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The making of a new past for a “new” South Africa: the commemoration of Robben Island

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Abstract

This study examines the interplay between the constitution of a new vision for society and new identity in post-apartheid South Africa and the corollary reshaping of the public representation of the past. In the first part, I construct a theoretical framework by combining theoretical literature on collective representations, collective memory, historiography, social identity and nationhood. Opting for constructivist theories and adopting a discourse analysis approach to collective representations of the past and to social identity, I analyse these phenomena as social constructs which are socially modelled and therefore reflect the broader social factors and processes (values, institutions, discursive practices and power configurations) which shape them. I further highlight that the representation of the past is at the core of the formation and evolution of identity. Specifically, there is an organic link between the formation of national identity and the shaping of the public representation of the "national past", the latter seeking to support and portray the image of national cohesion, hence providing an homogenising and often authoritative representation of the past.

In the second part, I draw on this framework to examine the case of post-apartheid South Africa where the changeover has brought about a new project of society striving for democratisation, reconciliation, national unity and break with the past. A new identity narrative is thus taking shape which materialises and fosters these values and goals. As a corollary, a new public representation of the past has emerged –more or less self-consciously promoted– in congruence with the new identity narrative. The interplay between national identity narrative and public representation of the past is all the more significant in South Africa as dealing with the past has been regarded as a cornerstone of the reconstruction and reconciliation of the society. In this context, reshaping the representation of the past aims at promoting a redressed and shared representation and thereby fostering democratisation and national cohesion; at the same time, this entails the construction of a presentist and authoritative representation of the past. Above all, the reshaping of the past provides a conciliatory narrative which includes the representation of the diverse cultures and histories, fosters consensus about the past, tames painful and divisive memories, furthers reconciliation, recasts existing identities and celebrates the advent of the "new" South Africa.

In the third part, I examine the specific case of the foremost commemoration of the "new" South Africa, that of Robben Island, in the light of the aforementioned theoretical framework and macro level analyses developed in Parts One and Two. For this case-study, I rely on academic sources, press and archives materials and qualitative field studies on Robben Island (observation of tourist visits and of the 1998 Youth Day commemoration, participation in a consultative symposium on the organisation and future of the museum, interview with the director, etc.). I then conclude that the commemoration of Robben Island –and its institutionalisation in the form of the Robben Island Museum– at once shapes and exemplifies the dynamics highlighted at the South African level.

They had returned inconsolable for all the love they had left behind, all the suffering they hadn't redeemed, all that they hadn't understood, and for all that they barely begun to learn before they were drawn back to the land of origins.

The famished road

Ben Okri

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¹ in Breyten BREYTENBACH, Return to Paradise, David Philip: Cape Town, 1993, p 26.

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❧ INTRODUCTION ❧

1.1. Outline of the study

This study is an inquiry into the processes whereby the emergence of a new vision for society and a new project of collective identity in post-apartheid South Africa has been accompanied by the formation of a new representation of the national past, in particular in and through the commemoration of Robben Island. Indeed, in the wake of the changeover from apartheid to a post-apartheid regime, South Africa has undergone a dramatic transformation and, in parallel, the representation of the South African past has been dramatically reshaped. The thrust of this work is to examine and deconstruct emerging public representations of the past and of collective identity and to unveil the rhetorical practices and underlying power configurations which have given birth to these collective representations. I will examine the dramatic transformation of South Africa in terms of the emergence of a new vision for society –characterised by the values and objectives of breaking with the past, democratisation, reconciliation and national unity– which I will analyse at the level of its concretisation in the form of the emergence of a new narrative of national identity. I will then seek to unveil the interplay between national identity and public representations of the past. While the reshaping of the public representation of the past can be shown to be a common feature of the emergence of a new national identity, their interplay seems all the closer and all the more significant in post-apartheid South Africa since the need to deal with the past –and, in particular with the divisive and traumatic past– has been conceived as a major social and political imperative and as a cornerstone of the reconstruction and reconciliation of society. In this study, I will thus seek to highlight the nature of the interplay between the formation of a new South African identity and the process of reconstruction of the public representation of the past as well as to analyse the processes whereby they mutually influence each other, whether these processes be “spontaneous evolutions” or deliberate actions by certain social actors. In particular, I will try to analyse the part played by major public institutions and actors, including the new government. Central to this analysis is the concept of commemoration which is a cornerstone of the emergence and modelling of collective representations of the past, hence of identity, and which is further at the core of the public processes of shaping and diffusion of these collective representations. In post-apartheid South Africa, the foremost commemoration of the new dispensation has been the commemoration of Robben Island which can be regarded as both a mainspring and an illustration of the processes of formation of a new South African identity and of the consistent representation of the national past. This study thus consists of three levels which successively intertwine: a theoretical analysis of the nature of collective representations of the past and of identity and of their interplay (Part One); a macro level analysis of the formation of a new South African identity and the corollary reshaping of the public representation of the South African past (Part Two); and, a micro level study of the place and role of the commemoration of Robben Island in these broader mechanisms (Part Three).

This introduction consists of a brief statement of the general theoretical approach and the main themes of the study to be dealt with in Part One (section 1.2); a summary outline of the national project of dealing with the past in the “new” South Africa to be covered in Part Two (section 1.3); a brief motivation for the specific study of the commemoration of Robben Island in Part Three (section 1.4); and an overview of the structure of the thesis (section 1.5).

1.2. Theoretical approach

1.2.1. *Specificities and limitations of the study*

I wish to highlight from the outset a number of specificities and corollary limitations of this work, which I will analyse against the backdrop of the existing literature. Thorough presentation, analysis and discussion of the relevant literature being conducted throughout the body of the thesis, I only mean to refer here to relevant approaches in the literature reviewed in order to make explicit and motivate the specific approaches and foci of my study.

Firstly, this study is an inquiry into the processes whereby human beings collectively represent reality to themselves and to others, and thereby experience and act upon this reality. I therefore draw on the literature examining how humans apprehend reality by (largely unself-consciously) constructing and using collective representations of this reality. These constructivist approaches to collective representations of the past (Connerton, Halbwachs, Schudson, Schwartz, Thelen, White) and of identity (Anderson, James, Jenkins, Smith) show that collective representations are shaped through symbolic and narrative means (Anderson, Bhabha, Bruner, Cohen, Gillis, Hinchman and Hinchman, MacIntyre) and are decisively influenced by existing discursive practices (Foucault, school of Subaltern Studies). Importantly, however, I examine these collective representations as they are shaped and promoted from above rather than in terms of popular appropriations of these collective representations. Two factors can explain this specific focus. Firstly, top-down actions and processes have a decisive influence on discursive practices and collective representations. Secondly, the processes of past and identity reshaping are very recent in South Africa (only a few years) and constitute emerging tendencies more than established trends: their actual impact on society at large is hence likely to be limited and more difficult to assess.

Secondly, this study examines the emergence of a new national identity and of the corollary public representation of the past in post-apartheid South Africa. While many works, especially during the transition period, were dedicated to discussing the idea of nation-building (Adam, Boyce, Degenaar,

Liebenberg, Simpson), very few recent studies have dealt with the actual project of nation and nation-building of the new regime (Filatova, Wilson). This is what I attempt to do in Chapters 5 and 7, while focusing specifically not on the material efforts of reconstruction and transformation but on the subjective dimension of nation-building, namely the formation of a new national identity, on which brief articles and partial comments exist (Deacon; Minkley, Rassool and Witz; Wilson). In order to examine the process of reshaping of the representation of the past, I will not examine the renewal of historiographical representations of the past in the school curriculum (Bam and Visser) and academic research (Hamilton, Legassick and Minkley, Rassool). Rather, I will seek to analyse the two main public projects of reshaping the representation of the past: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the culture and heritage policy. There exists an abundant literature on the TRC, including materials concerned with its role in the reshaping of the representation of the past (Boraine, Braude, Lalu and Harris, Minkley, Rassool and Witz; Robins), which is the perspective I will adopt. Concerning the culture and heritage policy, there has been many writings (in particular conference papers) on the issue of the politics of representation under apartheid and in the “new” South Africa as well as on the renewal of museums studies and practices (the 1992 Conference Myths, Museums, Monuments: New Premises?; the 1996 Fault Lines Conference: remembering, recollecting, reconstructing; or the 1996 Conference The Future of the Past). To complement these materials, I have made use of official publications and media sources in order to analyse official discourse and policy in the heritage field. Apart from the aforementioned conferences, the interplay between new public representations of the past and the formation of a new project of identity has begun to be examined by historians of the History Department of the University of the Western Cape (Legassick, Minkley, Rassool, Witz) and in a pathbreaking collective work, Negotiating the past: the making of memory in South Africa (1998). I will draw on some insights and conclusions of both sources in order to examine the functioning of the new representation of the past in shaping the “new” South Africa.

