigenous knowledge with scientific knowledge, and the issue of consultation with local communities, have been a central part of debates within the field of archaeology.

In order to contextualize this research, I review relevant literature concerned with relations between archaeologists and indigenous communities. It should be noted however, that although the work revolves around archaeologists and archaeology as a discipline, this is an inter-disciplinary study with issues that occur across fields, not only archaeology. Therefore, the literature reviewed ranges from social anthropology, history, archaeology, heritage and tourism, and others. I also look at the critical development stages of archaeology in South Africa and the impact apartheid had on the discipline. It is also crucial to give the background of the area where the site is situated. Therefore, I will also review available literature on Venda historiography. Works by scholars such as that of Nkhumeleni Ralushai and N. Nemudzivhadi give this study a good background on views of Venda scholars in relation to interpretation of their own history. Since the core theme of this thesis is social consultation, other works focusing on this issue are also reviewed. In particular, I have noted important works by Jeannette Deacon, Martin Hall, Chris Saunders, Kwesi Prah, Nick Shepherd, Aron Mazel and Peter Steward, Amanda Esterhuysen, Jeanette Smith, Gilbert Pwiti, Ngoro Weber and Matenga Edward. Moreover, since the core research problem for this work is not unique to one site, comparative studies will be examined. In particular, works by Dorothy Lippert, Peter Ucko, Nina Swindler et al, Rebecca Tsosie, David Spriggs, and Christopher Tilley and Sydney Miler are examined. One of the main emerging challenges on heritage management and conservation, commercialisation, will be reviewed. In order to set a stage for critical debates regarding the ethics of practice in South Africa, the National Heritage Resources Act will also be reviewed.

## BACKGROUND TO VENDA HISTORIOGRAPHY

As indicated in Nemudzivhadi (1977: 1), in as far as Venda historiography is concerned, there is little existing literature. With the exception of the works done by a few authors such as I. Rademeyer, D. Moller-Malan, J. Flygare, and N.J. Van Warmelo (1940). Nemudzivhadi (1977) shows that written materials on the early history of the VhaVenda was based on ethnographic-anthropological and archaeological findings. Unfortunately, only a few historical facts can be assembled from this evidence. Furthermore, he argues that the lack of sound anthropological and archaeological knowledge compelled these writers to concentrate their efforts mainly on tribal divisions. (Nemudzivhadi 1977: 1) Apart from recent archaeological research, which has mainly concentrated at Dzata and Mapungubwe, little was done to reveal the broader history of the VhaVenda people and their origin. This includes archaeological and anthropological interpretation by scholars such as Loubser (1991) and Hanisch (1980). Their work, however, focuses on settlement patterns, social structures and stonewalls technique of Dzata in comparison with others sites around the Limpopo-Shashi basin.

The first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw a development and interest by a few Venda scholars who, in contrast to early missionaries and other Western writers, wrote about their own history. They contested early histories written by authors as indicated by Nemudzivhadi. The main authors who showed an interest in the history of the VhaVenda were H.A. Stayt and Blacking J. As an ethno-anthropologist, Blacking (1969 and 1985), reported that his interests were mainly in studying cultures, traditions and other ceremonies such as initiation, rituals, and the music of the VhaVenda people. His work can hardly be said to provide an account of Vhavenda origins. It is with these observations that Venda scholars such as Nemudzivhadi, Ralushai, Dzivhani, Mudau, and others took upon themselves the task to bring order to what they saw as a somewhat disorganized and in certain instances, incomplete field of study.

Venda scholars assert that the latter's historical contribution was very limited and based on second-hand information. They feel that these authors' research on Venda history should be re-evaluated since they were cultural outsiders, with no means by which to verify the reliability of the information they received. Scholars such as Motenda M. M et al (1940), Dzivhani S.M (1940), Mudau E.F.N and Van Warmelo, J (1940), Nemudzivhadi (1977), Ralushai (1971, 1977, 1982, and 2001) and several other writers have made major contributions in writing and

interpreting the history of the VhaVenda. This includes issues such as those of conflicts and power contestations, significance of sites and of various ceremonial practices, and most importantly, the origin of the VhaVenda people. Ralushai (1982: 2) shows that generally, most written works on the VhaVenda are not analytical and writers are uncritical of works, which should be reviewed or corrected. He further asserts that he is not, of course, arguing that his work is perfect. However, he is appealing to students of Venda studies not to look at previous works as “holy scripts” – they should adopt a scientific or an objective attitude when making use of old written works.

At the time of doing this research, Professor Ralushai was busy reviewing written literature on Mapungubwe. His continuous work aimed at filling the gaps in indigenous understanding of this cultural landscape, from the relatively well-documented Mapungubwe period to the present. His focus is on the relationship Venda people have with this site and others such as Great Zimbabwe and Thulamela over the years and his aim is to deconstruct the way in which this relation has been viewed and interpreted by various scholars. This is a reactive work triggered by constant contestations and critical discourses on historical data, land ownership, accessibility and the control of these sites and associated cultural heritages found. He shows that his work would require broader research. (Ralushai 2003:3)

## **SOCIAL CONSULTATION**

Without dismissing the fact that there has been a slight change noted in terms of archaeologists' relations with indigenous societies, the fact remains that the defining characteristic of archaeology under apartheid was the growing separation between archaeologists and society. As illustrated in Shepherd (2003), in contemporary South Africa there is a call for indigenous people to enter disciplines that were historically reserved for whites. (Shepherd 2003:14-16) With reference to a few case studies around the world, the following section will be a review of concerns relating to social consultation, and critical challenges and other issues that emerge during this process. Drawing from my personal experiences I will also show the positive results achieved elsewhere. The following section is a review of personal experiences and observation on visited sites outside South Africa. Some of the issues raised in most of the case studies may differ slightly to what has transpired at Dzata. However in this context, the idea is to illustrate the shortcomings and most importantly, the benefits of a proper social consultation process.

## **PRECEDENT CASE STUDIES: LESSONS FROM OTHER SITES**

### **MALI HERITAGE SITES**

In February 2001, I was invited to participate in the Society for African Archaeologists conference in Mali. During this period, I visited many archaeological sites and traveled to Segou, Mopti, Bandiagara Villages, Jenne and Jenne Jenne, areas within which there are National Monuments and World Heritage Sites. Before visiting this country, I had already developed an interest in the rich culture and heritage of the people of Mali. Having read reports written by authors who have done extensive research on archaeological and other heritage sites in the area (Ardouin et al: 2000, Schmidt: 1993 and Togola: 1997), I wanted to see what had been done and how I could relate that to the situation in my own country.

Most important is the issue of indigenous people's roles, not only in the interpretation of the past, but also in safeguarding their own heritage for future generations. Negative consequences have emerged out of this interest in Malian heritage, for example looting and illegal export of heritage objects, but much has been done to deal with this problem. The rate of illegal excavations of archeological sites, all of which according to Schmidt and McIntosh (1993) might be as a result of socio-economic problems, has decreased. This is said to have occurred as a result of the commitment by archeologists and museum practitioners who offer heritage education to the broader community. In my visit to Jenne, I was pleased to see that local people are now in charge of their own heritage, working as field interpreters and guards. I met an American archaeologist by the name of Susan McIntosh who has over the years done extensive research and training of local people in the area. Consequently there is now a museum close to the site. This museum is accessible to both the local communities and international visitors. As will be discussed later, the same cannot be said of the South African case.

### **TANZANIAN HERITAGE SITES**

In September 2002, I received an invitation to participate at an international conference in Tanzania. The aim of the trip was not only for conference attendance. I felt honored to be invited as one of the key speakers to share my work experiences and the challenges faced by World Heritage sites. The major discussion however, was on the criteria of declaring sites as World Heritage Sites, and the challenges and process that need to be followed. In this regard, the main

focus was on Bagamoyo, a historical town situated on the coast about 70 kilometers north of Dar es Salaam. The town is beautifully situated on the brim of the Indian Ocean. (Areskough and Persson 1999: 4) Here, I also went to visit a couple of sites including museums, monuments, and an archeological site called Kaole. I was pleased to notice that at Kaole, archaeologists, together with government officials and local communities, have successfully worked together in devising ways of looking after and making archaeological findings accessible. Although there were, unlike in the case of Dzata, no development proposals on the site, like in Jenne-Jenne, social consultation resulted in the erection of a site museum. Most archaeological findings from this site are exhibited in this museum, and local communities are the custodians of the museum. The existence of a site museum gives local communities and other visitors a clear understanding of the objects and the history of the area where they were discovered. Thus artifacts were not taken away from their context, strengthening the sense of connection between indigenous people, their material belongings and the environment in which they lived.

### **THULAMELA SITE**

Thulamela site is situated on the Luvuvhu River in the North of the Kruger National Park. This site was earmarked for development into the centre of environmental education in the 1990's, with the ruins of the archaeological site as a springboard (Miller: 1999: xii). During the period 1993 to May 1997, intense archaeological investigations as well as rebuilding of walls on the site brought to light the history of the region. With full participation by representatives of the Venda and Tsonga/Shangaan communities, academics from various institutions as well as members of the National Parks, the project was jointly managed and developed. (Miller 1999: xii) Although there was contestation over ownership by the VhaVenda and Shangaan clans, with negative reports on poor collaboration between sites developers, archaeologists and indigenous communities, the Thulamela project brought a new and mostly positive attitude and a hope for successful relationships in future developments projects. According to Miller (xii), Thulamela media boom has shown that the public is hungry for knowledge of the past. Therefore, there is no excuse to fully involve the general public in the work of the archaeologist. He further argue that the time has come that important artifacts recovered from sites such as Thulamela should not be "priceless" pieces to be hidden away for personal gluttony of museum curators Miller. (1999: xii)

## PRESTWICH STREET SITE, CAPE TOWN

In South Africa, there is a tradition of allowing development on or near sites that hold significance to indigenous societies. In Cape Town, for instance, “indigenous groups<sup>10</sup>” have had continuous clashes with Local government regarding development on areas known to have been used as burial sites. A recent example is the “accidental discovery” of the remains of what is believed to be more than 1000 bodies at the Prestwich Street site. (SAHRA: 2003)<sup>11</sup>

During the first week of June 2003, human skeletal remains were exposed by the activities of a demolition company clearing the site for development. (SAHRA: 2003) This was reported to the City and SAHRA, who immediately ordered a work stoppage in terms of Section 36 of the National Heritage Resources Act. (No. 25 of 1999) An archaeological team from the University of Cape Town (UCT) was contracted by the developer to exhume the burials from the site. A permit to conduct such work was issued by SAHRA, who also recommended that a public consultation process take place concurrently with the exhumation. The purpose of this procedure was to allow identification of any direct descendants who might wish to be consulted regarding the re-interment, as required by the regulations governing known cemeteries.

This discovery however, prompted a number of questions, conflicts and misunderstandings between various groups such as those of indigenous communities, local heritage authorities, archaeologists, and the developer, religious groups, SAHRA, interested professionals and individuals. Although a number of on- and off-site meetings were held regarding the discovery, at the time of writing this thesis, debates regarding what should happen to the site, the human remains found and the development plan continued. At the end of a 60 days notice period, it was clear that not everyone was satisfied with the whole consultation process. As a result, a group, which named itself “Hands off Prestwich Street”, submitted an appeal against the process and the decisions taken. In their appeal document dated 15 October 2003, they argue that the public consultation was a very limited process. “This, is given the cultural and historical significance of the discovery, and therefore call for a more extended process”, they argue.

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<sup>10</sup> Although there has not been any proof of who the decedents of the Prestwich Street people are, these are the people who, so far are claiming to “be” the descendants. An issues which has also fueled debates and arguments to conduct scientific research on the remains.

<sup>11</sup> *This is a SAHRA's compiled documents, reports, comments and claims made by the general public, academics, museum curators, and other professionals from the time the site was discovered*

In their own words, they assert,

“Our faithful involvement in the process of public participation leaves us with the view that the process was of an exclusive relationship between archaeologists and the developer as mediated by SAHRA. As members of the public, we were brought as props to rubberstamp and legitimize decisions that favour the interest of the developer”. (Appeal doc: 2003:3)

They further argue that “The needs for archaeology as a science seems to have been given precedence over other needs: the needs for socio-cultural history, of collective remembering and acknowledging the pain and trauma related to the site and the history that gave its existence”. (Appeal document: 2003:3)

Similar discoveries had already taken place in the City of Cape Town. Most of these were found under the then National Monument Council. Sites that have involved cemeteries in similar situations include: Wynberg DRC Cemetery and Muslim Cemetery in Cape Town, sold for development in the 1980's. Others are Cobern Street Burials, near Prestwich Place, analogous to Prestwich Place discovery (1995), St Peters Cemetery, Mowbray, sold for church development in 1997, and the Lutheran Church Cemetery in Ottery.

Questions arising throughout this process are, for example: After all the discoveries as listed above what makes Prestwich site so special? According to Mr Ciraj Rassool (2004)<sup>12</sup>, the site is more significant because of its symbolic factors or the possibility that those buried underneath might be slaves, a representation of those who were oppressed by the colonialists. So far, the Prestwich site remains the only site found that speaks directly to the history of Cape Town.

Other questions are: 1) why was the developer granted a permit at the first place? 2) Who are the direct descendents of the deceased? 3) Who has the authority to decide when to excavate? 4) How

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<sup>12</sup> Mr Ciraj Rassool is a historian working at the University of the Western Cape. Mr Rassool has and continues to play a significant and critical role in heritage issues and ethics of general practice. He is currently serving as a member of the Archaeology, Paleontology, Meteorites and Heritage Objects Permit Committee and is a member of the South African Heritage Resources Council. This comment was made in one of the Permit Committee meetings, January 13, 2004.

long should the process of consultation take place? 5) If exhumed and left on the ground, what kind of measures should be followed to protect the remains? 6) Should the bodies be buried somewhere else? 7) If development is stopped, will that mean that there would not be any development in Cape Town<sup>13</sup>?

The statements made above present clear evidence of the challenges faced by developers, archaeologists and indigenous societies around the world. These debates will form part of the discussion in the later chapters. What has the situation been like in other areas around the world?

## **OTHER CASE STUDIES**

Recently, there has been an increase in publication and debate around successful collaborative projects involving archaeologists and indigenous societies. (Stone and Planel: 1999) Several case studies conducted around the world describe bleak situations in which archaeological projects were and still are continuing to be done without the involvement of the public. (Jameson: 1997, Gathercole and Lowenthal: 1990) Archaeologists continue to be at the centre of this feud. They are said to be making less effort at communicating and educating indigenous people about archaeological work, reporting in indigenous languages and disseminating information amongst various interested groups outside the archaeology community. (Swindler, et al: 1997) Archaeology is, as a result, viewed as a destructive discipline, and archaeologists are viewed as scientists who lack respect for the significant sites on which they work, and interest in the communities whose past they investigate.

In many countries, this practice has resulted in misunderstandings between archaeologists and indigenous societies. (Swindler, et al: 1997) The latter feel that archaeological work conducted on sacred sites makes a great impact on the site's significance and the physical fabric of the site. In places like Hawaii however, the relation between archaeologists, site developers and local communities is different. Archaeologists are often found to be on both sides of the dispute. As a result, native Hawaiians do not fully trust nor approve of their activities. In rare cases, archaeologists are found to be the ones who differ with government agencies and developers over the fate of archaeological sites in areas chosen for development. (Spriggs: 1990) Among Native American descendants, the general feeling that archaeologists do not consult with indigenous

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<sup>13</sup> These questions summarise those that people are asking regarding the site, development proposal and consultation process at various committees meetings.

societies during the development of their research design, and that the information they gather is inadequately disseminated, persists. (Swindler: 1997: 12) This situation, as will be shown later using examples drawn from Dzata site, is an indication of a widespread problem of poor communication between archaeologists, sites developers and local communities.

Although the Society for American Archaeologists occasionally holds special meetings to examine relations between archaeologists and Native Americans, as far as archaeologists are concerned, this relationship is also unbalanced. (Swindler 1997: 12) This is as a result of archaeologists' ignorance of Native American oral history, cultures, beliefs and the role they can play in research and the interpretation of the past. The main idea of holding meetings such as these is to examine how archaeologists can explore different approaches that can be adopted when dealing with local people and their past. In one of the meetings held in 1996 (Swindler 1997: 17-18), interesting questions such as how archaeological research is relevant to indigenous societies or cultural groups were raised.