Thirdly, I will examine the public representation and commemoration of Robben Island in the “new” South Africa. By contrast with most of the numerous works recently published on the island (Deacon, Hutton, Lubbe, Buntman, Roberts, Schadeberg), my study of Robben Island will not be directly concerned with the broad history of the island nor with specific aspects of its past. Rather, it will deal with the public image and symbolism of the island resulting from its public representation and commemoration. In this sense, this analysis is close to Harriet Deacon’s article ‘*Remembering tragedy, constructing modernity: Robben Island as a national monument*’ (1998), which focuses on the changing symbolism and use of the island in the context of the changeover. Without providing an in-depth case study of museum and heritage studies, I extend the analysis to the latest developments of the commemoration in the form of the opening of the Robben Island Museum. I further focus specifically on the interplay between this commemoration, the national identity narrative and the emerging public representation of the national past.

1.2.2. Public representations and commemorations of the past

In this study, I will focus on public representations and commemorations of the past and their interplay with national identity. To introduce these concepts, I will start with presenting collective representations of the past, of which public representations are a form. I will then specify the nature of public representations of the past and examine their relation with public commemorations. Finally, I will evoke the core issue of the interplay between public representations of the past and national identity.

Collective representations of the past

Collective representations of the past are the phenomena whereby those past happenings which are deemed important by society as a whole or by certain groups are collectively retrieved and recorded, by being inserted in meaningful and coherent temporal sequences, namely narratives (Schwartz, 1982: 377; Connerton, 1989: 26). Collective representations of the past are at once process and product: they consist both in the process of shaping, reshaping and displaying the representation of the past and in the specific narrative of the past which results from this process.

Two useful distinctions are commonly made amongst collective representations of the past. The first one contrasts history and collective memory. To start with, we can adopt the following minimalist definitions of these two terms: history is a retrospective, analytical and systematic scholarly knowledge of the past while collective memory is the recording –at once continuous and recollective– by a group of its significant and relevant happenings. Very different conceptions of these two terms and of their mutual relations however exist. The most common approach views history as an objective, universal and detached scientific discipline and strongly opposes it to collective memory, regarded as an unreliable and limited source of knowledge about the past, always changing and subjective (Halbwachs, 1980: 78-87; Nora, 1989: 8-9). Conversely, certain scholars criticise history (usually with hindsight) as shaped by the context of its writing (under the influence of presentist concerns or existing discursive practices) or purposefully manipulated by those who write it; as a corollary, they often consider collective memory as offering ‘unvarnished truths’ (Starn and Davis, 1989: 2). In this study, I will rather put the emphasis on the similarities and interplay of history and collective memory. Indeed, while the distinction history/ memory is helpful in that the former tends to be more self-reflective and striving towards objectivity and scientificity and the latter more specific and fluid (Le Goff, 1992: xi-xii), this seems to constitute a difference of form and degree more than nature insofar as both are socially elaborated and shared collective representations of the past and are therefore subjected to similar processes of social shaping and distortion (Hutton, 1993: 76-77; Starn and Davis, 1989: 4-5; Zerubavel, 1995: 4-5).

The second set of distinctions differentiates official and popular representations of the past. Official representations of the past can refer to two phenomena (which can be distinct or intertwined): the dominant historiographical discourse and the public representation of the past produced by officials. The former can be deemed official both in that it reflects and serves the dominant values and systems of representations and in that it is mainly the outcome of recognised and legitimate academic institutions. It corresponds to the "traditional" fields of academic history, covering mainly political (and broad-scale economic) issues, focusing on such collective actors as the nation, the state and dominant classes and resting on the use of written material. This "official history" is opposed to more recent historiographical trends, focusing on marginalised or localised topics and actors (history of minorities, history of mentalities, town histories, etc.) and/or using alternative methods (oral testimonies, sociological inquiry, etc.) (Bond and Gilliam, 1994: 11-12). The second form of official representations of the past consists in the representations of the past shaped and/or displayed by official actors; it is concretised in leaders' public addresses and writings, state ceremonies, state cultural institutions, etc. By contrast, popular representations of the past are more fluid and transient. They are reflected in oral histories, certain literary works, some group's memory, opinion polls, etc. (Koonz, 1994: 261).

Public representations of the past

Public representations of the past are those collective representations of the past which are produced and/or displayed in the public sphere; they are socially constructed and exist at the level of public discourse. They can be merely promoted from above and/or more or less widely shared by society. Their presence in the public sphere implies that they have attained a certain level of publicity, significance or authority. Like other forms of collective representations of the past, they are at once process and result. While I will refer to "public representation of the past" to evoke both the overall phenomenon and the process, I will reserve the phrase "public narrative of the past" to refer only to the result. In the public sphere, several representations of the past usually coexist: they are either partial representations focusing on specific events, periods and groups or alternative representations of the whole past. Foremost amongst these public representations of the past is the dominant representation of the past which is the most authoritative and/or the most widely shared representation. When referring to the latter in this study, I will often merely talk of "the public representation of the past", in the singular and without qualifier.

In terms of the distinctions introduced above, public representations of the past are at the crossroads of both sets of opposition, between history and collective memory and between official and popular representations of the past. Public representations of the past overtly or covertly draw on

history which constitutes the main source of established knowledge about the past and is usually regarded as the most accurate representation; they however do so taking greater or lesser liberties. Public representations of the past are, though, closer to collective memory. Indeed, public representations of the past are very similar to collective memory in that they tend to be acquired through general socialisation (as opposed to specialised learning) and to be quite fluid and changing but also in that they offer a view of the group's past and relate to the group's collective sense of identity which they support and make meaningful. Further, while there can be localised collective memories (of a church, a firm, a family) which remain in the private sphere, broad-scale collective memories (of a class, a community, a nation) are inevitably present in the public sphere, hence constitute a form of public representations of the past. Secondly, public representations of the past are at the crossroads of official and popular representations. They draw mainly on official representations insofar as those representations produced by authoritative channels (museums, university, academic history, etc.) or actors (political leaders) are more influential and pervasive in the public sphere. In this sense, the dominant public representation of the past at once rests on and supports the broader ideological discourse since it is part and parcel of collective representations and since it is mainly shaped by the political and social elite whose views, values, interests and concerns it reflects (Zerubavel, 1995: 10-11). In particular, public representations of the past are influenced by public history which consists in promoting and displaying knowledge of the past outside the academia and is mainly reflected in archives, museums, pageants, commemorative ceremonies, public discourse, etc. At the same time, the dominant public representation of the past is the first, most influential and most continuous source of popular knowledge about the past: people discover it at school (through stories, myths and songs) and are subjected to it throughout their lives (through public holidays, museum visits, public commemorations, etc.).

Public representations and public commemorations of the past

Public representations of the past are objectified and entrenched in public commemorations. In broad terms, "commemoration" denotes active remembrance of those aspects of the past, which are deemed significant. In this study, I will use various meanings of the term "commemoration", set at three different levels: in its broadest sense, commemoration encompasses all past happenings and past remains which are recorded, preserved and thereby highlighted in public discourse and/or in concrete sites; more specifically, it refers to the deliberate recollection, protection and public diffusion of some of these elements of the past; even more specifically, it applies only to the concrete ritual activities celebrating the memory of a specific event, period, place or person. This latter meaning corresponds to the common-sense definition of the term and to its most frequent use in this study. The broader definition, in terms of three concentric circles, is however interesting in that it reveals the selectivity at

work in any re-presentation of the past. The three “circles” of the definition indeed correspond to a gradient in the significance assigned to certain elements in our conception of the past and in the will to preserve them and make them known: at a first level, elements of the past are merely recorded in the collective representations of the past; at a second level, some of these elements are deliberately preserved and displayed; at a third level, parts of the latter are deliberately and actively promoted and celebrated. This definition thus highlights two phenomena underlying the social recording of the past. Firstly, any recording of the past –in public representations and public commemorations– is the result of a selective process: recording the past can never be comprehensive but has to be selective so that remembering certain happenings entails forgetting others. Secondly, this selectivity in the social recording rests on an evaluative process whereby those elements which are deemed significant, meaningful and relevant in the present and over the years are retained. The public representation of the past –and, at a more visible, deliberate and “ideological” level, its public commemoration– is thus a social construct which takes shape through selectivity and value-judgement. This opens the way to intrinsic or self-conscious distortions of the representations and, beyond, to their open manipulation.

This study thus focuses on public commemorations of the past since the latter magnify and make more visible those processes at play in public representations of the past and, further, since they are at the core of the shaping and reshaping of the representation of the past. Indeed, commemorations objectify the public representation of the past in a particular commemorative ritual and narrative. They thereby frame the representation of the past in specific terms and images. Further, they contribute to entrench this specific representation and to spread it to new groups. At the same time, commemorations facilitate the reshaping of the representation of the past. Indeed, they are often multi-layered, hence allowing a variety of readings; they are also fluid so that they evolve under the influence of the context. Moreover, they are material sites of memory, thereby providing a material locus for open challenge and contest by alternative ceremonies and narratives.

Public representations of the past and national identity

In this study, I will focus on a specific public representation of the past: the representation of the past –usually dominant in a given society– which is concerned with the national past as a whole. My analysis will be underpinned by the theoretical framework developed by Yael Zerubavel in Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition (1995), which examines the construction of public representations of the national past in Israel. This author introduces the concept

of “national master commemorative narrative”¹, which ‘is a (broad) view of history, a basic “story line” that is culturally constructed and provides the group members with a general notion of their shared past’ (1995: 6). It is thus that part of the narrative of national identity which focuses on the origins and past happenings of the national community as related to its present existence and situation as well as to its goals and expectations for the future. This concept enables me to highlight and analyse the two phenomena which underlie this study. Firstly, there is a close interplay between the public representation of the national past and the emergence and reshaping of national identity. Adopting a constructivist approach to collective identity and collective representations of the past, I will thus show that shaping a shared representation of the past constitutes a basis for the imagining, existence and cohesion of a national identity and has occasionally be self-consciously devised and used for this purpose by certain groups or regimes. Further, I will examine how the narrative of the national past at once reflects and influences the “content” of national identity. Secondly, and as a corollary, public representations of the national past evolve and are modified in congruence with national identity and with presentist concerns. “Deconstructing” public representations of the past thus makes it possible to highlight the mechanisms whereby the representation of the past is shaped and reshaped, as well as the present issues and concerns and the power relations and configurations underlying these mechanisms.

1.3. A “new” past for a “new” South Africa

1.3.1 Towards post-apartheid South Africa

After a decade of intense conflict between the apartheid regime and the resistance movement in the 1980s and in a changing regional and international context, the freshly appointed State President F.W. de Klerk initiated a dramatic changeover for South Africa in 1990. In an address to Parliament on February 2, de Klerk announced the unbanning of the main political groups of the resistance movement. Subsequently, the government released most political prisoners and started repealing key pieces of apartheid legislation. In 1991, the government entered in broad negotiations with opposition parties within the frame of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA). In spite of periods of tensions between the parties and of intense violence in the country, the parties reached a broad agreement in the form of an Interim Constitution in 1993, guaranteeing democratic rights in a single unitary state, settling for the formation of a government of national unity and opening the way

¹ This terminology differs from the above distinction between collective representation, collective memory and history, from my use of the notion of “public representation of the past” and from my own distinction between representation and narrative. In the following, I will consider “the national master commemorative of the past” to amount to what I call “the dominant public representation of the national past”.

for democratic non-racial elections. The 1994 elections saw an overwhelming victory of the African National Congress (ANC). The government of national unity (including members of the ANC, National Party (NP) and Inkhata Freedom Party (IFP)) was formed; the NP withdrew after a year.

This dramatic shift from apartheid to post-apartheid constituted more than a mere political change; it has also entailed a renewal of the project and vision for South Africa. The “new” South Africa rests on the project of breaking with apartheid, promoting democratisation, furthering reconciliation, fostering national unity and undertaking reconstruction. Except for the last one, these objectives have a strong subjective dimension and can be fostered by acting upon collective representations through discursive practices. In particular, these four elements –which are at once basic values and objectives– are promoted from above as part of the emergence of a new national identity. Moreover, they all entail to overturn the past, hence to deal with the past by acting upon its material legacy and its collective representation. Thus, the interplay between the narrative of national identity and the public representation of the past highlighted above is all the more important in the “new” South Africa since dealing with the past –specifically through the promotion of a new dominant public representation of the past– has been posed as a cornerstone of the reconstruction, reconciliation and transformation of society.

1.3.2. The project of dealing with the past

Dealing with the South African past requires two forms of actions: addressing the material legacy of the past and acting upon collective representations of the past. In this study, I will focus on the latter aspects: I will examine how the constitution of a new dominant public representation of the past aims at modifying collective representations of the past and of the collective self and at acting upon present realities. To that end, I will locate my analysis at the level of discursive practices prevailing in the public sphere. Such approach entails a focus on two specific perspectives. Firstly, I will examine existing discursive practices as they are reflected in official addresses, legal texts, informal statements by dignitaries (in books, press articles), the media, state ceremonies (public holidays and other commemorations), public institutions (museums, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission). In this way, I seek to analyse the intentions, values and power configurations underlying these discursive practices while being aware that the intentions of the actors can be little actualised in practice, that the values promoted are not (yet/always) shared nor appropriated by society and that power configurations are often multi-layered and ambiguous phenomena. Secondly, and as a corollary, my approach largely focuses on top-down forms of reshaping of collective representations of the past and of identity. This focus on actions from above is justified by several factors. Firstly, as aforementioned, political and social elites have a decisive part in shaping public representation of the past. Moreover, in

post-apartheid South Africa, the new government has self-consciously conceived dealing with the past as a major political objective and has more or less self-consciously undertaken to reshape the public representation of the past. It has thus initiated and supported the process of dealing with past human rights violations through the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which is meant to foster reconciliation and to promote a more complete and less prejudiced representation of apartheid time. Further, a rather diffuse action of reshaping of public representations of the past and of national identity is achieved through official discourse as part of the broader rhetoric on the transformation of the South African society. More directly, the Department of Arts, Culture, Sciences and Technology (DACST) and public cultural institutions have sought to promote more balanced and inclusive representations and commemorations of the past. This has involved the recognition and reintegration in the public realm of what were until then “counter-memories” –resistance and liberation struggle and more broadly “subordinated groups” memories as opposed to the dominant white colonial/apartheid discourse. Thus, some figures and symbols belonging to these “counter-memories” are now publicly celebrated and commemorated. Robben Island is the most symbolic among those which have emerged as “sites of memory” and have been publicly commemorated. The third factor which justifies the focus on top-down forms of reshaping of collective representations precisely lies in the choice of examining the commemoration of Robben Island. Indeed, the political will to celebrate Robben Island is especially strong in part since it has been one of the most powerful symbols of the resistance to apartheid and in part since –because of the position in post-1994 South Africa of many pre-eminent ex-Robben Islanders– its fate seems closely linked to official circles.

1.4. The commemoration of Robben Island and the Robben Island Museum

1.4.1. Robben Island

Robben Island is a small island located in Table Bay, eleven kilometres off Cape Town. Robben Island has had a very rich and diverse history; it has been used by many different groups and for many different purposes in the past five centuries. Most notoriously, Robben Island has been the site of a High Security Prison which was the main apartheid prison for Black (i.e. African, Indian, and Coloured²) male political prisoners from 1961 to 1991. Against other propositions (such as the creation of a holiday resort) debated since the early 1990s and as a result of a clear political will, the preservation of the prison and the dedication of the island as a major national symbol and foremost “site of memory” have been put forward. Thus, on January 1, 1997, Robben Island has been

established as a National Museum under the management of the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology. In this study, I will examine the commemorative practices and policies surrounding Robben Island and their institution in the form of the Robben Island Museum (RIM).

1.4.2. Public representations and commemorations of Robben Island

The choice of examining specifically the commemoration of Robben Island can be justified by two factors. Firstly, Robben Island has been regarded as a vital site of memory and a key symbol for the whole of South Africa, both under apartheid and in the “new” South Africa. Because of this national significance, Robben Island is thus “spontaneously” at the confluence of collective representations of the South African identity and of the national past and can therefore both reflect and magnify the mechanisms at work at the broader South African level. Moreover, in the “new” South Africa, the commemoration of Robben Island has been openly and deliberately conceived and established as a cornerstone of the reshaping of the public representation of the past and as the epitome of the transformation of society; as a corollary, the RIM has been set up as the major heritage institutions of the new dispensation.

In this study, I will examine the commemoration of Robben Island both through the actual commemorative activities on the island (museum, VIP visits, official ceremonies, celebration of public holidays, etc.) and through the references to Robben Island as an emblem and recipient of past recollections in public discourse. I will thus analyse the dominant public representation of the island’s past, its challenge by alternative representations and its interplay with the public representations of the national past and the new narrative of national identity. I will also examine the self-conscious and unself-conscious mechanisms whereby this new dominant public representation has been shaped, promoted and modified.

1.4.3. Methodology of research on Robben Island

The study of the commemoration of Robben Island is conceived both as a micro level analysis of a particular case study and as a study of the mechanisms at play at the macro level of post-apartheid South Africa. There is however no unilateral relation between these two levels: I did not conceive the study of the commemoration of Robben Island as a “mere” illustration of the macro level developments nor did I construct the analysis of South African dynamics as a broadening and

² The use of these terms does not entail any commitment to or belief in their reality and relevance but the mere

generalisation of my conclusions on Robben Island. Rather, I proceeded by conducting my analyses at both levels in parallel, specific insights on the macro level processes contributing to shed light and open the way to further developments at the micro level and vice versa.

To study the commemoration of Robben Island and its institutionalisation in the RIM, I have resorted to a variety of sources: academic works, archives materials (press articles, leaflets, tapes), public addresses by officials, videos and reviews of the press. I have further led direct inquiries in the work and functioning of the RIM by making use of the literature produced by the museum and by relying on qualitative field studies (observation of tourist visits and of the 1998 Youth Day commemoration, participation in a symposium on the organisation and development of the museum, interview with the director of the RIM, consultation of press reviews, etc.).