The above situation is not limited to the above-mentioned countries. Although the situation seems to be changing in post apartheid South Africa, the relationship between indigenous societies and researchers, such as archaeologists, remains unresolved in many cases. According to Swindler (1997: 18), consultation can no longer be perceived as a one-way avenue of communication in which archaeologists inform indigenous societies of what will be happening to archaeological, cultural and heritage resources. Any meaningful consultation should be a dialogue between equals. Real communication involves listening as much as ensuring that the message received is the one that is actually sent. Striving to understand each other's worldviews, the use of easy language, an interdisciplinary approach when dealing with sites, and developing new paradigms that include a sense of the sacred, should be their main concern.

Tsosie (1990) writes that although there have been many changes in professional ethics and attitudes; the public's perception of archaeologists tends to be driven by their own past experiences. This continued exclusion from archaeological activities and interpretation of the past therefore increases and fuels tensions between archaeologists and non-archaeologists. Just as in the past, archaeology had its politics, so does the practice of the discipline in the present day, argues Hall. (1996) In contemporary South Africa where people are still struggling to overcome the bitter legacy of apartheid and its discriminatory policies and isolating practices, one cannot be surprised when claims relating to notions of social construction are raised within a political arena.

In addition, one may even argue that these tensions could be one of the main reasons leading to the abandonment of archaeological work and other site development projects on sites such as that of Dzata.

The following section reviews the impact of apartheid and the role played by indigenous people in the development of archaeology.

### **SOUTH AFRICAN ARCHAEOLOGY: THE IMPACT OF APARTHEID**

To summarize his analysis of histories and knowledge produced under the apartheid era, Prah (1999:6) writes: “The object was to maintain the idea that in South Africa and much of Africa everybody is a “foreigner”.

Hall (1999: 12) attempts to trace the emergence of the concepts and ideas that informed the development of archaeology as a discipline and source of knowledge in Southern Africa. He argues, “The subsequent history of archaeology in Southern Africa is peppered with such failures of fit between assumptions and fact, forcing the abandonment of almost all nineteenth-century views about the nature of the pre-colonial past”.

Hall (1996), and in several other publications, argues that under apartheid South Africa, government policies forced many researchers, archaeologists included, to work in isolation without any collaboration with indigenous societies or communities whose past they were investigating. Any knowledge that controverted the canons of apartheid ideology was treated as state subversion. (Prah: 1999:2) As a result, biased research was conducted and knowledge that justified apartheid racist ideologies and dominant discourse of power over marginalized societies was produced. In short, indigenous people were studied, histories constructed and knowledge produced by the powerful scientific elite. In response to this exclusion, many indigenous people resorted to disassociate themselves from the past altogether. (Hall: 1996, Mazel and Steward: 1987, Esterhysen: 2000)

This situation was in no way unique to South Africa. In Zimbabwe, for instance, it is said that white archaeologists writing about sites like Great Zimbabwe, for example, worked in favour of the opinion of the colonial state and the white community in general. Thus according to Summers quoted in Mufuka (1983: 12), their theories were of “foreign origin”, as research was conducted

in isolation without any consultation with indigenous Shona and other descendants who were staying around the site at the time.

As illustrated in Hall (1999: 58-59) and Prah (1999:4) even though there was resistance by a few archaeologists, this kind of scholarship limited contact with indigenous societies. Political influences not only had an impact on the production and reproduction of knowledge, but also affected the development of archaeology as a discipline and interpretation of the past altogether. A few written records would then become the only source of reference for scientific analysis and other research findings. As already stated, indigenous societies were in many cases sidelined, denied access and space to negotiate their past.

In post-colonial Zimbabwe, however, scholars such as Pwiti (1994), Mufuka (1983), and Mudenge (1958) quoted in Matenga (1998); believe that adoption of new methods, such as the use oral history and involvement of indigenous societies could help rectify “false” histories written under colonial states. They see these methods as a departing point from the racist-colonial influenced kind of scholarship. These, they argue, will also draw people in and link them to the past. Scholars such as Thomas Huffman however, having used these methods in reconstructing the history of Great Zimbabwe and other sites in Southern Africa, could not have prevented controversies, critics, endless arguments, contradictory histories and assertions that arose thereafter. On the contrary, in post-apartheid South Africa, critics argue that the interpretation of the archaeological past remains a subject of manipulation to justify and legitimize various agendas, either academic power or socio-political circumstances. I shall elaborate on this point later in my case study.

Although in post apartheid South Africa the situation as illustrated above seems to be changing, the relationship between indigenous societies and researchers such as archaeologists, historians, anthropologists etc, remains unresolved and rather tense to say the least. While many indigenous societies have now embarked on a mission to reclaim their history and the cultural heritage and knowledge that goes with it, in terms of knowledge production, researching, writing, interpreting, and accessing information, power still lies in the hands of a few in the academic community.

It is important however, to acknowledge that there have been some South African scholars who have taken an interest in reviewing the history of specific disciplines such as archaeology. For an example, in her paper published in Robertshaw (1990: 38-58), Deacon reviews various trends and

events that led to the development of archeology from an amateur into a fully, professional practice. Shepherd (1995, 2002, and 2003) and Hall (1986, 1990) further explore the developments stages and challenges archaeology as a discipline is faced with during this transformation period in South Africa. Concurrent with Hall's assertions, Shepherd calls for a critical review of the ethics of practice within the discipline of archaeology and requests a more nuanced reading on the relationship between archaeology and apartheid.

In their works, (Deacon 1990), Esterhuysen and Smith (1999 and 2000) and Mazel and Steward (1987), show concern with the political contexts in which the discipline of archaeology functions. Considerable critiques were made of the roles indigenous communities played in the development of the discipline of archaeology in South Africa and demonstrate outrage at the distortion of history, especially that of indigenous societies. They argue that apartheid policies left the majority of South Africans with no choice, but to disassociate themselves from their past. Thus the legitimization of the apartheid government amongst other things, created separate educational systems and alienated indigenous communities from their land, heritage and identities (Esterhuysen 2000: 160). They conclude by saying that, automatically, these policies left the majority of South Africans with limited chances of acquiring knowledge about their past. (Esterhuysen 2000: 160-164)

Conventional accounts of the relationship between disciplines such as archaeology and apartheid in South Africa, as described by Deacon (1986 and 1990) and Sampson (1988) and quoted in Shepherd (2002:197), tend to take two tracks. Either they regard archaeology as fundamentally apolitical in nature and safely distanced from the political facts of apartheid. Shepherd further asserts that many accounts paint a picture of the discipline as an unsung partner in the resistance against the regime. Shepherd (2003: 17) argues that the defining characteristic of archaeology under apartheid was the growing separation between archaeology and society. Shepherd (p17) further recommends reading of critical works by scholars such as Bruce G. Trigger (1980:662-76), Inskeep R.R., (1967: 71-72), Hall (1984, 1990) and others that offers more of an account of resistance histories and knowledge's acquired during the process

Speaking in one of the specialist meetings held at the South African Heritage Resources Agency head Office in Cape Town, Shepherd (2003:19) makes these recommendations in response to the Prestwich Street case: 1) That archaeologists need to take responsibility and answer the questions posed to them by various interested groups. 2) Archaeology needs to be seen in a social context.

3) Its relevance to society needs to be openly demonstrated at all times. 4) International protocol on social consultation needs to be adhered to. 5) Before any excavations or exhumation is done, scientific values need to be demonstrated rather than assumed.

### **KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTIONS AND POWER DISCOURSE**

According to Foucault (1997: 7) power and knowledge are two entities that cannot be separated from each other. Together, they constitute truths. In other words, power and knowledge are in dialectical relation and neither can exist without the other. Said, (1978: 36) on the other hand, argues that “Knowledge gives power; more power requires more knowledge and so on in this increasingly profitable dialect of information control”.

Creamer (1997) argues that to most Westerners, knowledge is free. However, the same cannot be said about indigenous people. Knowledge to them, like currency, needs to be safeguarded by cultural traditions. This means that for most indigenous people, knowledge, most of which has been passed on from generation to generation, is so precious that it needs to be protected and guarded from those who would like to earn it without any understanding. Thus as far as the indigenous people see it, knowledge bestows power and is not given away carelessly for fear of retribution by Westerners.

Why is it that most researchers receive opposition from local communities? Is it because of the way they conduct their research, or the way in which they interpret their research findings? Or is it because of the indigenous knowledge that they tend to ignore in the interpretation processes? Although they believe in the importance of the past, why is it that local community for the most part disagrees with the researchers' views? Do power relations affect archaeology, both as a discipline and as a vehicle for unearthing the historic past, its interpretation and its use?

In his article, Rewriting History, Jameson (1990) argues that most archeologists working among non-western peoples do not understand how these people understand their own past. He is certain that if archaeologists would allow non-western societies to articulate their views, and get them involved in researching their own past, better projects would result. He believes that by so doing, archaeologists stand to find new solutions too many archaeological problems, especially in the case of research into sacred sites. On the other hand, what if, as described by Forsman (1997: 109), indigenous people themselves express no interest in acquiring knowledge through site

excavations and other studies? This may involve not wanting to sacrifice their beliefs, their last remaining resources, or satisfy what they refer to as the human desire for more knowledge?

Phillipson (1993) shows that archaeological data provides a picture of the past, which is essentially different from, and in many ways complementary to, that which may be reconstructed from written or oral sources. Therefore by creating archaeological methodologies that cannot be related to present indigenous cultures, might it not be that archaeologists are divorcing indigenous people from their past altogether? Shifts of power have seen recent adjustments of attitude by both parties. This was done, according to Swindler (1997), in the hope that it would lead to collaborative efforts that document a more holistic and realistic interpretations of the past, but for too long insufficient effort has been devoted to the humanistic approach of integrating western scientific methods with non-western perspectives.

On the subject of modernity and archaeological discourse, Tilley (1989: 111-112) argues that the problem with archaeology in relation to modernist identity space is that it has not sufficiently embraced the enormous potentialities provided to create new pasts, new knowledge, and new truths. There has been an insufficient modernist dynamic within archaeology itself. Traditional and “scientific” archaeological knowledge has remained seriously abbreviated or curtailed. Given that we might say so much about the past, the lack of diversity in archaeological texts remains striking - the same old stale statements tend to be endlessly repeated. Tilley furthermore argues that one cannot ignore the fact that there is a major suppression of indigenous knowledge by western-scientific knowledge. (Tilley 1989: 107) The professional elite, according to him, decides on the basis of its knowledge, claims and interests, what is important in the interpretation of the past, and recovers and preserves it. Indigenous communities are always on the receiving end. They are passive consumers whose past is decided on and defined by the dominant party that holds intellectual power.

In furthering Tilley’s argument, methodologies used in archaeological enquiry are according to Bowman (1989) and Meighan (1993) as quoted in Tsosie (1997: 67), generally invasive and not content to be confined to the study of cultural groups, oral histories and traditions. Archaeologists seek to excavate and appropriate the material remains of the past. At times, they probe spiritual and intangible aspects of the past in the quest for knowledge. The values that archaeologists generally seek to protect are those of science, of documenting “facts” about the past for the sake of knowing them, at the same time arguing that knowledge and research benefits all. Jameson

(1997:15) argues that "true history" is redefined and re-written as new information becomes available. Since archaeology produces new information, conclusions about "truth" in history can therefore be seen only as temporary, subject to interpretation and never complete. Indigenous knowledge, as Hodder (1979) puts it, produces multiple "truths" about the site that transcend mere descriptions of what was found.

Furthermore, many indigenous societies possess knowledge that is connected to the present. Such knowledge, according to Raharijaona (1997), is evident through valuable treasures such as ancestral rituals, sounds, tales, praises and poems, all inherited from the ancestors and passed on from generation to generation. As noted by Tsosie (1997:60), many indigenous societies around the world dispute the idea that science can tell them where they come from, since they already know from their origin stories, and this, together with what they believe, is an unbroken continuum.

In his paper entitled; '*Oral tradition and the African past*, Munwe Samba (1997:105) argues that to state that customs, beliefs, values and opinions of African societies have been handed down from the ancestors to posterity by word of mouth since the earliest times is no longer news. That is until the advent of European colonialism and its stress on literacy and the written word barely 100 years ago, changed the trend.

Vansina (1985) and Henige (1974) quoted in David Phillipson (1996: 10) argue that in order to properly interpret oral historical traditions, which are preserved in many African societies, we must understand the role that they play in society and the reasons for their recollection. Therefore, until archaeologists begin to accept and respect the views, knowledge, perceptions and the understanding of the discipline of local communities, their interpretations of the past will always be questioned or challenged by those outside their fraternity. In the conclusion of his paper, Raharijaona (1997) urges archaeologists in particular not only to respect the validity of indigenous versions of history, but also to understand their role in the creation and affirmation of cultural identity. He further notes that oral traditions serve to define, preserve and validate a group's identity and customs within a more encompassing cultural context. That is, the archeologist should respect local customs in his or her search for information.

## WHO OWNS THE PAST? LEGISLATION

### INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES

In several countries like the United States and Australia the government has drawn up policies and legislation that govern rights, roles and perspectives of indigenous societies in cultural survival, the protection of sites and interpretation of their past. (Museums Australia: 1993, Tsosie: 1997, US National Parks: 2000) These laws give indigenous groups stronger voice in terms of how research should be conducted, as well as opportunities to raise their views and request all researchers to respect indigenous knowledge and the appropriate treatment of ancestral sites and archaeological findings (Swindler 1997: 19).

Some of these laws were reviewed by Rebecca Tsosie (1997), in a paper published in Swindler et al (1997), "*Indigenous Rights and Archaeology*" Tsosie (1997: 64- 76). As a professor of law, Tsosie argues that the current dialogue between Native Americans and archeologists concerning appropriate treatment of human remains and ancestral sites has many dimensions: ethical, moral and legal. Acknowledging the fact that there are varying perspectives among indigenous people themselves regarding the significance of the sites, Tsosie asserts that attitudes within archeology are starting to reflect the postmodern influences of academia, including the commitment to understand these diverse perspectives and viewpoints through a process of dialogue with the other. However, critical issues arise when considering who has the right to control the past. Are the material remains of past cultures "common goods" or "public resources" for academics, the people of the nation, or the state where they are found? Or do they belong to the descendant cultures of the contemporary indigenous people, he asks? With reference to Acts such as the Archaeological Resources Protection ACT (ARPA), the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), and the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 (NAGPRA), Tsosie (1997: 65), reviews the manner in which federal statutes governs cultural preservation. In relation to this, the question arises: what would guide the core debate of this work in terms of the law in South Africa?

## SOUTH AFRICAN SITUATION

Constant complaints such as that of poor consultation, mismanagement of sites, conflicts resulting thereafter, site vandalism and others are of serious concern to heritage practitioners, other professionals and various governing bodies such as the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA). The National Heritage Resources Act (No. 25 of 1999) came into operation on the 1st of April 2000 to replace the National Monuments Act of 1969. It provides an integrated system to co-ordinate and promotes the management of national heritage resources. The Act is also meant to enable and encourage communities to nurture and conserve their legacy so that it may be bequeathed to future generations. This involves preventing anyone from carrying out any activity such as excavations, disturbing or making any intervention on heritage sites without consultation with the relevant Heritage Resources authorities. Within this Act, there are policies that govern issues such as the import and export of objects, the upgrading, renovation and restoration of national monuments and permit to excavate and the rehabilitate archaeological sites and many other related activities.