1.5. Overall structure of the study

This study is organised in three main parts. In Part One, I will construct a theoretical framework to analyse the nature and interplay of public representations of the past and of national identity. In Part Two, I will draw on this framework to examine the case of post-apartheid South Africa where the constitution of a new vision for society and a new project of national identity has been accompanied by the emergence of a new public representation of the past. In the final part, I will examine the specific case of the foremost commemoration of the “new” South Africa, that of Robben Island, against the backdrop of the theoretical framework and macro level analyses developed in Parts One and Two.

More specifically, the chapter structure goes as follows. Chapter Two examines how collective representations of the past are socially constructed and thereby shaped and “distorted”. Chapter Three sheds light on social identity and its relation with the representation of the past. Chapter Four draws on these first two chapters to analyse the specific interplay between the formation of national identity and the constitution of a congruent representation of the national past. In Chapter Five, I begin the study of post-apartheid South Africa with examining nation-building discourse as part of an attempt to construct a democratic and inclusive civic nation. In the following chapter, I look at the motives, objectives and mechanisms underlying the core undertaking of dealing with the past by promoting a new public representation of the past. I then examine the features and functioning of the new narrative of national identity which has emerged in post-apartheid South Africa. In Chapter Eight, I conclude

reference to the categories defined and implemented by the apartheid regime.

these macro level analyses by sketching the content and forms of the new public narrative of the South African past. Chapter Nine opens the study of the commemoration of Robben Island with the analysis of the emergence of Robben Island as a key public commemoration of the past in the “new” South Africa. Chapter Ten specifically examines the institutional form of the commemoration of Robben Island –the Robben Island Museum– and shows that it is meant to be a heritage showcase for the “new” South Africa. Finally, Chapter Eleven analyses the commemorative narrative of Robben Island and highlights how the latter contributes to celebrate and entrench the “new” South Africa. Chapter Twelve briefly concludes this thesis.

❧ PART ONE ❧

PAST, IDENTITY AND THE NATION

Introduction of Part One

In this first part, I set up the concepts, approaches and theoretical analyses which I will use and refer to in the rest of my study. I examine and establish linkages between three broad areas of study: collective representations -and, specifically, collective representations of the past-, social identity, and nationalism. Given the considerable scope of these fields of study, given the disparity of the foci, perspectives and assumptions of the various scholars and schools and given the large amount and diversity of the literature they have given rise to, I proceed through focused insights highlighting the specific elements which progressively make up my framework while attempting to position these elements against the background of encompassing theories and debates.

In this part, I will refer to the existing literature on collective representations of the past, most of which concerns the analysis of “collective memory”. I will use this literature to construct a theoretical framework for the analysis of collective representations of the past as social constructs. While I will mainly speak in this first part of collective representations of the past and of collective memory, I will make use of this theoretical framework in Parts Two and Three to analyse public representations of the past. I indeed consider that these theories and approaches can be applied to the analysis of public representations of the past: in some cases, what is analysed under the terms of “collective representations of the past” or “collective memory” includes my notion of “public representations of the past”; in other cases, certain specific conclusions on “collective memory” or “history” are transferable to public representations of the past. Thus, insights on the nature and functioning of collective memory as a social construct, existing at the level of collective representations and promoting an image of the group’s past and identity through general socialisation can be used to analyse public representations of the past which share the same features. Similarly, I will also refer to certain theories (Foucault’s studies, Subaltern studies) which analyse history in order to unveil the mechanisms whereby collective representations of the past are moulded by rhetorical practices and underlying power configurations: history-writing –which is an erudite, fixed and relatively institutionalised form of collective representations of the past– indeed magnifies the mechanisms whereby the past is represented in an homogenising and authoritative manner; these analyses on history writing may thus also shed light on the similar processes at work in the public representations of the past.

To start with, I will analyse collective representations of the past as social constructs and highlight how these collective representations are shaped and influenced by the social milieu. I will then set up the basics of a constructivist approach to collective identity; specifically, I will focus on the role and significance of the representation of the past in the shaping of such identity. Finally, I will draw on these two first chapters to examine the specific case of the interplay and consistency between the constitution of national identity and the shaping of a representation of the national past.

Chapter Two:

Social re-presentations of the past

In this chapter, I will show that there exist collective representations of the past and that they are socially constructed. In collective representations, the past is indeed not merely retrieved but socially reconstructed and thereby socially shaped and “distorted” through a range of channels and processes.

2.1- The collective representation of the past: a social reconstruction

In order to analyse the nature and functioning of collective representations of the past, I start with reviewing the pathbreaking works of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs who opened the field of study of the representations of the past as collective phenomena and social constructs by analysing memory as a collective and reconstructed phenomenon. I then qualify this approach by examining subsequent criticisms and revisions concerning the reconstructive dimension of the representation of the past.

2.1.1- Memory as a collective and reconstructive phenomenon in Maurice Halbwachs's works

Memory is commonly considered as the individual's faculty to conserve and retrieve images of happenings, feelings and learnings which occurred in the past (Le Goff, 1992: 51). In this individualist and psychological approach, memory is a “storage facility” which keeps the past in its integrity and entirety and thus allows it to resurface or be summoned up¹. During the 20th century, however, new developments have brought about a break with the above conception². They are exemplified in the pathbreaking works of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, who dedicated two theoretical works and one empirical study to examining collective memory³. Originally associated with Durkheim and later with the *Annales* school, Halbwachs redefined the notion of memory as a collective and reconstructive phenomenon. Memory is collective in two ways: firstly, individual remembrance has a collective dimension since it occurs under the influence of the social group; secondly, a form of collective memory exists, which is borne by the group and is external to

¹ A basic distinction originated in Aristotle is that between *mneme* –the preservation of the past in memory– and *anamnesis* –its self-conscious recollection (Le Goff, 1992: 65; Hutton, 1993: xx-xxi).

² In this regard, while Freud's works marked a break by highlighting the interplay between the unconscious and memory, they maintained the view of memory as a storage facility for individual remembrance (Hutton, 1993: 59-72).

³ *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, 1925 (excerpts translated in *On Collective Memory*, 1992); *La mémoire collective*, 1950 (translated in *The Collective Memory*, 1980); and *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre Sainte*, 1941 (conclusion translated in *On Collective Memory*, 1992).

individuals. Moreover, at both the individual and collective levels, memory is not a mere repetition or recollection of the past but an active reconstruction and modification of the past on the basis of present systems of representations⁴.

For Halbwachs, individual images of the past are remembered through their contextualisation in social settings, i.e. the group's current systems of representations. In order to remember, individuals make use of the language, social conventions, values and collective representations of the group they belong to –what Halbwachs calls the social frameworks of memory (Halbwachs, 1992: 43, 46-51, 168, 171-173; Hutton, 1993: 6-7, 78-79). As a result, memories are made part of a coherent and meaningful social setting and may thus become meaningful and be preserved (Halbwachs, 1980: 48-49; 1992: 52-53). But their insertion in the social frameworks of memory also means that they are modified, firstly to achieve more internal coherence and meaningfulness and, secondly, to be congruent with dominant collective representations (Halbwachs, 1992: 183). Finally, such a remembering process implies that all individual memories have a collective dimension since remembrance occurs only *'to the extent that it is connected with the thoughts that come to us from the social milieu'* (id.: 52-53; see also Halbwachs, 1980: 48). Beyond this collective dimension of individual memories, Halbwachs asserted the existence of a memory which is external to the individuals. This collective memory is a stereotyped and generic representation of the group's past held in common by its members. It is made of memories which are not one's own but ideal-typical memories or memories of other people⁵, and which are conveyed as part of the group's collective representations. Individuals do not remember their own specific experiences of social events (birth, first day at school, job, travels, etc.) as much as the socially conventionalised images of such events, as they are inspired by other people's experiences, literary and artistic descriptions, and stereotyped features of these events⁶. In addition, they remember collective events in the way they have been collectively shaped and held in memory. Further, at the level of collective memory as well, the representation of the past is distorted⁷ under the presentist influence of the social frameworks of memory. Indeed, as these frameworks –made of the group's current values and concerns– evolve over time, their transformation is reflected in the continuous reshaping of

⁴ The study of the English psychologist Bartlett, Remembering (1932) features a shift similar to Halbwachs's in the approach to memory. It has been corroborated by biologists concluding that the brain has no 'storage facility' and by psychologists describing remembering as an imaginative and constructive process (Thelen, 1989: 1119; Hutton, 1993: 7).

⁵ For instance, when we say that we remember historical events that we did not witness personally or when we recall memories of early childhood for which we cannot have direct recollections but which we were told at a later age.

⁶ On the issue of the conventionalisation of memory, see Halbwachs, 1980: 51, 70-71, 140-141; 1992: 222-223; see also Schudson, 1995: 358; Hutton, 1993: 79.

⁷ The term "distortions" is commonly used in the reviewed literature to refer to the modifications undergone by memories in (individual and collective) reshaping of the past. Halbwachs, for instance, commented that *'the various groups that compose society (...) most frequently distort that past in the act of reconstructing it'* (1992: 182; see also 183, 223). As underlined by Schudson, however, the notion of distortion is problematic since there are both intrinsic (hence unavoidable) and extrinsic distortions. While some are actual deformations open to remedy, others are inevitable since they result from the remembering process itself (1995: 347-348). In this study, both kinds of distortions will be examined without necessarily differentiating between them since the boundary separating them is often blurred and since they are often combined.

collective memory. Consequently, only those memories that are useful and relevant in the present are kept in collective memory. Moreover, the content of collective memory is continuously modified so as to always match the group's present values and concerns (Halbwachs, 1980: 118; 1992: 40, 172-173).

Halbwachs's constructivist and presentist approach was rooted in an empirical study of the collective memory of the Gospels in the Holy Land. In this work, he analysed how the life of Christ has been localised and materialised on the actual territory of Palestine by pilgrims and travellers coming from Europe in the early Middle Ages. He showed that the topography of the Holy Land was mostly the outcome of a creative process: early pilgrims and travellers did not retrieve the actual sites of Jesus's life but commemorated those sites that corresponded to their preconceived image of his life, for instance combining several events arbitrarily in the same site for symbolic reasons, or re-using sites of the Jewish tradition. Halbwachs showed that these representations underwent dramatic reshaping over time in relation to contemporary shifts in dominant religious conceptions and power relations (within Christianity and between Christianity, Judaism and Islam in Palestine). He concluded that collective memory was largely malleable and fluid (1992: 200-201, 234-235; Hutton, 1993: 80-82).

To sum up, Halbwachs highlighted the social and reconstructive dimension of memory and emphasised the modifications and revisions it continuously undergoes to suit present values and concerns. His pathbreaking studies of collective memory thus showed the existence and functioning of representations of the past borne by a group and existing at the level of "collective consciousness", hence constituting a form of "collective representations" as understood by Durkheim. Halbwachs's works have therefore inspired and provided a theoretical framework for later studies –especially post-modern ones– concerned with how representations of the past are collectively constructed and modified and with how they exist and function as stakes in the public sphere. Subsequent works have, however, not only complemented or drawn upon his research, but also challenged and redefined it, especially regarding the extent to which collective representations of the past can be reconstructed.

2.1.2- Limits to the reconstruction of the collective representations of the past

Criticisms have focused on Halbwachs's constructivist and presentist approach and on the subsequent development of the approach of "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983) which holds that, in times of great social change, societies resort to traditions in order to preserve their cohesion and/or specific values and forms of authority. In this view, traditions support social cohesion and stability since they imply continuity with the past and involve certain ritual practices which serve as rallying points for society. Such traditions are however fictitious, since the continuity with the past is more alleged than real. They are at least a revival of the past and at most a mere invention to suit

present purposes (id.: 1-14)⁸. Critics have argued that, if pushed to the extreme, the notion of invented traditions would imply that the past can be invented from scratch and that there is no continuity in collective memory (Coser, 1992: 24-34; Schwartz, 1990: 81-83, Smith, 1993: 13-17). They show that past reshaping cannot be a mere invention unrelated to the present context or to the mythical and actual traces of the past. Rather, it rests on and selectively uses older communal memories, symbols, and social institutions which are emphasised, reshaped and interpreted in new ways (Mach, 1993: 63-64; Smith, 1993: 13-17).

In his studies on commemorations, the American sociologist Barry Schwartz assessed the possibility of reshaping the representation of the past. He examined both the extent of and reasons for the reshaping of the past entailed in collective memory and the factors determining the selection and shaping of what is remembered⁹. In this way, he analysed the two dimensions of this reshaping: firstly, its malleability, i.e. whether collective memory is mainly either the repetition of living memories or a social reconstruction; and secondly, its fluidity, namely whether memories are selected primarily on the basis of present concerns (hence are largely and constantly evolving) or of their internal significance (hence are largely unchanging) (Schwartz, 1982: 375-376; 1990: 81-83). Reviewing Halbwachs's analysis in The Legendary Topography of the Gospels, Schwartz concluded that his strongly constructivist and presentist conclusions could be largely explained by the specificities of his case study. Indeed, the remoteness of the events and the mythical aspect of their records, as well as the lack of continuity between the human groups (hence collective memories) occupying the Holy Land, explain that the collective memory of the Gospels was largely imaginary and underwent dramatic changes in its representation. Therefore, while corroborating the nature of collective memory as a reconstructive rather than retrieval process (1990: 103), Schwartz underlined that, in most cases, *'given the constraints of a recorded history, the past cannot be literally constructed; it can only be selectively exploited. Moreover, the basis of the exploitation cannot be arbitrary. The events selected for commemoration must have some factual significance'* to be integrated and perpetuated in collective memory (1982: 396). Thus, collective memory is both malleable and fluid, but only within certain limits. First, the reconstruction of the past is more a selection of memories, and of interpretations of these memories, than a mere invention of the past. Secondly, while memories can be emphasised and interpreted differently depending on their relevance to present issues, the basis for their being remembered is their internal significance. In this way, collective memory can strike a balance between society's need for continuity –by preserving the memory of significant events and persons– and the changes it undergoes –by emphasising differently certain memories or certain interpretations on the basis of the present. Furthermore, apart from the continuity entailed by the unself-conscious permanency of internally

⁸ In History: Remembered, Recovered, Invented, Lewis wrote that history can be invented by being either *'devised and interpreted from remembered and recovered history where feasible, (or) fabricated where not'* (1975: 12).

⁹ In The Reconstruction of Abraham Lincoln, 1990 and The Social Context of Commemoration: a Study in Collective Memory, 1982.

significant memories, the continuity of collective memory is also ensured by the state's and private organisations' efforts to perpetuate certain memories –and the values attached to them– from one generation and one human group to the other (Schwartz, 1990: 102-103).

In conclusion, the collective representation of the past can be seen as a social reconstruction of the past within certain boundaries of factuality, significance and relevance to the present. As part of this continuous process of shaping and reshaping, the representation of the past undergoes a number of intrinsic and extrinsic distortions which contribute to its modelling.

2.2- The modelling of collective representations of the past

As part of its social reconstruction, the collective representation of the past is socially shaped and modelled. Indeed, the reconstruction of the past entails a process of retrieval, storage and public display of the past. But, since the representation of the past cannot be exhaustive, this process entails the (more or less self-conscious) selection of those happenings deemed socially meaningful, relevant and significant. Through this selective reconstruction, the representation of the past is socially moulded. Examining the general processes of social reshaping –or distortions– of the representations of the past, I will then focus on two main factors: the framing of the representation of the past in a narrative form and its modelling under the influence of social power.

2.2.1- *The distortions of collective representations of the past*

In his chapter *Dynamics of Distortion in Collective Memory*, Michael Schudson held that since memory is a selective representation embedded in social and historical patterns and processes, distortions in its representation are unavoidable: '*memory is distortion since memory is invariably and inevitably selective. (...) Memory is a process of encoding information, storing information, and strategically retrieving information, and there are social, psychological, and historical influences at each point*' (1995: 348). Schudson distinguished four main processes of distortion in collective memory: distanciation, conventionalisation, narrativisation and instrumentalisation. These mechanisms are intrinsic to the very functioning of collective memory and/or are part of an active and self-conscious reworking of the past. *Distanciation* refers to the way memory changes as time goes by. It entails a growing vagueness and a decreasing emotional intensity which makes it possible for sharply opposed memories to become less antagonistic and for individuals to view the past with multiple perspectives rather than their own only (id.: 348-351). *Conventionalisation* is the process whereby the past becomes (and is made) knowable and "rememberable". At the individual level, people commonly remember not their own past but the stereotyped stages of life which are conventionally supposed to be experienced and as they

are conventionally remembered. More broadly, what is socially remembered is not so much what happened, but what has been constructed as remembrance. Thus, the '*availability of the past (...) is socially structured*' (id.: 359) since the representation of past events is influenced by the social channels of its recording and active reworking. Further, certain sources, forms of encoding knowledge and forms of representation are more socially credible and authoritative than others. In particular, the commemoration of certain past happenings endows them with special significance and legitimacy (id.: 358-360). *Narrativisation* consists in framing the representation of the past in a temporal and plot-like structure that makes it meaningful, simplified, easier to grasp and to remember, more interesting and more relevant. Openly or not, all narratives of the past are related to (and shaped by) the present (id.: 355-358). Finally, *instrumentalisation* is the promotion of a version of the past that directly supports specific interests. It can consist, firstly, in favouring a specific –ideologically suitable– representation of the past. This can serve either strategic or semiotic interests: in the former case, a specific representation is promoted as part of a partisan contest; in the latter case, it is used to bring meaning to the present by shedding on it the light of a suitable past. Instrumentalisation can also be the use of any version of the past that brings fame or money to those who convey it. Thus, certain commercial ventures in the cultural field choose those versions of the past which are palatable to all (id.: 351-355).