Until recently, legislation has ignored the significance that local communities attach to their cultural heritage. Rather, the focus has been on the scientific management of the resources using modern preservation and conservation methods. Thus protection of the heritage resources has focused on the physical remains, their intangible heritage is ignored. (Pwiti and Ndoro 2002: 1) In their paper, Pwiti and Ndoro the latter note that at sites like Great Zimbabwe, and to some extent beyond Southern Africa, the emphasis on indigenous knowledge and ordinary people, particularly local communities, in the development and management of cultural heritage, has at least in theory, become a concern to researchers. The emphasis, they argue, is that heritage belongs to the people; therefore the issues of ownership become very crucial. (Pwiti and Ndoro 2002: 10-11)

The new heritage legislations promote collaboration not only between museum curators or heritage practitioners, but also institutions, individual researchers and site developer teams. Regarding archeological work, the SAHRA Draft Archaeology Policy (March 2000) and Draft Permit Regulations: Heritage Resource Act, Version 5 (11 May 2000), state that within a maximum of 12 months of the completion of the authorized actions or expiry of a permit, SAHRA requires the submission of a report, copies of papers/thesis or dissertation published by the permit holder. Failure to do so is regarded as an offence and may result in the withdrawal of permits and disqualification of future work. Regarding archaeological artifacts and their recorded

conditions in many institutions, it is stipulated that the permit holder must provide for the conservation of all recovered objects and associated data and records. He/she must obtain the written agreement of a museum director or head of department to store materials after excavation.

In summary, these policies recommend the involvement of local communities in heritage education and archaeological works in their respective areas. This means that both international and local South African archaeologists will have to liaise with the public regarding research planning, excavation, interpretation and the usage of findings, education, and so on. Moreover, local communities are given power to be guardians of their own heritage. With regard to site development, Section 31 (7a, b and c), states that the special consent of the local authority shall be required for any alteration or development affecting heritage areas (a), in assessing the application and (b), the local authority must consider the significance of the area and how it will be affected by the proposed alteration or development. In the event of any alteration or development being undertaken in a heritage area without the consent of the local authority, the latter shall have the power to require the owner to stop such work instantly and restore the site to its previous condition within a specified period. If the owner fails to comply with the requirements of the local authority, the latter shall have the right to carry out such restoration work and recover the cost from the owner. In further response to these problems, SAHRA says that it is planning to introduce a follow-up program that will help post-investigation on sites where permits for excavations or any archaeological research were issued. In addition, at the time of this research, SAHRA was in the process of setting up the Provincial Heritage Resources Authorities (PHRA). The main task of this body would be, in consultation with SAHRA, to manage relevant heritage resources within a respective province.

#### **HERITAGE MANAGEMENT, CONSERVATION VERSUS COMMERCIALIZATION AND TOURIST DEVELOPMENT**

Considering that there might be heritage sites that have been exposed to development projects mainly with the aim of utilizing them as major tourist destinations, it becomes important and also relevant to this study to look at the implications of such activities for sites that hold any significance to communities.

Jameson (1997) asserts that most of the information generated by archaeological research is part of humanity. Therefore there is no doubt that this discipline will always attract widespread

interest from various groups. Ironically, as he further states, this interest has in the past led to a frightening commercialization and even an abuse of the human record. Thus like many heritage sites, archaeological sites have also become targets of a commercial trend, which in most cases results in indigenous people losing rights and power to manage, access, develop and use their own heritage. This becomes more critical when sites, which hold historic value to indigenous people, are targeted for development - although this may not be openly admitted - for commercial gain.

One of the problems of the commercialization of sites is that it hinders the conservation of the natural and cultural environment. Day to day activities such as receiving large numbers of tourists, as seen for example on sites such as Robben Island, could expose the sites to vandalism. In my paper entitled: '*Robben Island: A review of factors encountered in the conservation of both the Island's Natural and Cultural environment*', presented in Bagamoyo, Tanzania (September 2002), I touched on this issue. I argued that the Robben Island's World Heritage Site status resulted in an enormous increase of interest on the Island, doubling the number of visitors in a very short period of time. Working as a conservationist on this already vulnerable site, one is always faced with challenges and difficult tasks regarding how to strike a balance between ensuring the visitor's satisfaction and maintaining conservation of the site's natural and cultural environment. How can the management make it possible for people to experience, discover, interpret and utilize the museum's heritage resources, while respecting to the conservationists' goals or tasks, I asked? In conclusion, I noted that unless a good conservation management plan is available, there is a great danger and challenge to be faced once historic sites are opened for tourism.

On the contrary, some sites targeted for such use are now guarded by barbed wire, limiting access. The erection of fences around sites, the building of new structures, and the charging of entrance fees for both local and international tourists is creating tension between local communities and site developers and managers. The argument is that this exercise restricts and denies members of the public rights to use, access, and control their own heritage. The role of local communities is restricted, since many developers rarely consider paying attention to their perspective. Communication about what is going to be done and how and who is going to be in charge generally takes place between professionals, developers, government officials and other stakeholders. Thus, once agreement is reached, the past is automatically taken away from local communities and everything put beyond their control. (Tilley 1989: 113)

## CONCLUSION

Based on above reviewed literature, it is clear that that the social consultation process has become a critical issue around the world. Without ignoring the many positive results and successful projects noted above, one cannot ignore the fact that unfortunate damages, losses of layers of histories and sometimes, sacrifices of heritage significance of sites and other important places and objects, continue to take place in many parts of the world. As many authors are indicating, unless proper measures and processes are set and followed before and during various site development stages, an untold amount of heritage stands to be lost. The case of Dzata, as is to be narrated in chapter 5 and 6, is one example out of many cases that continue to cause tensions, misunderstandings between archaeologists, sites developers and local communities. Before that, it is important to lay out the methods and processes followed in order to acquire information about Dzata.

University of Cape Town

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY: INTRODUCTION**

This section illustrates different methods and processes followed to gather information for this study. This research took an interdisciplinary approach rather than a traditional scientific approach used by archaeologists. Social anthropological methods such as observation, sites visits and interviews with various individuals were used to gain the information required to make this research possible. This is due to the fact that: 1) this research revolves around a site that is located far from where the researcher (myself) studies and lives, 2) there are members of the community who are very attached to the site as a results of the significance it carries to the VhaVenda nation, 3) many people who have or might have done research or got involved in the development process are now scattered throughout the country. The following is a brief summary of various approaches used.

### **REVIEW OF RELATED WORK**

Prior to the inception of an in-depth research process, an extensive survey of literature was done. This was carried out in order to achieve a broad understanding of the problems and the extent to which similar cases have occurred. Most of the research materials consulted in this research, especially with regard to the site and its historical background, were reports, dissertations and papers and some gathered from various individuals. Some of these works were reviewed in the previous chapter. It should also be noted that most of these works are unpublished resources.

It was initially difficult to get academic references regarding the historic background of Venda and the site as a whole. After a thorough check at various institutions, few resources on this section were found. Since I work in a museum and spend time visiting museums and archives, I decided to check for archival information at the Robben Island Mayibuye Archives. Here, press clips regarding politics and Venda homeland in relation to the apartheid government were found. This information was very important since it gave direction to some of the issues raised in this work. Other relevant literature reviewed in the previous chapter was also found in the Robben Island Museum Resource Centre, the South African National Art Gallery Library, University of Cape Town Main and African studies library, University of Pretoria library, Schomansdaal

Museum and the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA). However, due to the fact that little research has been conducted on these issues, and there are no reports on work done on the site in question, little literature regarding the site was available.

### **CASE STUDY RESEARCH**

As indicated in my introductory chapter, this site is located very close to my family home in Venda, in the Province of Limpopo. Therefore, my knowledge about the site goes back to the very early stages of my life. Before the inception of this project, I had already visited the site on many occasions as a child, while I was an archaeology student at the University of Venda and at other times for personal interest and out of curiosity. Other preliminary visits to the site were done in May, June and December 2001. The aim of these visits was to assess the general state of the site, i.e.: generally check if there were any activities taking place on the site and examine the state of the archaeological site, the buildings, and interior exhibition spaces. I also wanted to see if there had been any visitors to the place. Other similar visits were done in December 2002, January and July 2003 mainly to ascertain its previous and current status. The detailed findings, to be illustrated in chapter 5, were recorded each time the site was visited.

Besides Dzata, I had on many occasions, while visiting home, made stopovers at Schoemansdall Museum. This museum is situated in Louis Trichardt, recently renamed Makhado. As will be indicated later, this is the Museum used by most researchers who do research in this region. It is in this museum where some artefacts, reports and old minutes were stored. Two museum scientists I spoke to, Mrs. Kutama and Mr. Netshiavha were unfortunately, not employees of this museum when the development project took place. The only information they had was on current plans and amendments on the future development proposal. They were also helpful by allowing me access to any files they assumed could have evidence of what had transpired at Dzata.

### **IN DEPTH OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEWS**

Following the site visit, meetings with relevant people to discuss the scope of the study were arranged. Through a series of interviews with selected groups of people e.g. local community members and traditional leaders, educators, learners and other relevant informants from the

previous government and non-governmental organizations<sup>14</sup>, further information was gained. Most of the people whose names appear in the minutes of meetings that took place from as early as 1988 till mid 1994 when the project ended could not be reached. This is due to the fact that some have passed away and others have since moved to other provinces. Local community members, who played significant roles, were randomly selected for interview. A person-to-person encounter technique became a necessity during this field work so as to assist with the clarification of several issues.

People such as Mr. Lalumbe, Mr. Muvhango and Mr. Ramavhoya, though their names were not on the records, were chosen based on existing committees and roles they are currently playing under the authority of the Royal Mphephu family. Most importantly, they are also members of the community. Over the years they have witnessed activities and changes in the area. Recently, people like Mr. Lalumbe and Mr. Muvhango have been asked to look at various issues surrounding Dzata. They also represent the community in reviewing factors that led to the initial failure of the project and are helping to establish new working and advisory committees, and liaise with Heritage Authorities and museum scientists in the area regarding issues of use and further developments. Most of these interviews were conducted in order to gain more information and a deeper understanding of the previous and present activities, relationship of the interviewees with the site, as well as their views with regard to archaeological research and the development process on this site.

Since some of the interviewees could not communicate in English, interviews were informally conducted. This was seen to be the only method appropriate and to make things easier, most of the questions were asked in the local language, Tshivenda. It was further decided that since the individual roles played varied as a result of different levels of expertise, there was no need to draft questionnaires. Instead of a free flow interview method was used. In most cases the interviewees were allowed to narrate their stories, role-play, and give their general view regarding the developments. In line with this research theme, the following is an example of questions asked:

- What is your Name?
- Where do you live?
- How old are you?

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<sup>14</sup> See individual profiles, date and places of interviews in chapter 5 and reference list. In this chapter, a detailed response to the interviews will be given.

- Have you heard anything about Dzata?
- If so, by whom and what did they tell you?
- Does this site have any meaning to you and what is it?
- Do you know anything about the developments of the site?
- When did you become aware of it and how?
- Were you involved or informed about the developments...
- By whom and when was it?
- Do you know any person who was involved?
- What is your view on the whole project?
- What do you want to see happen, or would you have liked to see happen on the site?
- What do you think or feel about the site now?

Interviews with archaeologists who at one stage were involved with or consulted during the development process were arranged and conducted at different times and places. This includes Professor Thomas Huffman and Amanda Esterhuysen, archaeologists working at the University of the Witwatersrand; Prof Andre Meyer, an archaeologist based at the University of Pretoria; Edwin Hanisch, an archaeologist and a consultant who was contracted to do archaeological excavations and install an exhibition. Other museums professionals and universities were also consulted. Most of these people have over the years been involved in archaeological research in this region e.g. on sites such as Mapungubwe, K2, Schroda, Great Zimbabwe, Thulamela and others. Therefore to me, they stood out as relevant sources to consult when dealing with sites, people who, historically, had a connection with the sites they have worked on. They are all members of the South African Archaeological Society, and as a member of this organization, I often talk informally with them about issues relating to our work and the site. It is possible that some information about these developments might have been discussed informally during one of these encounters before the inception of this project. Finally, I consulted with SAHRA with regard to their policies governing archaeological activities and their position regarding the present situation.

## LOGISTICS

Since 1999, I have been staying in Cape Town, almost 2000 km from Venda where Dzata site is situated. The idea of pursuing my studies and using the Dzata site as a case study might seem impractical. In the process of doing this research, I came to realize that my professional commitments were posing logistical problems, in terms of travelling to Limpopo Province where the site is situated. Although some visits were coupled with my vacation at home, too much time was spent on long-distance phone calls, arranging meetings, confirming appointments, travel arrangements and other logistical issues. After such effort, I often wondered whether these parties would honour the agreement by making themselves available. Things such as accessing the library and attending classes were always in conflict with my work commitments, and as a result, reduced the pace of this research process.

Doing this research was to a large extent, however, not always difficult. The fact that the site is situated in Venda, the land where I was born and have spent my entire childhood, my youth, and part of my adult life, made things easier for me. I never took time to familiarise myself with local conditions. My prior knowledge of the area and my background studying and growing up in the area, gave me advantages that would not have been the case for an outsider. Communication, much of which was done in TshiVenda language, was much smooth and easier between me and the interviewees. They were all able to identify with me and felt at ease to share with me their personal views about the site.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

This chapter gives an overview of research findings, a critical analysis of which will be done in the next chapter. Most of these findings were gathered through the process of interviews, visits to municipal council, individual, museum, archival and university libraries' records. To give an overview of the cases study, the following sections report on the core aims and objectives behind the development process.

#### **WHAT WERE THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF DZATA MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT PROJECT?**

According to Roestorff (1996: 1) and Kutama (2002: 8), in 1988, the late President P.R Mphahlele instructed VDC to construct a museum or holy shrine in memory of the paramount chiefs of Venda, a place where the sacred drum, known as "Ngoma Lungundu", the voice of the Great Gods (Lalumbe: 2001), was to be displayed. Owned by the Singo people of Dzata, it is believed that this drum conveys power to be used when the Singo's encountered enemy attacks. Once beaten, it is believed that the clouds would get covered, and the Singo claim victory. It was also used for ancestral worship and as a communication device between the living and the dead, when they were appreciating or requesting assistance from the ancestors. Until its disappearance, few people, including commoners and chiefs had seen it. There is however, an existing belief or speculation that the apartheid government took it to a Museum somewhere in Pretoria. Others believe the Drum was smuggled out of Dzata by whites in 1889 just after the site's abandonment. To date, no one has a concrete idea of its whereabouts, or whether it disappeared after the abandonment of Dzata.

Dzata museum was planned to function as a national museum. The aim of the project was to develop a cultural centre that would showcase the place where the VhaVenda were 'born'. It was aimed at displaying the cultural and historical significance of the site. It was further planned that the site would function as a living monument of the VhaVenda people, and to consolidate all cultural and natural features of the surrounding environment. Other ideas were that of promoting the site and its surrounding areas as a prime tourist destination and in doing so instil pride and create small business

opportunities for the local community. (Roestorff 1996: 1-2) Another aim was to use it as a learning centre with target groups from the public and schools. This includes groups of learners from nearby schools and those who were going to visit the site during school holidays.

### **INITIAL DEVELOPMENT STAGES OF THE MUSEUM BY THE VENDA DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION (VDC)**

Kutama (2002:8) and Roestorff (1996: 1) note that a local branch of a firm of architects was contracted to design a modern building, based on traditional African architecture. The result was a design consisting of two large thatched rondawels built of stone with an inter-linking passage. One of these rondawels was to house the sacred drum, while the other one was to serve as a space where information about the drum is exhibited. This idea was met with a lot of resistance from the local chiefs and the community. (Roestorff 1996:2) Since the Venda Nation consists of various clans, it was felt that the Ngoma Lungundu belonged only to a section of the Venda people, i.e. the Singo. Arguments arose about the contents of the museum, as many felt that these should be taken from the broad spectrum of the Venda population. Those who attended eventually agreed that the theme of the museum would centre on the origin of Dzata, with the emphasis on the role of the “chief in the society” and that if the original drum was not found, a model would be made and placed on display. It was also decided that very little attention should be given to natural history, since it was felt that a natural history museum should be built in Thohoyandou, the capital city of Venda at the time. February 1990 was set as the target date for the official opening of the Dzata Museum. However, because of delays in funding, research and the collection of artefacts, the opening was postponed until February 1991. (Hanisch: 1989)<sup>15</sup>

### **FURTHER PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT: BUILDING CONSTRUCTION, EXHIBITONS AND ARCHAEOLOGY**

Originally the aim was to develop the project in phases. These would include the clearing of the site; construction of a museum building, ablution facility and caretakers' hut; installation of an exhibition;

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<sup>15</sup> This information was extracted from a letter entitled: “Postponement of the opening date”. Dzata Museum, Dzata Museum file: 11/1/6/5, 2002, Schoemansdal Museum, Makhado, Louistrichardt, Limpopo Province.

fencing-off of the area; archaeological excavations; employment of staff, and developing a management system for the museum. In order to protect this important site from local communities, the areas regarded as important such as the *Musanda*<sup>16</sup> were fenced off. In preparation for the major development, a space to serve as a new entrance into the main settlement was also cleared. Stones from the ancient walls were used to mark the entrance area. The area of the first reception as the royal meeting place was cleared. A few dwellings, where dignitaries could be accommodated during celebrations, were constructed on this section, using stones from the ancient walls as building materials. Mud for plastering the walls was dug up at an area to the east that fell in the area of the living quarters of the royal wives. Later excavations revealed several potsherds in the plaster used for the new huts. With instructions from the King, 27 Candelabra trees, representing 27 territorial councils, were planted in this section, as well as on both sides of the entrance which had been cleared. (See Figure 3) Unfortunately this planting of trees was not received well. Archaeologists felt that since these trees were not there before, they give a false representation of the royal kraal. (Roestorff 1996: 3)



FIGURE: 3

This photograph shows stonewalls rebuilt in the 70s by local communities. At the background, one can also see examples of Candelabra trees planted after the abandonment of the site. **Photo taken by: Irene Mafune, January, 2001**

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<sup>16</sup> The word “*Musanda*” refers to the royal Kraal where the chief and his family reside.

Instructions were also given during the 1970's to rebuild some of the walls in the royal section. The locals did this, without any supervision from a "specialist" such as an archaeologist. Arguments that arose thereafter were that the "reconstructed" walls were built incorrectly, and not on the original foundations. A large area situated to the west of the fenced-off site was leveled. It was to be the place where the museum building and other facilities were constructed during the 1980/90's. This area was to serve as a multi-functional area for celebrations and for other functions mentioned above. When the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology at UNIVEN started work as a consultant for the VDC during the late 1980's and early 1990's, surveys and excavations brought a lot of important facts to light. It was discovered during these surveys that the site covers a much larger area than originally thought and that the new entrance, construction of the new huts and leveling of the western area destroyed a lot of stonewalls. Some remains of the settlement were damaged beyond repair.

Quoting from a letter dated 3 August 1989, "attempts were made to extend the area that was originally fenced off". (Ndiitwani: 1989)<sup>17</sup> However, little response on this proposal was received from the chiefs of the area. Eventually, after many negotiations, the fencing-off of a bigger area was agreed upon. One must also bear in mind that the property on which the Dzata site is situated was not formally bought by the VDC from the Chiefs, so there is no formal title deed. Therefore, on what basis was the VDC allowed to reconstruct the Dzata site and develop it as an open-air museum? This matter will be addressed in the discussion chapter.

Furthermore, the archaeological site was to be developed as an open-air museum, where many structures, which would be identified, could be reconstructed to give visitors an impression of what Dzata was like in its heyday. This also raised objections from royal authorities, who felt very strongly that commoners should not be allowed to tread on what was termed "consecrated ground" where the greatest of all Venda leaders had lived. After many discussions, the matter was resolved and archaeological excavations were undertaken. A fence was later erected around the site. (Roestorff: 1996 and Kutama: 2000)

To preserve the site and prevent further decay during the development process, the VDC ironically employed several temporary workers, who, under the guidance and supervision of

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<sup>17</sup> Information extracted from a letter written by Mr F.I.T. Ndiitwani, Chief Executive Officer of VDC, August 3, 1989. Dzata File, BRO: 154, Schoemansdaal Museum, Makhado, South Africa.

UNIVEN had the task of clearing the bush covering the archaeological site. Because of the large amount of wood that piled up, other local people were given permission to take the wood for their own use. When the chiefs heard of this, they were upset, since they thought the locals were given free reign to remove things from the site. However, after a visit made by the chiefs, including senior officials, they realized what was being done, and acknowledged the importance of clearing the area for preservation purposes. (Kutama 2002: 9)

## **ARTEFACTS**

According to reports and minutes, a consultant from the Department of Anthropology and Archaeology at the UNIVEN was appointed to assist the VDC in installing the exhibition. The development of the general infrastructure was also done under his guidance. A team was appointed to work with him, and under his leadership, various artifacts were collected from the local community to be placed in the exhibition. A start was made on the design of the interior displays and the development of the open-air section. Progress was slow, since no full-time museologist was appointed.

Since the importance of Dzata had been recognized, and its location become known, like other heritage sites around the world, Dzata has not escaped conservation challenges and disasters either caused by animal, human and sometimes natural factors. It has been noted that many people who have visited the site over the years have taken what they consider to be mementos with them. Many a private collector has pride in the fact that they have artifacts from the Dzata and other important sites in their possession. In Roestorff's (1996: 3) report, it is said that Chiefs have over the years taken artifacts that they regarded as sacred. Local people have removed stones from the ancient walls in order to use it as building material. To add to these problems, cattle and goats grazed on the site before the fencing had been supplied). As a result of the loss of vegetation, the site is now highly exposed to natural factors such as erosion. Some of the problems will be illustrated later in the thesis.

What happened to the objects found around the site and those that resulted from archaeological excavations? According to a recent report compiled by Kutama (2002), approximately 360 artifacts were transferred from Ditike Craft Center to the Dzata Museum collection. (Kutama 2002: 13) These artifacts were stored in a house in Thohoyandou which belonged to the VDC, but during 1991 these objects were moved to the new museum buildings where they are currently

stored in the exhibition cabinets. These cabinets are not yet completed and some of them have no locks on the doors. They are also not yet sealed properly in order to keep insects and dust out. The result is that insects are presently damaging some of the artifacts, especially those made out of wood or animal skin. The replica of the '*Ngoma Lungundu*', for instance, is presently in such a bad state that it needs a conservator's attention. Most of these artifacts were moved for safekeeping to the Mphephu Resort when the museum was closed down at the end of 1998. (Kutama 2002: 13-14)

Attempts were also made to collect artifacts from the local community. (Hanisch: 1989)<sup>18</sup> Although this took place under the careful guidance of a consultant, many of the artifacts collected had little or no relevance to the museum exhibition. It was however stated in a letter by the finance manager at the time, Mr Dzuguda, dated 15 February 1991, that according to some committee members, the territorial authorities and chiefs were reluctant to donate their best artifacts, and it became necessary to buy the items. Many people who were approached about donating artifacts argue that they would rather keep their valuable objects for ancestral worship than give them up for a museum purpose. This reaction implied further cost implications on the limited budget that was allocated for the project. (Roestorff 1996: 4) This is an interesting problem needing further discussion.

## **FUNDING**

The issue of limited funding can have a negative impact on the progress of the project. In many cases, development processes are left uncompleted due to either mismanagement or lack of funding. When the Dzata project was started in the late 1980's, a budget of approximately R 500 000 was envisaged for its completion. However, over time it became clear that the project was under-budgeted. Consequently many projects were left uncompleted, and the general management or maintenance of the new buildings and the rest of the infrastructure could not be undertaken. (Roestorff: 1996 and Kutama 2002: 15) Although assurance was given by the VDC that all outstanding expenses would be covered, it has come to light that some contractors have not received full payment for the works already completed and these works are in decay.

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<sup>18</sup> This information was extracted from a letter written by Mr E.M.O Hanisch to VDC Chief Executive Officer, December 21, 1989. Dzata File: Bron: 154, Schoemansdaal Museum, Makhado, Louis Trichardt, South Africa.

Another reason for the setback with regard to the completion of the Dzata project is that as time proceeded, the VDC retrenched most of the staff working on the project. Following Venda's incorporation into the new South Africa, VDC was at the time of this research referred to as the Northern Province Development Corporation (NPDC). The lack of continuity resulted in important information being misplaced and institutional memory being lost. It is for this reason that information with regard to developments at Dzata has become difficult to find.

### **OTHER PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS**

According to a report compiled by Roestorff (1996: 4), since the 1970's various tertiary and other institutions have been involved with research at Dzata. Though no research results were left behind, there were problems encountered as a result of these projects. The following are some of those noted in his report.

Officials from several universities and institutions such the University of Venda, the University of Pretoria, Wits University, the National Museum in Bloemfontein and the National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria, had, over the years, conducted research at Dzata. Material artifacts and information gathered during this time are said to be scattered throughout the country – mainly in areas where these institutions are based, e.g. Gauteng, Bloemfontein and Cape Town, where the SAHRA head office is based. In trying to find out where this data is stored, I visited most of these institutions, and conducted interviews with the relevant people. To my surprise, none of these institutions claim “direct” responsibility or reveal clear positions as to whether they have any artifacts or records in their possession. The discourse of accountability in this instance becomes very critical.

### **WHAT HAPPENED? THE LOCAL COMMUNITY'S PERSPECTIVE**

As far as the local communities are concerned, through job creation from various projects that was to be initiated by and implemented at later stages (Kutama: 2002, Roestorff: 1996 and Tshigabe: 2001) the developments were to be economically beneficial to local residents and the rest of the province. Tourism on the other hand, according to the developers, was aimed at redressing the imbalances by empowering communities to create beneficial projects. Other interested groups were to be invited to initiate projects that were to benefit themselves and the

communities. Local communities claim that from the onset of the planning there was no proper consultation with local leaders and communities in general.

As mentioned in my introduction, gathering information regarding what happened, who was involved and how were they selected, was in this regard very difficult. However, to gain insight into what took place on the site, a few people who were once consulted, and others who now formed part of the Dzata Development Committee, were traced and briefly interviewed. The section which follows will focus on issues of concern raised by some of these people regarding the development of the site, the social consultation process, and the role the local communities feel they should have been allowed to play in the process. Members of the local community, Mr Solomon Phaswana, Mr Lalumbe, Mr Ramavhoya and My Muvhango, were interviewed. Another interviewee was Mr Ralushai, a retired professor of social anthropology and an expert in Venda history. I also interviewed academics who were linked to the project at some point, Professor Thomas Huffman and Amanda Esterhysen from Wits, Edwin Hanisch UNIVEN, Professor Andre Meyer and Doctor Julius Pistorius of the University of Pretoria.

#### **Interview 1: Mr. Phaswana**

As a result of my work, I have been away from home for some time and had not visited the site for a year or two. Therefore, before conducting my first interview in 2001, I decided to walk to the site one afternoon. Since the gates were all locked and there was no sign of anyone inside. I decided to walk around checking if there was any open space for me to get in. As I was doing so, I met Mr. Solomon Phaswana whose age at the time of this interview was according to him around 76-80. (See Figure 4 below) He said he was born at Tshiendeulu, where the first Dzata site is situated. Discovering that he was not the person in charge of opening and locking the gates, I thought I should just interview him as an ordinary local member of the community to get his viewpoint on the issue. He still recalls most activities that used to take place on this site. According to him, when the late paramount chief, Patrick Ramabulana Mphephu was still alive, Dzata was the most respected site. Senior residents would visit the site on a regular basis to practice what was referred to as "Thevhula". Women were not allowed to come close to where the rituals were performed. However they were expected to participate by wearing traditional attire in the form of goatskin skirts. Men would wear "Tsindi", also a piece of cloth made out of animal skin which covers the front only. Because of Mr Phaswana's age, he could not recall the

exact year, but he assumes it might have been somewhere around 1960-1970. In response to the research problem, he stated that nowadays, due to western influences, people have no respect for traditional and cultural values. He also mentioned that as a local resident, the developments on the site took him by surprise. He stated that as a person who is loyal to his headmen, he never misses any community meetings, mostly held at the royal homestead on Sundays. He does not recall anyone ever coming to explain what was to happen on the site. Regarding archaeology, he recalls being told by a friend once that there were people digging, however he had no clue as to who the diggers were, how they were digging and why. He claims that should he have been told about some of these developments, he would not have agreed with the proposal.

“Dzata is a very important site. Although all the chiefs are not buried here, Dzata is still a sacred site to us. The ruins are divided into various chambers where different people are not supposed to enter. Children and adults, those who are not “Vhakololo”, or descended from any royal family, were sometimes forbidden to visit certain areas.”

He also believes that as a result of rituals performed at Dzata, the region never saw any drought. It used to rain all the time and the soil was very fertile for cultivation. But all this came to an end when the development proposal was put on the table. When asked about his wishes, he said that he would like to see all the activity revived instead of people roaming around the site all the time.



FIGURE 4: The researcher (Irene) sitting on the ground with one of the interviewees, Mr Solomon Phaswana (sitting on a rock) near the fence surrounding the site Dzata. **Photographer, Khathutshelo Mammegwa, January, 2001.**

#### **Interview 2: Mr. Ramavhoya**

Interviewed on the 04 January 2001 in Dzanani district in Nzhelele, Venda, Mr. Ramavhoya, who claimed to be aged around 47 at the time of the interview, said he still has memories about the site.

“Although I was young and a scholar at the time, I still recall seeing people in the late 50’s and early 60 collecting stones from the site. I assume some of the people were researchers from the University of the Witwatersrand. As far as I am concerned, some of those artifacts were never brought back to the site”.

He feels that researchers do not have any respect for local communities. Since no reports of all the work done on the site were left for local communities, he also raised concern about the old Venda government, by asserting that most of the officials working for that government were not innocent either. According to him, they, without any consultation with local communities, abused their power as government officials and authorized most of those activities. In 1988, he said, Edwin Hanisch was delegated to investigate the profile of Dzata for local communities and rehabilitate the walls. VDC was the only government agent who provided funding for the project. As far as he is concerned, the project failed. How and why, he has no idea. He assumes that it could have been because of a lack of funds.

### Interview 3: **Mr. Lalumbe**

Interviewed on the 4th January 2001 and 11 January 2002, and through a number of telephonic interviews, Mr Lalumbe believes that there were no proper procedures or protocols on how research was to be done on the site.

“White People used to just drive past everyone without even communicating with locals as to what they were doing or about to do on the site...If they did, they did it with the ‘wrong’ people”.

The feeling that prevails is that of ignorance, that is to say, researchers never bothered to make any effort to reach out to the public about their work. Eager to know what was going on, local residents would, according to him and the other interviewee Mr Muvhango, walk past the site. The latter argue that local people who questioned the activities were only told that the process is called excavation. Unfortunately most of them barely understood what it meant. Mr. Lalumbe said, “as a result, people refer to archaeological excavation as the “white men’s work”.

Quoting from one of the interviews conducted with Mr. Lalumbe, he argues,

“Educated and trained people always have an attitude towards those who are not in their field. Since they have acquired knowledge through their training, they see no need for them to consult with local people for suggestions as they assume that the general public does not have an understanding.”

An important question that needs to be addressed relating to this claim is: who is the right person to consult on issues such as this? On whose behalf do people such as Mr Lalumbe speak?

He went on to say that local residents do not always have access to government policies and they rely on those who claim to have knowledge and access to legislative documents for explanation. This means that whatever they are presented with, they do not have any choice but to agree. He furthermore states that not having supporting documents or information to strengthen their position and feelings regarding site development projects such as Dzata, their arguments are in most cases said to be unfounded. So they are left with little choice other than to abide by the decisions of the developers or consultants.

What does Dzata mean to people like Mr Lalumbe? According to him, Dzata is a very significant site, which must be preserved, as it is the only site that bears evidence of the history of the VhaVenda people. He also felt that the VhaVenda people's history, as it happened in Dzata, should be revisited and more research should be done. Issues such as that of the Drum, "The Drum of Nwali, our ancestral God of Vhasenzi and Mambo wa Denga, King of the heavens, and Lord of the ancestral spirits", which he believes was brought from the graves, need to be researched. Interestingly enough, he also believes that only an indigenous Venda can do good research, which will provide "valid" histories. According to him, the VhaVenda are known as secretive people, meaning that, whatever history is written about them could be inaccurate as it has proven to be in many areas. It is part of the culture not to divulge "correct" information to strangers. He strongly believes that all that is currently classified as "myth" about the Kings and the VhaVenda people will be proved otherwise. These are very important issues, evidence of contestations and challenges that many researchers are facing in terms of roles of indigenous people in research and interpretation of the past and key points I shall discuss later in this work.