In the following sub-section, I will examine at greater length the narrativisation process and the influence of social power on past representations. The latter informs the former and encompasses most aspects of conventionalisation and instrumentalisation. As suggested by Schudson (id.: 360-361), both deliberate processes of reworking the past and more unself-conscious and pervasive mechanisms will be considered since they occur simultaneously and in interplay. They are often difficult to differentiate and they thereby combine their effects on the (re)shaping of the past in collective representations.

2.2.2- *The narrativisation process*

Establishing that narrativity is a feature not only of history but also of collective memory, I will subsequently examine how it moulds social representations of the past. Narrativity is commonly acknowledged as a characteristic of historical representations of the past¹⁰. However, that narrativity

¹⁰ This assertion must be qualified by the recognition of two underlying debates. The first issue is to determine whether history is intrinsically narrativised. Indeed, while there exist non-narrative forms of historical writing, these have been overtaken by narrative history and/or are considered as less "achieved" than history (White, 1987: 4-6). Moreover, current claims to write non-narrative history have been dismissed (for example by Ricoeur in the case of the *Annales* school). Secondly, concerning narrativised history, the dominant narrativist school (White, Mink, Ricoeur) –which argues that narrativity is intrinsic to historical research and writing– is opposed to those (Mandelblau and Goldstein) who prefer to emphasise the scientific (rather than literary) nature of history and underline that narrative is merely the most common way to write down historical knowledge. For a survey of these positions and corollary debates, see Carr, 1986: 7-9; for a view of White's assessment of the conception that narrative history is the most accomplished and scientific form of past representation, see 1987: 4-6, 24-25.

may also mould collective memory is often contested. This issue rests on a debate –intense amongst historians, philosophers and historians of ideas– to determine whether narrative is only an intellectual artefact employed to represent reality or whether it is part of social reality itself. In the former case, the narrative form of history consists in a break with –and distortion of– reality (and collective memory) while in the latter case, narrative history is merely an extension of the narrativised form of collective memory to a more self-reflective level (Carr, 1986: 7-17). The American historian of ideas Hayden White supports the theory of discontinuity between the historically narrativised representation of the past and past reality itself. He holds that narrativising consists in moulding real life into a coherence, fullness and closure it does not possess on its own (1987: 20-21, 24). Opposed to this dominant conception, another trend of thought has appeared more recently in psychology, anthropology, historiography and philosophy. It argues that narrativity is not only a feature of our self-reflective (or even scientific) understanding and representation of reality but also of our more immediate and intuitive grasp of it ¹¹. Thus, in his paper on *The Narrative Construction of Reality*, the American psychologist Jérôme Bruner described narrative as a culturally transmitted conventional form which is the main instrument of the mind to ‘*organise our experience and our memory of human happenings*’ (1991: 4). For Bruner, narrativity is therefore one of the keys to understand how human beings represent to themselves –and thereby constitute– the realm of human life (id.: 3-6). In his study on *Time, Narrative and History*, Carr dwelt upon the line of argument which holds that both spontaneous and self-reflective representations of reality have a narrative form. He focused specifically on human representation and experience of the past and asserted that ‘*narrative structure pervades our very experience of time and social existence*’ (1986: 9). For him, narrativity is a practical feature of the way humans live and understand their experiences and actions at two levels. Firstly, narrativity is present in that experiences and actions unfold in a temporal and plot-like structure –with a beginning, middle and end– hence displaying one of the main feature of narrativity. Secondly, humans spontaneously grasp their on-going actions and experiences by discoursing upon them through a story-telling process which is meant for both themselves and others. This in turn contributes to the configuration of these actions and experiences as diachronic, coherent and meaningful stories¹². This second approach thus underpins the conception that collective memory –although somewhat less self-reflective and usually less retrospective than history– also constitutes a narrative representation of the past. In the rest of this study, I will make use of this conception, subject to two qualifications. Firstly, narrativity as a human way of conceiving and making sense of reality should not be considered as a

¹¹ Thus, while White opposes only two levels –on one hand the incoherent and meaningless realm of reality, on the other the coherent and full representation of it through narrativisation in history (what he calls ‘*our capacity to make scientific sense of (reality)*’ (1987: 25))– this second approach rather distinguishes three levels: reality itself, human spontaneous grasp of it and human self-reflective representations of it (in history, literature, etc.).

¹² For the practical use of narrativity at the individual level, see p71; at the collective level, see p168.

universal and atemporal feature but rather as a culture-bound tool¹³. Secondly, even in those contexts where it is conventional, narrativity is not an absolute and ever present aspect of human actions, experiences and understanding; rather it is something for which humans strive insofar as they want to make sense of what they do and are going through (Carr, 1986: 90). Indeed, the main rationale for narrativisation is to achieve meaningfulness by having past representations (whether self-reflective in history or more spontaneous in collective memory) display '*coherence, integrity, fullness and closure*' (White, 1987: 24). Narratives provide meaning by constituting and encompassing events into a coherent whole structured around a plot evolving over time from beginning to middle and end (White, 1987: 6; Carr, 1986: 71). They also provide meaning by making reference to a broader social context according to whose values and mores the story is understood and assessed (White, 1987: 10-14)¹⁴.

But such structuring into a narrative is not neutral and entails the shaping and distortion of past events along specific lines. Jérôme Bruner (1991) and Yael Zerubavel (1994; 1995) highlighted a range of processes through which narrativisation moulds the representation of the past and its constant reshaping. Firstly, narrativity shapes the past through the very selection of those happenings which are narrated (and covering up of those which are not) and through the ways in which these happenings are inserted in the temporal structure and the plot. Particularly decisive is the choice of where to begin and end the story. Indeed, the choice of the beginning and the end gives indications about what is deemed significant and meaningful, and therefore what is integrated in the story and what is defined as its origin and conclusion. Specifically, the temporal limits can be deliberately set at a specific point in time so as to exclude events which do not match the dominant subtext. Moreover, the beginning and end of a story strongly influence the interpretations that can be made of it. In particular, the choice of the end determines which lessons are to be drawn from the past (Zerubavel, 1995: 221-228). Secondly, narratives reshape past happenings according to existing stereotypes at the level of both the overall plot and the particulars. This conventionalisation of the representation affects the construction of the narrative as well as its understanding. Thus, the story making moulds the series of past events as representative of a genre (drama, epic, etc.). In addition, when necessary, it distorts particulars to make them correspond to stereotypes of the genre and to make them congruent with the encompassing plot¹⁵. Moreover, the overall genre of the story makes certain readings and interpretations appear more congruent, hence more credible than others; as a result, these readings become pre-eminent in the representation of the story. The overall genre also impacts on the constitution of the story by

¹³ Bruner defined narrativity as '*culturally transmitted*' instrument of mind (1991: 4) and Carr stated that '*narrative may be only one way of confronting time*' (emphasis in original) (1986: 183), that of modern Western thought.

¹⁴ Such conception of the insertion of fragmentary elements into a coherent and meaningful social structure can be related to Halbwachs's description of the insertion of memories into "social frameworks" (see sub-section 2.1.1).

¹⁵ In his empirical study, Halbwachs describes the narrative form of collective memory in a formulation which echoes this characteristic: '*The very manner in which memory distorts facts reflects the need to show that each one has a significance beyond the event itself, that it has a logical place in the complete history and that it is part of a chain of events which together culminate in an event comprising all the others*' (1992: 223).

influencing the reconstruction of missing or uncertain particulars since the latter have to appear consistent with the dominant genre and the other particulars (Bruner, 1991: 6-11, 14-15). Such consistency is necessary not only within one specific narrative but also between this narrative and the other narratives it is related to. A third feature of narrativity is that its “truth” does not lie in accuracy and verifiability as much as in verisimilitude (id.: 13), hence opening the way for “credible” distortions. In particular, Zerubavel emphasises the fluidity between history or memory on one hand, and legend on the other hand, since the criterion to distinguish between reality and fiction is more credibility than historical validity or accuracy (1994: 117). A narrative, albeit selective or even openly distorted, can be credible if it appears internally coherent and consistent with the encompassing narratives. Thus, the gaps or rewriting of happenings in a specific commemorative narrative are not perceived as a distortion, or are not perceived at all, if this narrative provides closure and is congruent with the broader master narrative and its underlying subtext and ideological messages. In this sense, the mythological and ideological structure underpinning a narrative can be more important than its historical validity to endow it with credibility (Zerubavel, 1995: 216). Fourthly, narrativity is concerned with normativeness (Bruner, 1991: 15). This aspect has been especially emphasised by White for whom the very *raison d’être* of narrativity is to “moralise” the representation of reality and to endow it with a completeness and authority that are only idealised features of reality (1987: 10-14; 24). This conclusion can be qualified since, as a corollary of the above conclusion on the narrative continuity between past reality and representations of the past, the normativity inherent in historical narratives can be seen as the extension of the spontaneous moralisation which underpins humans’ search for meaning in their representation of reality. Thus, without going as far as White but following the thrust of his argument, it can be said that, in order to provide meaning and achieve closure, spontaneous and self-reflective narrativity relates events to a specific group or culture; it thus endows events with moral significance in reference to this social centre and orders them accordingly (id.: 10-11). In this way, any narrative refers to the dominant norms and values of the social setting in which it occurs and reflects its forms of legitimacy and authority¹⁶. Finally, narratives are cumulative and their accrual constitutes a culture, a tradition or a history depending on their content and form. ‘Once shared culturally (...) narrative accruals (then) achieve(...) “exteriority” and the power of constraint’. They thereby contribute to perpetuate and internalise social norms and values (Bruner, 1991: 18-20).