#### **Interview 4: Mr. Muvhango**

Currently the spokesperson of the current Chief, Toni Ramabulana Mphephu and member of the Royal Mphephu Tourism development Sub-Committee, Mr Muvhango willing to be consulted during this study. During our interview on the 4<sup>th</sup> of January 2002, he agreed that there were many meetings that were held regarding the development of the site. He mentioned that although he was not directly involved then, he knows now that there are conflicts between SAHRA, the Royal homestead and local communities on matters of power. Who should decide on what exactly should be done on the site, when and how? Another issue is that of declaring the site a Provincial Heritage site rather than a National heritage site. As a member of the above committee, as far as he is concerned, Dzata, like other heritage sites, such as Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe, should have the status of a World Heritage site. From his own observation, the numbers of interested people who have visited the site is equal to the number who visits the above-mentioned sites. Therefore, Dzata should be respected and be returned to local people who will plan and do projects that will benefit themselves. Like Mr Lalumbe, he also feels that all research data should be brought back to be managed and curated by local communities and their authorities.

### **Interview 5: Nkhumeleni Ralushai**

Interviewed on the 10<sup>th</sup> of January 2002, Ralushai asserts that as far as he can remember, little effort was made to communicate with the broader community. A retired Professor in Social Anthropology, Professor Ralushai is a well-known person in the whole Limpopo region. His critical research results on Venda Historiography, some of which will be used in this thesis, have since become very important and useful to many writers and researchers in the discourse of re-interpreting the past. Once a vice-principal of the University of Venda, Professor Ralushai has, since his retirement from this post in the mid 1990's, been involved in a number of issues. The most popular activity was his appointment in March 1995 by the Executive Council of the Limpopo Province to head the Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft Violence and Ritual Murders in the Northern Province. Consequently, the Commission became popularly known in academic circles as the Ralushai Commission. (Mavhungu: 2003: 2)

Regarding the Dzata site, he notes that at one stage he was told that the University of Pretoria was in charge and that research regarding the site was to be done. As far as he remembers, no digging was done when he went with researchers but only samples were taken. His concerns as a historian are the manner in which research is done and the notion of interpretation of the past. "By focusing only on archaeological data, archaeologists will always make terrible mistakes", he said. He condemns the use of science as the only source of knowledge and claims that oral histories and the study of traditional literature can prove how invalid some historical events as narrated by scientists over the years could be. He feels that the automatic use of and belief in scientific evidence and analysis to interpret indigenous people's histories reduces "our" history into a small "bible". He sees Mapungubwe archaeological site as a critical example of his assertions. He further claims that research and re-interpretation of findings found on this site, could give a new version of the area's history. At the time of this consultation, he was writing a document that he said would give a different view and understanding of Mapungubwe and possibly would contradict some of the already written materials that archeologists and many other researchers have used over the years.

Regarding consultation issues in the case of Dzata, he gave an example of Thulamela, an Iron Age archaeological site situated in the Kruger National Park. From the time the site was discovered, local communities were informed and some were involved in the rebuilding of the

already fallen stonewalls. During this process, “there was no top-down position”, he said. For the first time in the history of South Africa, archaeologists worked directly with local communities. As a result, the project was a success and as far as he is concerned, should be used as a model in terms of involving other parties in research and allowing communities to take senior decision-making roles in what happened on their ancestral land.

According to him, Dzata is a sacred site, a Singo capital, which should be respected, an area where the first Paramount Chiefs of Venda settled before the nation fragmented into independent chiefdoms. As he concludes, he maintains that social consultation is a critical issue of concern, which, unless done properly, will cause projects to fail. Local peoples’ views need to be respected, he said, as there might be underlying problems influencing the resentments. He gave an example of the case of land issues. Developers should understand that there are and have always been conflicts regarding land ownership, either amongst local authorities or between the latter and the state. These and other issues, he asserts, should be considered before any project initiation.

#### **Interview 6: Tom Huffman**

Professor Tom Huffman was interviewed on the 17<sup>th</sup> of January 2002, at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. He too agreed that he was involved in excavating the site. However he was never the person in charge or the principal investigator. He was requested by UNIVEN to come with his students and assist in the excavation of what is thought to have been the audience chamber. (See Figure 6) On the issue of negligence and poor conservation, he mentioned that during excavations, he was instructed to leave the area open for tourism purposes, but in fear of rainfalls and other environmental factors, he and Edwin Hanisch decided to close the excavated space. He furthermore noted that his involvement on the site was just a follow-up on what others had done before. Quoting from Sinamai (2003), it is said that in the mid-1980’s, a bulldozer was sent in to flatten the area within the central part of the “monument” where the museum was going to be built. Both Huffman and Hanisch, who at the time were consultants, don’t seem to have any complaints about this activity at the time. The site was still a National Monument and thus still technically under the NMC, but they don’t seem to question the use of a bulldozer on an archaeological site. (Sinamai 2003:75)

Huffman asserts that he was actually told that Herald Prinsloo, who was an archaeology lecturer at the University of Pretoria, was the first one to excavate the site when J.F. Eloef was the head of archaeology at the University of Pretoria. Sinamai (2003: 65) mentions that Dzata was first excavated by Fouche in the early 1960's but it did not reveal anything spectacular, it was ignored. Other people he remembered to have worked on the site are Jan Loubscher, who at the time of writing this thesis was said to have immigrated to America, taking a post of Associate at the New South University in USA. (Huffman: 2001) To conclude, Huffman said that the idea of developing the site for museum and tourism purposes was actually the one that led to all the work we see on the site to date.

Hoping to find some of the people mentioned above, I went to the University on the 18<sup>th</sup> January 2002. There, I met two archeologists, Professor Andre Meyer who has since retired and Dr Pistorius, who denies ever having heard about or had anything to do with the project. He asserts that he is not aware of any involvement of the University of Pretoria either. Professor Meyer, on the other hand, repeated what Professor Huffman said. He notes that if the University was ever involved, perhaps it was Professor Eloef, the founder of the archaeology department at the University who got involved. As will be discussed later, all this finger-pointing poses a difficult and at the same time very interesting point of departure for this case study.

#### **WHAT HAS BEEN PUBLISHED AND DISSEMINATED: THE MISSING FILE?**

During the project, no one, except those working there, was allowed to go near the site. The only people allowed in were those temporarily employed to clear the site. (Lalumbe: 2000) Consequently, none of the results and the findings were shown or presented to local people. Until today some of the people are not even aware of what came out, what happened to the artifacts and where they are currently stored. As far as local people are concerned, there was not even a single document left for them to read or see what the project was all about. Neither were local chiefs or the King issued with any report about the work done on the site. This, according to some educated local villagers like Mr. Lalumbe and Mr. Muvhango has since become a trend. After completing their work, many researchers just leave without leaving any documentation for them to read.

Since aspects of this development project were done in association with Schoemansdal Museum, I decided to go and search for files that I thought would contain relevant information regarding

the site that was going to help me in my research. With assistance from Agnes Kutama and Victor Netshiavha, both recently employed by the Provincial department of Sports, Science, Arts and Culture under the Heritage division, I found that there were relevant files. These contained correspondence dating from as far back as 1988 when the project was proposed. Of all the files stored, there was only one file marked "Archaeology". I was surprised to find this file empty. All the documents and reports that I thought might have been kept there were and still are missing<sup>19</sup>. According to two museum scientists, who by the time of my investigation had just started working in the Museum, the file was the only one that did not have any contents when they arrived. This to me is quite shocking and at the same time suspicious. Why is it that of all the files, the archaeology one was the only one that has been emptied?

#### **STATUS OF THE SITE AT THE TIME OF THIS RESEARCH (2001 – 2002)**

VDC did much to maintain and develop the site. However, since 1995 when the VDC was merged with the Northern Province Development Corporation, the subsidies provided by Government for this purpose were withdrawn. This resulted in the closure of the museum because it was not a financially self-sustainable entity. Since this closure the site and building has fallen into a state of disrepair. The following is an illustration of a few problems noted at the time of this investigation. Though some might have been or are in the process of being attended to, most of them will form part of the long-term conservation and management plans and maintenance processes which are still being drafted.

During my research, I noted that the museum building needs repairing since the roof is leaking, the thatching is damaged, and ants are causing damage. Some of the lights need to be replaced. The completion of the exhibition cabinets, electrical work and paving inside the building needs to be attended to soon. The collection, which is currently stored in the museum building, needs to be removed and fumigated. General maintenance of the rest of the infrastructure needs to be done, such as the repair of the fencing and clearing of the entrance area, which has been covered by grass. Although the bushes were cleared on the archaeological site during the early 1990's, they are now taking over again and could cause damage to the ruins. This problem could have been prevented if precautions were taken in the past e.g. applying poison to bushes that were chopped down.

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<sup>19</sup> This was confirmed through my telephonic conversation with a Museum Scientists at Schoemansdal Museum, Ms Mpho Kutama, Friday January 30, 2004: Time 2:30. I called her so as to double check some of the facts regarding Dzata Development Project.

Over and above these problems, and the issue of unity necessary to develop this site as a museum and to be used for tourism purposes, Dzata remains in the center of both political and social conflicts. There is varying interest amongst the government, local authorities, the public and professionals, such as anthropologists and archaeologists and heritage managers. Questions arise such as: How far, in terms of heritage management and conservation, should the site development process be stretched? Is it necessary to add or keep structures? Who amongst local authorities, communities and government should be in charge or have the power to control what happens on the site before, during and in the post-development stages. Both the government and the local Mpephu royal kraal are busy drafting separate tourism and development proposals. How these will be integrated and implemented remains to be seen.

Furthermore, this feeling that Dzata should, under the National Heritage Resources Act, be declared a National Heritage Site (NHS) and a World Heritage Site (WHS) has resulted in lawmakers assuming that the request is politically rather than culturally motivated. The local authority, however, still maintains it is with their request. As said earlier, they point out that Dzata should be granted a status similar to that of sites such as Mapungubwe and Great Zimbabwe. They commissioned people to do more research and reports that show the significance of the site to the VhaVenda nation and local communities in general.

Unfortunately SAHRA has denied this proposal. To many local leaders and committee members interviewed, this is as a result of a “conspiracy” to overlook the site, as it is the only area that represents and still holds value for the VhaVenda people. Mr. Muvhango, a member of the recently formed Mpephu Tourism Development Sub-committee (MTDSC), and resident of the Mpephu royal kraal, mentioned that at this stage, the committee is trying to make sure that development of the site is completed.

## **CONCLUSION**

To date, there have been some changes in the above findings. According to the Schoemansdal staff, several meetings between the MTDSC and SAHRA officials have been to discuss further development on the site. Therefore, there is a strong possibility of changes to the above findings as results of recommendations that have and continue to be made by these committees. At the time of completing this report, consultants to revive the exhibition development program had

been appointed and were working on site. In the chapter that follows, I critically discuss findings as illustrated above. Taking note of my interests and position as both a professional trained archaeologist and a local person, I shall expand on critical issues reflected through Dzata as my case study.

University of Cape Town

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Even though there is strong evidence to show that there were various parties involved in discussing, planning and implementing the development action processes at Dzata, the actuality of what happened, from the local people's perspective, remains complicated. With regard to the roles played by and responsibilities of archaeologists, government officials, and local leaders. However, the research findings present major issues of concern that aggravate political and power relations and cause misunderstandings, conflicts and accusations amongst local communities, heritage authorities, site developers, archaeologists and other stakeholders.

Concerns about issues such as those of ownership, accessibility, control and power contestations, and interpretations of the historical past, roles, and positions of various parties, either political or traditional have become a dominant discourse. Regarding the issue of consultation, both indigenous communities and the professional elites have their own opinions regarding who should have been consulted, who should be in charge of all activities on sites, who speaks, on whose behalf. This is a critical issue, which arose before the initial proposal for the site development project by VDC.

Although there might have been some political and academic influence on the whole process, one should not ignore the fact that the intention behind the entire development process was not irrelevant. Nevertheless, it is within these various discourses of contestations and power relations, knowledge production, interpretation and use, indigenous rights, and politics that this work will attempt to bring forth critical issues for consideration in future projects. With reference to all the research findings thus far and various examples drawn from similar situations around the world, this chapter will be used as a platform to deconstruct and critically debate a number of questions raised in the previous chapters.

To open my discussion, I would like to start by tackling one issue, which I see as the core of this project. That is consultation between indigenous-local people, site developers, professional researchers and other stakeholders. This will be followed by broad discussions under themes like, knowledge and power, significance and understanding of the sites, language and dissemination of research findings, accountability, accessibility and others already mentioned. To conclude the

discussion, I will look at the broader legislative framework, how things were done in relation to the existing heritage management governing policies. Though examples might be drawn from other areas, most of these issues are raised in respect of the Dzata site.

## **SOCIAL CONSULTATION**

Given the current circumstances on heritage practices, consultation remains the most crucial issue and yet it is seen to be the most frustrating and problematic. Once raised, challenging questions always emerge: what is consultation? Who and when does one consult? To what extent are the “non-professionals” supposed to be involved? How do “professionals” talk to them? Concerns and notions such as those of representation, the right to decide, access, varying perspectives and voices, power to control and politics cannot to be separated from this debate.

Speaking of professional archeologists in relation to this matter, Fuller (1997: 181- 197) argues that when conducting cultural resource investigations, the latter seldom speak to local native communities. Instead, she continues, the latter would prefer to rely on “acceptable scientific methods”. That is, they prefer to reiterate those data collected incompletely and hastily by the early scholars, denying native’s access, even though in some cases, the very same people (natives) provided the very same data in the first place”. According to sources from the royal Mphephu kraal, there was no proper consultation with local communities from the onset. Based on information gathered and concerns raised throughout this research process there is a dominant, intense feeling that since the invasion by so-called “white people”, the site has lost its significance. The complexity of these tensions can be seen through a number of questions that the local community is raising during interviews - for example: 1) who gave them permission? 2) With whom did they speak? 3) Why were they allowed digging on the “sacred” site in the first place? 4) Why can’t white people respect “our” sites? And 5) Can black people do the same to their monuments?

A prevailing feeling revealing itself through these comments is that researchers (most of whom happened to be white) are just ignorant people who undermine the views and capabilities of the local people and their authorities. As far as Fuller (1997:183) is concerned, consultation first and foremost involves the recognition and respect of the indigenous people and their territory. Therefore, if assertions as claimed by local interviewees in the case of Dzata are correct, those who worked on the site should account for their deeds, to avoid being seen as “ignorant people

with little interest in conserving tradition and culture, the intangible heritage of the site and those who have lived on it”.

Little evidence has been found suggesting the manner in which the official appointment of archeologists to work on the project was carried out. It is clearly stated that the archaeologist, Mr Edwin Hanisch was appointed with the full knowledge of the local authority. Although the latter came to meet with him to discuss his role, there was never an understanding as to why and how his work was to be conducted. Thus there was no clarity on roles that all or other parties including him were to play. Again this takes me back to questions raised earlier: by whom and how should this process be undertaken? To reverse these imbalances, local authorities and community representatives feel that the process of consultation should not be a top-down but rather a bottom-up process. That is, the process should be seen as long term, as it was done on sites such as Thulamela. There needs to be a dialogue and a striving to understand and integrate various viewpoints. Sadly, archaeologists, as seen in examples given in the literature review, continue to be at the centre stage of feuds. The discipline of archaeology is, as a result of these acts, viewed as a destructive discipline and archaeologists as nothing else but disrespectful scientists who, besides their work, lack respect for the significance of the sites and interest in communities whose past they investigate. Various accounts, as narrated by the interviewees, bear evidence of this general feeling. The question that remains to be answered, if these assertions are true, is how long will it take for archeologists to transform and what will make them do so? Unfortunately one cannot answer these questions. It is only when one looks at recent cases such as those of the Prestwich Street site, the contestations arising and responses from archaeologists, heritage authorities and site developers that one urges for a review of the legitimacy in the process of consultation.