To conclude, the study of narrativity highlights some of the mechanisms through which the representation of the past is moulded in the very process of being constituted and subsequently reworked. By thus studying narrativity, we have begun to uncover the role of social power as a major factor shaping collective representations of the past, which is the focus of the next sub-section.

¹⁶ This further parallels Halbwachs’s conception of social frameworks as encompassing social norms and values (1992: 173-189) as well as the link he highlights between collective memory and “ideology” (see next sub-section).

2.2.3- The influence of social power

To shed light on the influence of power¹⁷ on collective representations of the past, the contributions of Halbwachs and Foucault on this issue will be examined. Both authors are considered as the precursors of more recent studies of collective representations of the past and commemorations. However, while Halbwachs directly analysed the working of collective memory and commemorations, Foucault's insights in the matter were only more indirect and general. Nevertheless his analysis and critique of the functioning of discourse in social sciences –especially his critique of the role of tradition in history–, his formulation of a new genealogical approach, his understanding of the relation between power and discourse, and his study of the nature and techniques of power/knowledge, all contributed to the new perspective and intellectual framework which have underlain post-modernist studies of past representations. While Halbwachs focused on collective memory, Foucault rather dealt with erudite and rhetorical forms of representation. However, both were concerned with the representations of the past which are *materialised* (in documents and monuments), hence *commemorated*. Therefore, their approaches and conclusions have been used in recent works on commemorations and are used in this study as theoretical underpinnings to analyse the interplay between power and collective representations of the past, as well as to deconstruct forms of representations and thereby unveil the power struggles and configurations they reflect and concretise.

In The Legendary Topography of the Gospels, Halbwachs showed that the constitution of collective memory was determined by the weight of the different groups that constituted society (1992: 183-184; see also Hutton, 1993: 78-79). Within each group, and at the national level, the most powerful and influential sub-groups have the upper hand in the representation of the past and largely determine its form and content according to their particular values, concerns and interests. They take possession of the past through two processes: the exclusion of alternative representations –which are marginalised from the public sphere and/or discredited– or their absorption and re-appropriation into the dominant representation (Hutton, 1993: 128)¹⁸. However, the shaping of collective memory is not a simple and one-sided process. Apart from being framed into a dominant “official memory”, past representations are also reshaped and modified by being challenged and contested by alternative readings of the main representation and by counter-representations (Starn and Davis, 1989: 2; Wachtel, 1986: 218; Zerubavel, 1995: 11). This moulding of memory –and the contest around it– are heightened and materialised in the public arena since each sub-group attempts to enshrine its representations of the past through the commemorations of temporal and spatial loci of memory (Halbwachs, 1992: 222-223). In this regard, Schwartz underlined that ‘*memory-making is an act of enterprise*’ (1990: 102):

¹⁷ In this perspective, a very extensive definition of power is adopted, encompassing political power (especially as embodied in the state), socio-economic and cultural power as well as both diffuse and concrete forms of power.

¹⁸ See below for a study of such strategies in the formation of nationalist history.

institutions (state, local authorities and private organisations) self-consciously promote specific representations of the past and materialise them in commemorations so as to ensure the persistence of their memories and values. Thus, a variety of past events are celebrated and preserved in the living memories of the different groups composing society. While they all coexist at any point in time, when specific memories match the present concerns of society as a whole, their commemoration is promoted and their representation in collective memory is enhanced (and possibly modified in accordance with the broader contemporary issues) (1990: 102-104)¹⁹.

Apart from analysing the role of various social groups in shaping memory, Halbwachs examined, at a more diffuse level, the interplay between collective memory and ideology, or what he calls "social thought". He described them as closely intertwined: on the one hand, social ideas –far from being abstract notions– reflect or embody specific recollections of the society, while on the other hand, each person and event remembered in collective memory is '*transposed into a teaching, a notion, or a symbol and takes on a meaning*', hence become part of ideology (1992: 188)²⁰. Michael Billig further elaborated this aspect of Halbwachs's works in his essay on '*Collective Memory, Ideology and the British Royal Family*'. For him, collective memory is ideologically determined since it is the outcome of the ideological patterns (such as Halbwachs's "social frameworks") and processes (such as socialisation in specific groups) enabling the shaping, storing and transmission of collective memory by society. On the other hand, ideology is similar to collective memory since it encompasses what is valued, remembered and commemorated from the past and excludes what is left to oblivion or concealed. Thus, '*memory will be both a part of ideology, as well as being a process by which ideology, and thereby the power relation of society, are reproduced*' (Billig, 1990: 60). Billig therefore showed how collective memory and ideology intertwine, and underlined that collective memory both produces power –by strengthening its ideological basis– and is moulded by it (id.: 60-61; see also Alonso, 1988: 50-51).

Foucault's works²¹ focus less directly on collective representations of the past; they nevertheless provide insights and conclusions on the relation between power and collective representations of the past. Elaborating a new approach, the history of discourse, Foucault sought to analyse the rules and forms of existence of discourses so as to understand the *raison d'être*, nature and modalities of the emergence, organisation, accrual and modification of current (Western) knowledge and what the latter reveals of the power that has moulded it (Foucault, 1989; 109, 131; 1991; 59-60, 70). This approach is

¹⁹ For an instance of memory-making, see Jelin who presents the Human Rights movement in Argentina as the entrepreneur of a particular approach to the past, one favouring the unveiling and remembering of past atrocities and opposing amnesia and amnesty (1994: 50-51).

²⁰ See also Halbwachs (1992: 175-176) on "social frameworks" as concatenation of ideas and judgements.

²¹ I mainly used Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, 1977; Two Lectures, 1980a; Truth and Power, 1980b; The Archaeology of Knowledge, 1989; and Politics and the Study of Discourse, 1991.

conceived as a shift away from the history of *idéas*²². Indeed, for Foucault, the most reliable source of knowledge is to be found not in ideas or mentalities -whose knowledge is difficult and whose interpretation is subjective and highly contextual- but in the forms of representation by which these were conveyed (Foucault, 1989: 7; see also Hutton, 1993: 6, 162). He further showed that these forms of representation do not convey the same meanings and ideas over time but are shaped, reused and invested with different contents according to the present concerns and power configurations of society (Foucault, 1980a: 93, 100-102; 1980b: 131-132; Hutton, 1993: 162). In this way, he revealed how knowledge and culture are moulded by rhetorical practices, i.e. the forms in which language and specialised discourses are materialised. These rhetorical practices are themselves the object and reflection of political struggle and organisation, and hence bear the mark of power (Foucault, 1980b: 132; 1989: 120). Foucault asserted that there is a bilateral relation of power/ knowledge: power needs to rest on truth and therefore produces and shapes knowledge that in turn sustains and reproduces power (1980a: 93; 1980b: 131-133; Hutton, 1993: 113). For him, truth does not mean “*the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted*” but rather “*the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true*” (Foucault, 1980b: 132). Thus, the constitution and organisation of knowledge consist in the production and consecration of a discourse which is given and which releases effects of truth and power (objectivity, scientificity, credibility, respectability, legitimacy, authority, etc.) (Foucault, 1980b: 118-119, 131-133). Power needs knowledge firstly for utilitarian reasons: the organisation and functioning of relations of power require the establishment, accumulation and sharing of a discourse of truth (id., 1980a: 93). Moreover, such “discourse of truth” has been developed as the basis for knowing, monitoring, shaping and controlling human behaviours, hence entrenching power of control and domination (id.: 92-108, 119; Gordon, 1991: 3-4; Lemert and Gillan, 1994: 60). Finally, precisely because it resorts to truth and knowledge, such “disciplinary power” can conceal its nature and increase its legitimacy²³ (Foucault, 1980a: 95-96, 105-106; 1980b: 119; Gordon, 1991: 8). As a result, power organises and moulds knowledge: ‘*it institutionalises, professionalises and rewards (the) pursuit (of truth)*’ (Foucault, 1980a: 93), thereby bending knowledge to its needs and concerns. Thus, discourse analysis is revealing not only for what is encompassed –and how– in the rhetorical practices of a society but also for what is excluded²⁴. Further, the selectivity in the formation of discourse is reinforced over time since discourse constitutes

²² For Foucault, the history of ideas seeks to study the emergence, organisation and evolution of ideas and systems of thoughts and to interpret them over time with a tendency to emphasise or even contrive the continuity and similarity between various intellectual traditions and systems (1989: 3-17; Hutton, 1993: 5-6, 111-112).