## **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SITE**

When dealing with the question of significance, one should understand that there are varying and important elements that need to be considered. It is true that indigenous people have and always will, hold different views and beliefs and attach varying significance to cultural sites as compared

to archaeologists or any other person who does not belong to a particular native group. (Pwiti and Ndoro: 2000) It should also be noted that certain intangible aspects that are scientifically seen not to be of significant important, i.e. spiritual, also need to be preserved and protected. Nevertheless, the answer as to where this is placed within the discourse of heritage practice and governing laws remains to be seen.

With regard to site developments, management and roles played by various stakeholders including indigenous-local groups, I would refer to examples given in chapter 3 by Pwiti and Ndoro (2000). Referring to a number of heritage rock art sites and what they refer to as stone built Zimbabwe type sites in Eastern and Southern Africa, i.e. Kondoia Irangi in Tanzania, Domoshava and Silozane in Great Zimbabwe, the monument of Great Zimbabwe, Thulamela in South Africa, as well as a number of other sites in the region, these authors explore the implications and problems that might emerge as a result of varying perspectives, such as the appropriate use and significance of sites, which in this context, is considered sacred by local communities, and problems such as intentional vandalism, resistance to developments, and claims of land ownership.

In this case study were locals claim that the site under development or the area excavated has always been used as a ceremonial area for ancestral worship, there are various questions that emerge. What happens when the need to research overshadows the need to conserve and preserve the site as is? What should be done when such contradictions emerge? How does the law protect the sites, especially when these contradictions are at loggerheads with preservation and conservation methods? How can site developers decide between physical, (tangible) heritage and spiritual (intangible) aspects of the site? Do ceremonial activities pose more danger than grading and digging sites? Is it possible for the two to be integrated? What about the impact of tourists on sites as compared to ceremonial activities that took place once or twice a year? These are challenging questions that need to be reviewed when all these processes are carried out.

During some of my interviews, I had a strong sense that local authorities and communities think that their culture, traditions, beliefs and the value they attach to the site were never considered. I could not ignore the impression given by local communities that scientific management methods were given preference over the indigenous viewpoint. The common suggestion made was that before any proposals and activities are initiated, understanding the significance of the site should be a priority. This is believed to be the only method that will help the developers to be flexible

and plan how they will integrate cultural values of preservation versus western scientific conservation methods. By adhering to minimal intervention rather than destroying the historic meaning carried from generation to generation as seen in the case of Dzata.

#### **LEGISLATION: SITE MANAGEMENT AND INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

In the past, the National Monuments Council (NMC) was responsible, according to the National Monuments Act of 1969 (Act no. 28 of 1969), for implementing a conservation management program which would identify, control and preserve archaeological and cultural sites and monuments in South Africa. Although they had regional offices, archaeological matters were dealt with from Cape Town with the result that sufficient control over sites in the various provinces was lacking. There is no doubt that protecting and preserving our heritage has since become very challenging and of critical concern. However, if appointed heritage authorities or agencies continue to claim that they are inundated with work, alternative approaches should be taken. Possibly if SAHRA could invest their time on heritage education, teaching the public about issues of significance, conservation, management and protection of both tangible and intangible heritage rather than trying to implement rules and regulations in what I see as a vacuum, most of these problems would be minimized.

At the moment there is an Archaeology, Paleontology, Meteorites and Heritage Objects Permit committee of which I am a member. Our main task is to review applications and recommend that SAHRA issues permits for archaeological works, import and export of any heritage objects for further research and other studies. The idea behind the formation of this committee was to help ease responsibilities and work load on SAHRA who do not have enough capacity. As far as the power indigenous societies have on this work is concerned, my findings reveal that SAHRA is currently reviewing and amending laws that would help address some of these concerns.

Once this is completed, issues of irregularities in terms of site management before, during and after research will be history. Thus one would expect to see the processes and all activities under control. Cases such as Dzata and others should be used as a practical example for future projects. Nevertheless, it should be noted that regardless of the Act, there would still be complaints regarding various problems.

Local people feel that the significance that the sites hold for them is much more valuable. As a way of showing respect to the values attached to the site, SAHRA should consider categorizing it as a National Heritage Site and furthermore have it nominated as a World Heritage Site. One might see this attempt as a bit ambitious. However, those interviewed said that there is a misunderstanding or what they presume is a conspiracy to overlook the site and its symbolism to them. As far as they are concerned, this is the only site that represents and still holds the value of the VhaVenda people and history of their originality. They argue that because of its physical materials e.g. landscape, museum structures, ruins (stone walls), oral history, the Dzata site needs to be recognized and conserved for generations to come. These, as far as they are concerned, are the only intangible expressions of Venda identities and experiences. So far, Dzata does not hold any national or World heritage status as wished by local communities. According to the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) of 1999, there are systems in place used for grading sites Grade I covers Heritage resources with qualities so exceptional that they are of special national status. Grade II covers Heritage resources which, although forming part of the national estate, can be considered to have special qualities which make them significant within a province or a region. Grade III comprises other heritage resources worthy of conservation. Contrary to claims, Dzata could, based on this grading system, be categorized under Grade II, meaning that it is a provincial heritage site or monument.

#### **CONTESTED HISTORIES AND THE POLITICS OF THE INTERPRETATION OF THE PAST**

One cannot ignore the fact that history and politics play a major role in shaping the positions that living people take in the discourse of heritage resource management. (Forsman 1997: 105-111) According to Klopper (1996: 2), since 1994 when South Africa transcended to democracy, culture has become a major site of struggle. This struggle is predicated on an increasingly contested understanding of the past, over who should have control over cultural sites and whose interpretation of the past and present should be conveyed to future generations. Though archaeology and apartheid are seen as separable (Shepherd: 1995), in the South African context, the misunderstanding between archaeologists and indigenous people, has resulted in an increased distance. At the same time it has fueled political conflicts and debates within the discipline. An idea that archaeological practice exists outside, above or in an alternative realm to politics as mentioned in Shepherd (1995), persists amongst other groups.

With reference to accusations such as a lack of transparency as in the case of Dzata, the questions one may ask in this regard are: who is an appropriate person to conduct archaeological investigation? With competing interpretations and viewpoints about the past as indicated by Professor Ralushai and different attachments to the significance of the site, whose view should be considered important for effective development, control and management of the site? In chapter 1 (1.3) I gave an account of Venda as a homeland and the role that Chief Patrick Raamaano Mphephu played during his reign as both the king and the president of the then Republic of Venda. Taking into account the Kingship contestation between his sons, Toni Ramabulana Mphephu and his cousin Thovhele M.P.K. Tshivhase, the idea of developing Dzata as the “main tourist attraction” in the Limpopo region cannot be separated from the rest of this political discourse. Many people view it as a highly politically motivated endeavour aimed at glorifying the status of the Singos and not representing the rest of the Venda Nation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the idea was met with a lot of resistance from other chiefs and the community who felt that the VhaVenda people include not only the Singos, but comprise of a number of clans that may not necessarily be represented in the proposed museum exhibitions.

It has since emerged that the Tshivhase’s have also started developing their area known as Mukumbani as the largest tourism destination. Besides the new structures erected on the area already, the main attraction would be the royal homestead, magnificent stonewalls and large trees surrounding it. This area is actually regarded as one of the few typical Venda “*Musanda*” left - a royal kraal with settlement pattern resembling that of other Iron Age historic sites, which is rarely found around the region. This move has been viewed by many as an open demonstration of power contestation and a feud between the two Kingship candidates. These examples are also an indication that political issues do stretch beyond the realm of traditional barriers to the professional level. Whether such interventions get to be known, are chosen to be ignored by site developers or not, the fact remains the same: they do and will always have great influence in the manner in which projects such as the one in question are conducted and their outcome.

## **ACCOUNTABILITY**

Who should be held accountable for the “failure” of major projects such as the one in question? With specific reference to this case, it is difficult for one to ascertain who actually caused the project to fail. Whether there were political, traditional nor social influences, is difficult to

conclude. According to Mr. Ramavhoya, government officials, most of whom were not local residents around the developed area, played a tremendous role in making the project unsuccessful. They were, according to him, the ones who authorized most of the work that was conducted on the site. Various letters and minutes taken during the planning stages of the project bear evidence of the presence of many Venda Republic government officials in various meetings held in different places. With this evidence in place, one could support his assertions.

Although there were a number of people involved, as far as I have observed and from my findings review, archaeologists cannot be exonerated. It is also obvious that conducting excavations with little consultation and involvement of local people could lead to the failure of projects regardless of good intentions. Furthermore, it is this lack of transparency and poor dissemination of archaeological data that creates major problems. The situation in which the latter plays both roles, that is representing local communities and advocating their position to other archaeologists, government agencies, projects components and other professionals, also seems to have been a major problem and an issue of great concern. Mr Ramavhoya, though his age was not an issue of concern at the time of this research, recalls his encounter with people he assumes might have been researchers who were collecting stones from Dzata. At the time, he claims, he was too young to understand what their aim was. It was when he came to know about the proposal to develop the site and archaeological excavation resumed that he tried to connect what he saw with what was happening. It is amazing that most of the people, whose names were mentioned throughout by these interviewees, once contacted, demonstrated an unwillingness to take full responsibility for what transpired at Dzata. Accountability to the damage, or what communities regard as the destruction of their intangible heritage, remains unclear.

## **KNOWLEDGE AND POWER**

In relation to this discipline and the political history of South Africa in particular, crucial questions such as that of ownership of the past, power to control, access, write, interpret, and manage information, cannot be ignored.

Given the current political discourse, is it appropriate to suggest that indigenous knowledge deserves a space in the interpretation of the past? What about notions such as that of authenticity, validity and claims to knowledge - how long will they remain of less concern within the archaeology fraternity? How well has the relevance of archaeology and role of archaeologists that

been communicated to the broader community? How have the relationships between the two affected the interpretation of the past, knowledge production and the discourse of nation-building? And if indigenous people continue to be silenced, whose history and whose knowledge do archaeologists write about? That is, who has the right to speak and on whose behalf? What about different perspectives, multiple voices and various versions of similar histories, can all these be separated or can they be integrated? Will indigenous societies ever have space to contest and negotiate their past and its meaning without creating conflict among themselves and other contesting groups? Most importantly, how has the issue of power been demonstrated in the case of Dzata?

In my interview with Mr Lalumbe, it was obvious to me that the knowledge local people possess about the site is a satisfactory component which, over the years, has guided them and provided them with the sense of authority and power to control and protect what they see as an inheritance from their ancestors. Mr Phaswana asserts that cultural traditions and all beliefs and ritual practices have, as a result of this western intervention of seeking knowledge, become part of the intangible heritage, becoming memories that, according to western tradition of knowledge production and use, have little possibility of offering clues about the past.

My grandmother's and the late Mrs Masindi Ramunyandi's memories and assertions about the site demonstrate the passion, pride and respect they held for the site. When asked about the history of the site, they recalled the efforts that their generation had exerted over the years, resulting in secure, well-guarded sacred sites which, although not surrounded by fences and guards, remained protected. Evidence that indigenous people's view and value of knowledge is completely different to that of westerners.

Other issues I found interesting in the case of Dzata is the arguments that arose as a result of stonewall that were rebuilt by local people. It is said that the rebuilding of walls by local communities was done incorrectly since there was no involvement of "specialists". The absence of archaeologists or of a specialist's supervision during reconstruction, as already mentioned, is said to have been the cause of the mistake. (Roestorff: 1996). Thus rebuilding the walls was not done not on its original foundation or using the correct technique. The question one would ask is who has the right to acquire the name "specialist"? On what basis do archaeologists have the authority to claim knowledge and power to decide the fate of these sites, including stone mason knowledge which many locals have carried out for years? There is also the issue of Candelabra

trees that were planted along the path that leads to the ruins. These trees are said to give a false representation of a “*Musanda*”. (Roesetorff 1996: 3) Is this evidence of what happened when the so-called “specialists” or professionals conduct their work without consultation? Who gave orders to plant these trees after all?

Notions of power, gender, secrecy and status also play an important role in this discourse. Raharijaona (1996) gives an example of how knowledge and power is demonstrated amongst the Betsileo of Madagascar. He writes that the oldest male has the authority to speak about the past. However they must only speak in the presence of more knowledgeable people as inaccuracies might offend ancestors and bring about social and physical harm. He furthermore argues that oral traditions serve to define, preserve and validate a group’s identity and customs within a more encompassing cultural context. Archaeologists must therefore respect local customs in their search for information, he says.

This was made clear by Mr Lalumbe who is on a crusade to have the history of Dzata and that of the rest of the VhaVenda re-written. His argument is also motivated by a view that because of traditional beliefs and customs, people withhold information from researchers. Thus, the VhaVenda are historically secretive people who might, as a way of protecting themselves and their histories, have given researchers invalid information about their history. Furthermore, in the case of Dzata, although women, men, commoners, and royal family members or “Vhakololo” share the same belief and knowledge about the site, from an indigenous perspective, one might argue that the “*vhakololo*” in this regard holds greater access to knowledge of the site.

To substantiate this assertion, I will draw from a comment made by one of the interviewees. According to Mr Phaswana, everyone was welcomed to ceremonial activities at Dzata. However, as a commoner, there were certain rules that he had to be followed. Certain areas were restricted only to *Vhakololo* so as to give them space to perform their rituals. It is in this context that one might argue that knowledge possessed by these groups might differ to a certain extent and that the scope in which consultation should take place should expand beyond small groups to a large number of representatives. Furthermore, it should also be noted that the traditional powers and beliefs could also influence the amount of information there is and the manner in which that is disclosed. Once aware of these restricting factors, researchers should know that whatever knowledge gathered on or before any project is not immune to contestations and further debate. Again, this recalls concerns raised by both Professor Ralushai and Mr Lalumbe regarding

knowledge production. They argued that the involvement of indigenous people in researching their own past and writing and interpreting it using ways which differ from methods used by scientific western-influenced researchers, would help produce results that would aid the transformation of the discipline. As stated earlier, this is a rather complex issue, which needs to be looked at. The issue of language cannot be excluded from this discussion. The section below explores various factors of language that, if not taken seriously, could impact greatly on the information sharing about and understanding of the past altogether.

## **LANGUAGE AND DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Robertshaw (1990: 7) states that, whatever their theoretical bent, archaeologists should be accountable. They should recognize that they have a responsibility to make their results accessible and understandable to the people of the country in which they work. Fanon (1967:18) on the other hand says, "A man who has the language consequently possesses the work expressed and implied by that language." He furthermore argues that, "A mastery of language affords remarkable power". In the case of Dzata, where various people and institutions over the years have conducted numerous studies, not even a single report was found regarding all the work done on the site. Although archaeologists argue that there are reports available, I did not see any and my question is with whom, and where are they kept? Indeed, in which languages are they published? Why is it that there is not even a single document or report in the hands of local communities or authorities? Whose past is presented in "those" documents anyway?

Pecheux (1982) quoted in Tilley (1996), underlies the fact that speaking and writing are not only instruments of communication, but also of non-communication. Jameson (1997) further states that, because many people do not have the necessary knowledge or training to evaluate the result of the archaeological work directly, they can and should be given this information in an accurate, "de- jargonized" and entertaining manner. How well have archaeologists succeeded in communicating their work and disseminating their research results thus far? How prepared are they to adopt the culture of open communication and information sharing?

To further this discussion of language, Tilley (1997: 113) puts it this way, "archaeology produced materials are rarely accessible to non-archaeologists". This is as a result of the language used, which in most cases is scientific and also because fewer publications are distributed to museums, schools and heritage institutions, he argues. These documents are written in languages that are

easily accessible and understood only by the scientific elite. There are a number of schools around the area where Dzata site is situated that offer primary, junior and secondary education. Why is it that the methods as suggested by Tilley were not adopted?

It is a fact that information generated through any research will attract widespread interest. Ironically, much information generated by archaeological research is hardly seen or understood by non-academics. This is as a result of the lack of effort archaeologists put into disseminating it or even writing it in languages that are more accessible to various interested groups. Perhaps it is true that many archaeologists as reflected in US National Parks (2004) and Deacon (1990), while speaking of the need to transform their discipline into that which seeks to both appeal to and serve the general public as a whole, on the contrary mainly focus on acquiring academic qualifications, neglecting the state of the site and artifacts after completion and publicizing of their work. The question one may ask is to whom is their archaeological research directed? Are they doing research for their fellow scientists or for the benefit of both the scientific and indigenous communities? If they continue with this trend, how do they plan to achieve these goals?

To illustrate the extent to which the problem of using scientific or any language can be in places like Africa where there are thousands of languages spoken, I looked at the argument by Musonda (1990: 3-18). In trying to confront the slow development of African archaeologists within the continent, Musonda shows that rather than looking at the use of scientific knowledge by archaeologists, language barriers within the continent should be seen as the main obstacle. Consequently, he asserts that these barriers also limit their opportunities of gaining knowledge on what is happening within the continent and sometimes abroad. With reference to a number of case studies around the continent, he expresses delight that in many African countries where English is not an official language - e.g. Mozambique and Mali - there are people who are now writing and publishing their work in English, which according to him is the only way African archaeologists can share their knowledge. Thus according to him, using English is the only way in which communication can be maintained at a satisfactory level.

Without completely disagreeing with him, I find his view to be somewhat problematic, based on statement and suggestions made by the authors quoted earlier. It is true that language barriers do create limitations in terms of accessing information and knowledge. However his assertion is no different to saying that archaeologists should just continue writing in languages understood by

themselves and the rest of the scientific community. I say so because for too many indigenous people, English remains a foreign language, regardless of whether it is simplified. As a result, information gathered and written will only be understood by and accessible to those who are privileged to have received a Western education. Using myself as an example, I might be one of the privileged who has worked hard to get a better education, but that does not put me in a position to claim that my understanding of English or any language besides Tshivenda, which is my Mother tongue is superior. The struggle to write, understand and follow English discussions at a satisfactory level persists.

As mentioned earlier in my findings report, most of the documents that could rarely give one an insight of what the site is all about were found in the Cape Town SAHRA offices and Pretoria University Library. While on this issue, I would like to revisit the mystery behind the missing archaeological file at Schoemansdaal Museum<sup>20</sup>. If documents, reports and minutes regarding site development were found, why is it that only the archaeological file was empty? What happened to the files and documents? An attempt to find what transpired has unfortunately been to no avail. With no intention of implying anything negative, I might say that it is quite unusual that only the file that contains such valuable information was emptied. It also causes me to wonder whether this was a deliberate act meant to restrict people from accessing information relevant to current debates and contestations over the site. If that is not the case, then let this research be an eye-opener to archaeologists and those who might, at this point be sitting with the files of the site in question.

Although it is crucial and interesting, the issue of language is not the only question to reevaluate in this region as shown throughout the literature survey. There is a perception by many professionals that people who are not part of a particular discipline do not have interest in acquiring knowledge about that discipline. Consequently, researchers rarely write or interpret their findings in Indigenous languages. As Hall (1996:33) asserts, although in many cases archaeologists will have a lot of latitude in how they design research projects and put together their interpretations, ultimately, they are writing about the past for “someone else”. In this case, one can say that the majority of people in this region do not have formal education, and therefore cannot read or write. Those who can are barely able to understand English, not to mention scientific language, which is generally used when writing reports. Whose responsibility is it to

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<sup>20</sup> Here I refer to the file marked archaeology that, ironically, was empty.

distribute research data amongst various parties? At the time that some of these projects were proposed and studies conducted, there were a growing number of specialists and linguists in Venda who, if consulted, I am certain would have contributed by summarizing and translating reports and other communication leaflets. Furthermore, if the problem lies with the budget, why can't planners, when requesting budgets for projects such as this, indicate the importance of the post development stage which includes making resources available to all interested parties. Taking into account the goal of our government to instill pride and dignity to those whose past has over the years been misrepresented and whose history has been written and interpreted in a biased manner, I am quite certain that applications would be considered for such an initiative if an effort was made to get more money.

### **ACCESSIBILITY, OWNERSHIP AND USE OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL DATA**

In South Africa and elsewhere around the world, previously marginalized communities are increasingly concerned with affirming their rights to manage their own cultural and heritage resources. (Klopper: 1996, Creamer: 1990, Forsman: 1997, Pwiti and Ndoro: 2001, 2002, Longford: 1993 quoted in Creamer: 1997) As presented in Dzata's case, the control and ownership of sites has many dimensions, i.e. moral, cultural, political, legal and material, all of which require consideration. However, there are questions that arise in this discourse. The main questions as asked by Layton (1994), Creamer (1990), Gathercole and Lowenthal (1990), Stone and Mackenzie (1990), and several other publications are: Who owns the past? From how far back can people claim to have acquired or recall knowledge and connections to the past? On what criteria could a cut-off point be based, as suggested by some researchers? Quoted in Creamer (1990), Langford (1993) argues from an indigenous perspective, "It is our past, our cultures and heritage, and forms part of our present life...As such, it is ours to control and it is ours to share on our terms", he writes.

According to Forman (1997:107), the most divisive and complex issue in the entire consultation process is the concept of ownership. However, he argues, this sense of ownership is usually expressed as control of site excavation, dissemination of data, and enhancement of professional reputation, is often extended to archaeological sites by the archaeologists who locate them. Sometimes the sites are considered their property, at least on an intellectual basis. Sharing the management of these sites with indigenous communities is often considered "troublesome to the work of archaeologists." As indicated by Pwiti and Ndoro (2000), conflict of ownership and

restrictions imposed on indigenous people by researchers in the name of heritage management have led to the destruction of sites. A rock art site with historic paintings been painted over as a result of anger imposed by western laws and researchers. Indigenous groups insist that unless they are offered a meaningful involvement in the management decision of sites, archaeologists will always be restrained from pursuing their scientific research on sites with significance to the communities.

Take for example, the erection of the fence around Dzata. What message does this send to the broader community? According to conservation experts, the fence offers protection from vandalism by both human and animal. However, this action can convey varying messages to these two groups. Indigenous societies argue that is another way of restricting communities from accessing their own heritage. An example from a site like Mapungubwe is the issue of accessibility. Local people or any interested groups are highly restricted. To enter the site, permission must be granted by local farmers, National Parks and archaeologists who have acquired the power to control accessibility to the site. If someone wants to visit the site, he/ she would be required to make arrangements prior the visit and also request someone to accompany them to the site. I understand that this is to protect the site against theft and vandalism, but on the other hand, I think this action could trigger feelings that are rooted in old political issues such as that of land ownership and borders created by the apartheid government. Another example is Thulamela which is situated in the heart of the well-fenced Kruger National Park. Although archaeologists working there managed to negotiate with local communities, accessibility to this site remains restricted. (Pwiti and Ndoro: 2002) Local communities who, under the apartheid system, were moved to the surrounding areas, cannot access the site. Although both parties can easily justify these actions, the question remains, whose heritage is it anyway: the states, tourists', archaeologists' or the public's?

Regarding archaeological data, from my personal experiences working as an archaeologist and my current position as a museum artefacts conservationist, my visit to a number of museums in South Africa and Universities that have archaeological departments has revealed that a vast collection of archaeological finds from local excavations are rarely displayed for public view. The general public has no access to or control over these cultural remains. The state, in which *some* of these objects are stored after scientific analysis, documentation, etc, is evidence that there is inadequate care of these collections by archaeologists. I have always been outraged by the level of negligence in terms of curation of archaeological objects. Why is it that archaeologists do not

take responsibility for curation and rarely take the initiative of devising ways of making these findings useful and accessible to various parties?

According to Longworth (1999: 1), caring for archaeological collections does not simply mean good housekeeping, but the on-going and expanding use of the collections for display, research and for education. Previously in South Africa there were no policies that controlled and insisted on proper care of these artifacts. As a result many archaeologists would, in the name of research, take most of their findings with them. Currently, as will be elaborated later in my discussion, there are many cases where indigenous societies are fighting for the return of their ancestral belongings that were taken years ago, as archaeologists claim, for "research" purposes. During a study done for the course 'Public Archaeology in Africa' course at the University of Cape Town, (Mafune: 2001), it was revealed that a number of these objects are not being taken care of. Most university storage spaces are over-crowded with archaeological objects, there is no curation, and there are no future plans to use these objects or even release them to the communities residing in the area where they were found. Whose heritage is it supposed to be anyway? Are archaeologists doing enough to address this problem? Aren't there other alternatives? Archaeologists need to revisit this issue and recognize their obligation to the public. The power to define and decide on usage, accessibility, ownership and control of this heritage should be afforded to both the specialists and the general public.

Although in this instance the vision was to build a museum where objects found were to be exhibited, this cannot be used as justification of the fact that the objects are not stored under good conditions. No proper curation has been done to them. As mentioned earlier, there are other items that, at the time of writing this thesis, were stored at Mphephu holiday resort. There is concern about these items which, according to other informants were taken by researchers in the name of research. Though it could not be proven in this work, there is a feeling that most of them were never returned. If Mr Ramavhoya's assertion that he has seen people collecting artefacts from the site is true, how many more could have disappeared over the years? From my own observation and discussion with my peers, there seems to be a tendency by archaeologists to collect artefacts that fascinate them from sites and, worst of all, to keep them as personal collections. Where is the morality in this practice?

Some materials are kept in storerooms at tertiary institutions, some at museums, with the supposed intention to use them as study material for students, exhibitions and research. The

problem is that these materials are hardly ever displayed and are generally not accessible to the public. Though this might not always be admitted, certain archaeologists and researchers from these institutions have artefacts in their private possession. These occurrences cause me to raise issues such as accessibility, ownership and long-term use of the historical data. Whose heritage is it anyway?

With reference to museums, which have been set up in the country of Bali-Nyonga, Nwana-Samba (1994: 6) expresses the hope that artefacts found by local farmers will be stored there, and that local children will be taken to archaeological sites. As mentioned earlier, my visit to the Kaole ruins was very educational. I noticed and learnt that at least in one part of our continent, local people such as the Bagamoyo, with the assistance of local government, conservationists, and funding from various stakeholders, have managed to convince archaeologists to leave objects where they were found. Thus, instead of following the trend of taking objects or leaving them uncurated, an on-site museum has been built to exhibit valuable historic objects for visitors, locals and other interested people. With local people being fully involved and in charge, the museum work also as an interpreting centre which school children and their teachers can visit and use for educational purposes. This, according to archaeologists and local informants, has been one of the most successful projects and has instilled a pride in and appreciation of history by the local, scientific, and tourism community. This site is situated on the coast of the historic town of Bagamoyo, and has remains of mosques dating back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Professor Felix Chami of the Department of Archaeology, University of Dar-salaam Tanzania, excavated the site.

Coming back to issues of accessibility, ownership and control of the past, Tilley (1989: 113) suggests that, because the general public does not understand archaeology and its processes, i.e. surveying, excavations, etc, archaeologists have a responsibility to reach out to the public and empower them to understand and appreciate what archaeology can provide for them. They can do this by providing the opportunities and tools to learn more about archaeology as well as by opening the doors for public participation. By making the past accessible, they are helping the public to understand why and how the past is relevant to the present. Museums therefore, remain major institutions where both universities and museum archaeologists can communicate with the wider society. Without denying the fact that other museums in South Africa have progressed in this regard, ironically, most of them alienate people, rather than being used as educational centers, places where the archaeological past could be showcased and its link to the present interpreted. Few archaeologists are willing to take initiatives to make the archaeological past more accessible

and usable. Conservation, one of the most important practices in museums, is always used as an excuse to deny people their right to access and use heritage. Thus, the archaeological past has become an institutional heritage that can only be used and accessed by specific elite groups.

According to Layton (1997: 18), archaeologists should realise that they are not the only ones who value knowledge of the past. Indigenous societies, whom they research, also value their past. If archaeologists' involvement in site development processes is openly discussed and the information generated is well distributed, many problems and accusations will be avoided. The effort to have archeological knowledge reviewed for incorporation into South African school curriculums and textbooks (Esterhysen: 1999 and Mazel: 1989) would help bridge the gap and even provide correction to historical records and accounts.

To close this argument, it is necessary to examine the development of archeology as a discipline in contemporary South Africa. This will be done with reference to factors that have impacted on this advancement, from the apartheid period to the current situation.

## **ARCHAEOLOGY TODAY: PERSONAL REVIEW**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The end of apartheid in South Africa not only signaled the birth of a new democracy. It also marked the time when previously marginalized South Africans would have rights and equal access to basic socio-economic and other needs, once deemed exclusive to certain racial groups. To many South Africans, the birth of the new South Africa was a long awaited change that would not only see the un-banning of political organizations, but a rise in interest in and a call for transformation, in particular, the ways in which knowledge is produced, not only in academia, but also in public spaces such as museums, monuments and other areas of knowledge production. Many disciplines such as archaeology that were previously the exclusive domain of the white privileged classes had to confront contestations and pressures by various interested groups such as indigenous people. Like many academics, archaeologists were (and still are) confronted with demands to construct a representative discipline that accommodates the broader communities. Scholars from various backgrounds are bringing new challenges into the discipline. Archaeologists are being asked to consider other knowledge besides scientific in the

interpretation of the past. They are also faced with confrontations regarding their working relationship with indigenous societies. In this section I would like to pinpoint areas, which, to me, remain the most crucial areas of concern. Areas such as the relationship between archaeologists, sites developers and communities, archaeology in the academic context, in the job market, in representation, and lastly, archaeology in relation to the general transformation process, will be addressed.

## **ARCHAEOLOGY IN RELATION TO INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

As indicated earlier, the relationship between indigenous people or local communities and site developers, researchers, and archaeologists in particular, has changed in post apartheid South Africa. Contrary to existing trends and discourses where everyone claims to be working and speaking on behalf of the indigenous communities, there are, as evidenced in my findings, unresolved issues that still need attention. In order to bridge this gap and have effective collaborative projects, there are questions that need to be answered. For example, sites developers and researchers should ask themselves: what can indigenous people bring into projects and their disciplines in general? If any form of knowledge is brought, would this be valued or considered in the process, or would it be seen as claims that are based on unfounded non-scientific facts as shown in the Musuku exhibition opening ceremony? Here I refer to contestations that emerged when a group of Indigenous people who were attending the *Musuku Our Golden Links with the Past* exhibition opening ceremony, on September 24, 2001 at the South African National Gallery, Cape Town, saw the occasion as a platform in which they could confront researchers about interpretations of their past and the usage of incorrect names and inaccessible languages. Not everyone receive their assertions; archaeologists who felt offended later confronted the people claiming that their arguments were based on unfounded facts that were politically influenced.

Drawing from personal encounters, I can argue that while new views about the past of indigenous people might be brought in most archaeologists remain reluctant to offer them space to contest and interpret their own histories. The public reaction to archaeological practice and archaeologists themselves, generally speaking, still indicates the need to view the history of archaeology in a broad social context. Taking into account that few people know what archaeologists do and what archaeology as a discipline can offer, and are thus less informed about the nature of archaeology, archaeologists should constantly ask themselves questions about how they can redress these historical imbalances.

## REPRESENTATION WITHIN THE DISCIPLINE

Sensitive as they are, issues such as that of representation have since the birth of a democratic South Africa, brought many challenges in broad dominant power discourses. Given this background, it will be worth looking at some of the crucial issues I have noticed within the post apartheid South African discipline of archaeology. Although 1994 marks, as already stated, a time where all the doors are said to have been opened for everyone to study any subject at the institution of their choice, in a discipline such as archaeology, this change, if at all there, can hardly be noticed. It is argued that this period also signalled the rise of public scholarship, which, unfortunately coincided, with the relative decline of social history in the academy. (G Minkley, et al: 2001) In other words, the birth of new disciplines left disciplines such as archaeology under threat as it fuelled a decrease in interest. Is there a standard solution to this problem? In the literature review chapter, I noted that according to a statistical report by Shepherd (2000: 19-23), this decline in the interest of disciplines such as archaeology would have a huge impact, since the number of black students, who had shown an interest in archaeology in the early 1990's, dropped. This to me is a very critical issue of concern, which needs to be addressed. With reference to archaeology in academia, the questions one may ask are: Why is the response to this discipline so low amongst indigenous societies? What are Archaeologists doing in order to bridge the gap in their respective environment? Could this be blamed on current trends of heritage practices and training in South Africa? Have disciplines such as archaeology lost their direction? Is archaeology no longer relevant in contemporary South Africa?

While reviewing the state of the discipline in contemporary South Africa, there are other factors that need to be considered. More focus should be placed on restricting factors such as language, technology, accessibility to funds, public awareness and educational programs, which as far as I am concerned continues to exclude some people. If the academic elite in the post apartheid South Africa is reluctant to tackle these problems, there will not be acknowledgement and appreciation of the value and significance of the discipline. Speaking from the perspective of those who were underprivileged in terms of knowledge acquisition, the feeling of exclusion, inequality and powerlessness to challenge arguments and raise one's viewpoints, remain restricting factors. Furthermore, similar problems will continue to ravage our country's heritage as many

developments continue to take place. The fewer people are trained, the more problems we will have in terms of providing developers with qualified, knowledgeable people who are sensitive to cultural values.

## **ARCHAEOLOGY IN THE APPLIED ENVIRONMENT**

In relation to jobs, the current situation in South Africa is that most institutions such as museums and universities import academics from outside South Africa to conduct archaeological works. Inviting foreign experts to in our institutions creates a situation in which South African graduates cannot find jobs. Drawing from Deacon's (1990: 42) statistical study of archaeological jobs surveyed in museums and universities, I get the impression that as the situation now stands, the problem of employment could be another restricting factor in the development and transformation of the discipline.

Speaking from my own experience, many archaeology graduates end up working in areas that are not related to their training. Many, instead of working at a retail store, chemists, or doing administration work, are leaving the country in the hope of acquiring a relevant position. It is one thing getting funding to study, but at some point one needs to implement what one has learned. The "amateur tag", though Deacon (1990: 51) has called for its death, is still used as a restricting factor limiting young professionals from taking over positions. At the time of writing this thesis, a frustrated friend told me that the process of issuing tenders and permits for archaeological research are biased and based on wrong perceptions. The very same professionals who were our instructors are the ones who want to control all these jobs. There is little trust in the capacity of young graduates to perform at a professional level. However, at the time of completing this research, a Standard Generating Body (SGB) for archaeology, had just been established. This body, comprised of archaeologists from various provinces, saw the need to reevaluate the skills, knowledge and experience required for one to become a professional practitioner. Chaired by Deacon herself, formation of this body is seen as a positive move whose recommendations might change the situation of the concerned graduate mentioned above.

Nevertheless, talking from a personal indigenous perspective, exploration of areas where archaeologists are most likely to work i.e. museums and academic institutions, is still challenging. How many indigenous archaeologists do these institutions employ? It is true to say that archaeology remains a white male-dominated discipline. In many instances, people who have

been working in similar institutions for over 2 or 3 decades still occupy the very same positions after all this years. Most of their work is not stimulating and does not reach interested groups outside their scientific fraternity.

In closing this argument, one could ask whether this culture of importing foreigners into our institutions would ever assist in solving and bridging gaps as seen throughout this work. In addition to high numbers of unemployed young graduates, South African archaeologists rarely get opportunities to conduct research outside South Africa. This means that most of them need to stay and contribute in their native country. Contrary to this, there is no need to import and offer foreign archaeologists preference over “home-brewed professionals”. As argued earlier, young graduates who have so far acquired qualifications, could provide the necessary capacity needed to perform the very same jobs offered to foreign archaeologists. On the contrary, I have noticed that most institutions generally offer their graduate students positions as tutors. Why not offer them positions as junior lecturers and provide training that would equip them with more knowledge and skills which they could use when the existing generation has passed on?

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## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters have been concerned with the broader context within which this research was undertaken. Various issues of concern thought to be critical but not well explored in the academic context were highlighted through the case study of Dzata. The process of social consultation between archaeologists, site developers and indigenous communities, the core subject of concern for this project, was explored. Various case studies from within Southern Africa and around the world were used to highlight negative and in some cases, positive results achieved through proper consultation processes. Furthermore, it has become clear that socio-economic and political issues surrounding the development of site Dzata will continue to pose critical challenges not only to developers, but to archaeologists, heritage practitioners and law makers in future development processes. The complexity behind issues such as those of ownership, conservation and the power to control and access sites of heritage significance remains a critical discourse. While archaeologists and site developers continue to make claims of ownership in discovery of sites and interpretation of history, indigenous communities have awarded themselves the rights to these sites through their descendents and their cultural connections. While awaiting acknowledgement and recognition from archaeologists, site developers and heritage practitioners, indigenous people around the world will continue using all means of resistance to secure their rights to knowledge, religious practices, spiritual fulfilment, accessibility, and control of sites that have significance to them. Consequently, if this tension continues to dominate, the relationship will remain problematic and challenging.

The number of cases studies presented in this thesis demonstrate that social consultation may at times, become a disturbance of amicable social relations between archaeologists, site developers and indigenous local communities. Current development on sites Prestwich Street site in Cape Town and others that hold significance value to indigenous people continue to set a stage for dominant discourse on notions of critical practice, the legitimacy of development and most importantly, the social consultation process. All these are taking place in both public and academic spheres. They have not only evoked contestations on the issue of ownership, but

continue to create challenges for the discipline of archaeology, heritage authorities such as SAHRA and site developers.

With reference to the case of Dzata, one might however argue that while power, as demonstrated through custodianship and conservation of both tangible and intangible heritage, continues to surpass the current development process, the future is not all bleak. According to Forsman (1997), the future of archaeology is in communities functioning as active, not passive participants in the interpretation, management and preservation of their rich cultural heritage (Forsman 1997: 108-109). The formation of MTDSC gives us hope in terms of mending a relationship that has not always been that smooth. The Thulamela excavation, for example, is evidence that when the consultation process is conducted properly, projects can be successful. The cooperation between archaeologists, Venda chiefs, and local communities in resolving all the issues relating to the excavations and reburial of remains at Thulamela could be hailed as a model of successful negotiation. (Miller: iii)

Through my interviews and discussion with members of the local community, some suggestions were made to the developers and mainly to the archaeology community. The following section presents various issues which are critical for successful site development and research on sites that hold significance to communities.

#### **CRITICAL HERITAGE PRACTICE: IN THE EYES OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

Swindler 1997: 18) asserts that real communication involves listening as much as speaking and ensuring that the message received is the one that was actually sent. Any meaningful consultation, she argues, must be a dialogue between equals. With reference to my interviews with members of the local community, Mr Lalumbe, Mr Phaswana, Mr Muvhango and Mr Ramavhoya, there seems to be a common interest at heart, which is to see Dzata's history known and appreciated, while at the same time preserving the site's significant value. This section of my thesis will highlight a series of issues raised as concluding remarks by those who feel that their voices have for years been suppressed and in some areas continue to be ignored.

Consultation, they argue, should be a major concern when exploring relations between indigenous societies and archaeologists. Before any projects are undertaken, a well-represented team which

includes members of the public, academics, sites developers, other stakeholders such as government representative, should be selected to thoroughly examine the implications behind the proposal. When dealing with sites that have spiritual significance, an interdisciplinary approach should also be taken into consideration before research is conducted.

On the subject of the Dzata site, they would like to see the Government and heritage authorities striving to preserve historical remains of the old Dzata settlement that resemble old Venda settlements, cultures and lifestyles. Despite the availability of nomination and heritage status criteria as stipulated in the legislation, they still insist on seeing Dzata declared a National Monument and given World Heritage Status. Regarding a future development plan, they would like to see permit applications sent back to the territorial councils to investigate whether this matter was communicated properly. That is the newly elected Mphephu Tourism Development Sub-committee (MTDSC). It was quite obvious that they would like to retain their power of delegating researchers to investigate the site and be part of the permit review process. Interestingly, they insist that projects should be community-based and not too scientific. Local people believe that if one is looking after something that belongs to them, they should look after it properly. Therefore no community will ever support the elite in doing what was done at Dzata again. They believe that power should be shared amongst both the local and scientific communities. They also urge for the implementation of projects, which would empower local communities and offer them the skill to sustain themselves and the site. The above suggestions demonstrate that, in order to avoid tensions that require mediation which might, as in the case of Dzata, come late and at large costs, complex issues need to be resolved.

#### **THE FUTURE: TRANSFORMATION**

There is no doubt that the apartheid legacy is clearly manifested in many aspects of our modern lives. I have indicated from my own personal background, experiences and observation of various instances within the discipline of archaeology, the production, reproduction, acquisition and use of knowledge remain one of the highly contested areas. “Non-whites” have a huge task to reclaim, to negotiate space, to speak, to challenge, to write, and to deal with dominance of apartheid informed discourses and maintaining the balance in terms of power, race and gender domination remains a major concern and challenge.

In terms of transformation, archaeology and archaeologists everywhere should stand up and face these issues, some of which have since divided and have created tensions between themselves and with indigenous people. However, it should be noted that this problem not only affects those working directly with indigenous communities. Those in academia are also not immune to this challenge. Considering that there are few if any, archaeology graduates who have received training in archaeological ethics, educational or public archaeology courses, reviewing the content of the discipline remains a critical initiative still to be taken by various academic institutions.

In my view, archaeology is not only a source for revealing information that might heal the wounds of the South African past, but for seeing people of all races and cultures integrated and demonstrating pride in their own heritage. Archaeologists and those working within the heritage sector should therefore respond to this call to transform. In particular, the call for an increase in the numbers of indigenous people in the discipline of archaeology should be prioritised. Although these calls are, in as far as Lippert (1997: 125) is concerned, easy to make and harder to implement, academic archaeologists should conduct a broad re-evaluation of this call. They need to be aware that, as indigenous scholars, there are social and economic pressures that should be considered before deciding to undertake training in the discipline of archaeology. Critical questions that we frequently ask ourselves regarding our participation and study of this discipline are for example, how indigenous people can study archaeology when there is a possibility of one's viewpoint not being heard. What is it that the discipline expects of us? Considering our contradictory positions, it is obvious that we will bring our perspectives to our work which in most cases, go against the standard archaeological knowledge about indigenous people. The question is, would that be accepted or rejected as non-scientific? If these paradoxical functions and positions are not attended to, this call will remain futile. However, those working within the discipline should bear accountability, face and deal with these challenges and strive to adopt and implement changes that will see the discipline transforming into that which serves a broader community outside the existing narrowly congregated and unfairly representative community.

### **ARCHAEOLOGY: PERSONAL CONCLUDING REMARKS**

For the past ten years, I have been a participant and observer in the discourse between archaeologists and indigenous-local communities. During this period considerable level of conflicts, encounters and controversies became a typical relationship I know between

archaeologists and these communities. The most striking feature of this conflicts was the near to total absence of communication between the two. As a result, my position as an Indigenous- local person has and continues in many cases, a challenge. Being a professionally trained archaeologist, my career has never been an exciting one both in academia and on the field. As indicated in my introduction, I was in many cases confronted by local communities regarding archaeological activities and developments on various sites around which reside. In most cases, I was seen as someone who has lost respect of her cultural values and has since embraced western beliefs, of disrespecting ancestral spirits. In her paper; *In front of the Mirror: Native Americans and Academic Archaeology*, Dorothy Lippert argues that, in most cases, a person who holds such positions is usually seen as an opportunist who advocates Indigenous- local position on sensational topics more for their own careerist purpose than out of any particular commitment to the position being promoted (Lippert 1997: 120).

Drawing from my personal experiences and observations as an indigenous-local person, a heritage practitioner and an archaeologist, it has been difficult as I tried to give an honest critique throughout this debate. Nevertheless my position gave me the authority to speak on issues with which I am familiar and have had first hand experience of. Through various opportunities I received while working on sites that had significance to local communities, my conclusion was that, as far as many indigenous people are concerned, acquiring knowledge of their past through excavations is the last thing they would consider.

I agree that successful transformation of the archaeological discipline will require opening and establishing a lasting dialogue between archaeologists and the general public. Archaeologists should recognize and acknowledge the fact that, despite the significant contribution that this profession has made to understanding prehistory, they have not done a very good job communicating with or involving the descendants of the past societies we are studying. Archaeological results should be written in as many languages and disseminated to as many places as possible so as to reach all the interested groups. Nevertheless one cannot ignore the fact that the language problem also displays the remnants of the colonialist legacy around the continent. My own experience while attending the Pan Africanist Congress (Society for African Archaeologists) in the West African country of Mali in February 2001, was one that constantly reminds me how indigenous people who have had no contact with this Western language might feel when confronted with the situation as I did, which was having to run from one session to the

other trying to find speakers talking in a language I could understand, which in that context was ironically, English. I thought it was unfair for most key speakers to talk in languages which were foreign to me, e.g., French. To end this argument, I would therefore say that there is no doubt that language will remain an issue which all researchers will at some stage be confronted with. However, in the case of South Africa where various languages are spoken in different provinces e.g. TshiVenda, Sepedi and Tsonga in the Limpopo Province, and Xhosa, English and Afrikaans in the Western Cape, researchers should be held responsible for making their findings widely accessible to people who speak these provincially dominant languages. In this way, information about the past will be broadly received leading to wider discussions.

In making archaeology a discipline that appeals to and serves the community or the greater public, I would conclude by arguing that archaeology should transcend from old methods to a new acceptable style. The discipline should move from noble innocence to self-consciousness. Communities outside the professional fraternity should be trusted to control and safeguard sites without the involvement of “experts” or “specialists”. With reference to archaeological practice in particular, I would like to see archaeologists or “diggers” as they are referred to by many non-archaeologists, communicating with local communities. Both parties should find constructive strategies and mutually beneficial ways of communication.

According to Forsman (1997: 108), members of the academic and cultural resources management communities seeking a working relationship with indigenous communities need to communicate and describe their motives openly. They must demonstrate some benefit to indigenous societies without offending elders and other informants through breach of confidentiality, disrespectful behavior, or deceit. Honesty and commitment to honoring native values is important. Archaeologists should make an effort to educate people and make them understand what archaeology as a discipline can offer. If they don't, how will they explain themselves to people who do not have any knowledge about the discipline itself? How will they work with communities that have not seen or been in a museum without provoking critical questions and suspicions? Most importantly, approach in the practice should change; methods need to be moderated in terms of social needs.

Projects must benefit local communities and not just the career and finances of the archaeologist or sites developers. The latter should again strive to empower the public to be in control of their own heritage, in interpreting and articulating their history. These people could then participate in

the creation of historical knowledge and the definition of the historical context of themselves and their cultures. This exercise could also be seen as another way of teaching archaeologists and site developers to understand the significance and remember to preserve this significance in any intervention.

Drawing from the case study, Dzata, many artifacts were said to have been removed from their context to institutions under the pretence of further investigations e.g. radiocarbon dating. However, some were not brought back to the areas where they were excavated or found. (Rosetorff: 1996) The suggestion is that, before development or archaeological projects as such are conducted, all stakeholders involved should work out a plan as to how the findings are going to be used. Examples to prove the possibility of successful projects were Kaole, Bagamoyo and Jenne-Jenne in Mali, where a site museum and interpretation centers were established.

With regard to the growing trends to develop sites for tourism, these actions should be guarded since they continue to trigger conflicts between professionals and indigenous societies. Drawing from my interviews with professionals involved in the site in question, it was quite obvious that the latter believed that enough consultation took place and that they had a good plan to complete the desired task. They did not anticipate that questions and problems would arise later. Who should have been consulted? Whose views should have been listened to? What should not have been touched? Should sacred areas not have been researched? One cannot deny that if these developments are planned and done properly, tourism could be a beneficial entity to local communities. Once the site is developed, it could be a way of creating economic independence for poor communities, self-sustainability of the site, creation of jobs, knowledge production, education and appreciation and opportunities to showcase cultures and traditions and narrate histories to the coming generation. In this sense, one can further argue that if developments on sites like Dzata are done properly and its tourism potential was known, financial gain would not only support future managers on sustainability of the site, it would also be of economic benefit to local communities. Although my research has covered a number of critical issues, it is important for me to mention that there is a need for further research in the on social consultation in both academia and field for public policy.

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