²³ Foucault underlined the apparition from the 17th-18th centuries onwards of a new form of power, “disciplinary power” (distinct from sovereign power) which is a pervasive mechanism of (self-) surveillance and (self-) repression resting on the knowledge constituted about men in social sciences and aiming at the ‘*normalisation*’ of society (1980a: 104-107). This power is not merely negatively repressive: it also appears positive through its shaping of discourse and production of knowledge (1980b: 119).

²⁴ We find here a parallel with the above analysis of remembrance and commemoration as resulting from selectivity and value judgement, thus encompassing those things which are valued and excluding those which are disregarded.

a precedent which determines (potential and actual) subsequent discourses and forms of representation. In the long-term, certain forms of representation are framed along specific lines as continuity of previous forms while others are totally excluded (1989: 28).

More specifically, Foucault identified two factors which shape and constrain the representation of the past. Firstly, what is remembered of the past is not so much what actually happened (as it happened for the society of the time) or can be “unveiled” by historians, but what has been represented and commemorated (as it has been moulded by contemporary and later powers) (1989: 7; 1977: 151; Hutton, 1993: 6; Schudson, 1995: 359). Secondly, the representation of the past is rooted in the inherited body of knowledge and in tradition, thereby perpetuating earlier forms of discourse and conceptions of the past (1989: 12, 21; Hutton, 1993: 111-112). Thus, for Foucault, the historical approach proceeds from mythical beginnings and stresses the continuity and coherence of events conceived as a descent and confirmation of origins (1977: 140-144, 152, 161-162). Foucault criticised this approach since it distorts the past by representing it as unified and teleological and enshrines a specific set of memories as the “truth” (1977: 140, 148; 1989: 21; Hutton, 1993: 5-6, 111-114). As such, history can appear as an “official” representation of the past, reflecting dominant values and representations and excluding others. In addition, it constitutes the scholarly knowledge of the past and thereby re-appropriates, conceals or excludes other –allegedly “deviant” and inferior– forms of knowledge (Foucault, 1980a: 81-83; Bond and Gilliam, 1994: 8-10). Foucault countered the historical approach with his own framework, the archaeological approach. The latter focuses on the forms of past discourses at the material level of their existence (Foucault, 1989: 7, 131) and goes backward from the present in a genealogical attempt to retrieve the past in its complexity, diversity and uniqueness (Foucault, 1977: 139-140, 146-148, 162; 1980a: 83-84). Foucault thus sought to deconstruct the centralising and homogenising procedures through which knowledge is organised and functions (1980a: 84). He thereby wished to uncover the counter-memories²⁵ which were absorbed or excluded in the process and which can offer a basis to challenge or modify the dominant discourse (Foucault, 1977: 148; 1980a: 82-83; Hutton, 1993: 6).

To sum up, both analyses highlighted that the past is known at the level of its representation which is continuously and pervasively being remoulded in commemorative forms under the shaping influence of power. Moreover, they underscored that rememberings and forgettings are intrinsically linked. Indeed, in the process of moulding collective representations, the dominant discourse sanctions certain images of the past as memories and thereby excludes alternative formulations (Foucault, 1989: 28 and 46-63; Halbwachs, 1992: 200-201). In this way, these authors further highlight the importance

²⁵ It is important to distinguish two different meanings of Foucault’s notion of counter-memory: it can refer to the absence of memory (i.e. continuity) in archaeological inquiry (Hutton, 1993: 162) or evoke those alternative forms of discourse and representations which are marginalised in the process of formation of the dominant discourse.

for competing representations of the past to have access to the public sphere so as to establish themselves as authorised and legitimate representations. As a result, they provided a framework for recent studies focusing on commemorations as evolving forms of representation and objectification of meaning and as the reflection of power struggles and power configurations. Such studies undertake to analyse how commemorations have been an object and reflection of political discourse and political struggle and how they materialise a specific, limited and biased representation of the past. This analysis in turn provides insights in the nature and interplay of dominant and oppositional ideas, values and concerns as well as in the organisation of and contest over the modalities of power both in a given period and over time (Hutton, 1993: 161-162)²⁶.

To conclude this chapter, we can recall that collective representations of the past are socially constructed and shaped so that they be meaningful and relevant to society while preserving a certain continuity, credibility and significance of the remembrance. In the very process of being thus constituted, the collective representations of the past are socially moulded and possibly consciously reworked. As narratives, they endow the past with meaningfulness, coherence and closure while shaping it as a normative and ideological construct. Indeed, they are decisively influenced by the social context, i.e. social values, concerns and mores but also the nature and configurations of power and power struggle. Because collective representations of the past concretise and reflect the social factors which shape them, their study can reveal the selectivity and value judgement that has constituted them and, further, some aspects of the underlying social complex made of unself-conscious reshaping and deliberate distortions, social values and issues, rhetorical practices, institutional and diffuse forms of power, hegemonic power and its challenge or contest. It is however important to keep in mind that the selectivity and open distortions at work in the social reshaping of the collective representations of the past are not necessarily perceived nor contested as long as the representation of the past reinforces and fits prevailing cognitive structure and shared social values. In the next chapter, I will turn to the analysis of social identity and, as a corollary, seek to highlight the place and role of the representation of the past in the shaping of collective identity.

²⁶ For example of such studies cf. Alonso, 1988; Billig, 1990; Kaplan, 1994; Meister, 1995; Savage, 1994; Schwartz, 1982 and 1990; Zerubavel, 1994 and 1995.

Chapter Three:

Past and collective identity

Identity is a controversial –and nowadays central– concept in social sciences. In what follows, I will adopt one of the two main conceptualisations existing in the field, the constructivist approach to (collective) identity. On this basis, I will then examine the central role of the representation of the past in the making and modelling of collective identity. I will then analyse commemorations as the key material and symbolic loci materialising the confluence of collective identity and collective representations of the past and their shaping process.

3.1- The shaping of collective identity

3.1.1- A constructivist approach to identity

Identity –individual or collective– is what enables humans to understand, define and distinguish what/ who they are in regard to the (individual or collective) Other (Jenkins, 1996: 4; Mach, 1993: 4). It is always two-sided since it implies at once distinctiveness from others bearing a different identity and sameness with those who share the same identity (Jenkins, 1996: 3-4; Martin, 1993: 1-2). As a psychological and sociological concept, identity has appeared and become pre-eminent only recently in the social sciences (Gleason, 1983: 910-911). The widespread use of the word started in the United States, in the 1950s, from two different sources: Eriksonian psychology and the sociological use of the term in role theory, reference group theory and symbolic interactionism (id.: 914-918). This dual theoretical origin largely matches up the two parallel sets of polar conceptions of identity which have dominated the field ever since. The first opposition contrasts internal and external notion of identity. For Eriksonian psychology, identity has its roots in the internal psychic structure of the individual and largely preserves sameness and continuity albeit undergoing changes through interactions with the social milieu. For sociologists, identity is an artefact resulting from the interaction between the actor and society, ascribed both by designation and self-designation; it is therefore largely open to change (id.: 918)²⁷. The second dichotomy opposes the primordial or essentialist approach to identity and the constructivist or optionalist one. In this perspective, identity is conceived either as a given set of largely immutable essential features or as a creative process in which actors, within the broader social context, make up, modify, emphasise and de-emphasise the whole or elements of the set of

²⁷ In this second approach, identity is not external in that it is merely allocated from outside the actor but in that it includes not only self-designation but also designation and naming by others (Mach, 1993: 8; Martin, 1993: 14).

characteristics that constitutes their identity (id.: 919)²⁸. While the former approach is congruent with the psychological conception of identity as deep and internal, the latter is closer to the sociological formulation of identity as external. Indeed, in both dichotomies, the first term conveys a view of identity as permanent while the second term presents it as changing (id.: 919-920).

In this study, I will analyse identity, and more specifically collective identity, as a constructive and changing phenomenon. I will therefore use the constructivist approach to identity (and consistently its external conception)²⁹. This approach is best expressed in Anderson's notion of "imagined communities" (1991), which emphasises that the sense of belonging to a community is, at least partly, a construct of the mind and collective identity a form of collective representations. The thrust of my argument is not to claim that any collective identity can be created *ex nihilo* anywhere and at any time. Rather, I seek to underline that collective identity is not a pre-given and immutable form but is socially constituted and open to (deliberate or not) modification. This approach allows me firstly to emphasise transformation and modifications in identity. It is consistent with and supported by Ricoeur's analysis of identity as the dialectics of sameness and selfhood –i.e. the dialectics between the continuity of the self over time and the succession of identifications adopted by the self thanks to its openness to transformation³⁰ (Martin, 1993: 4). Secondly, the constructivist approach underlines the dimension of identity as an artefact, and therefore its openness to more or less self-conscious (re-)construction³¹. The latter can result from a bottom-up, a top-down or a combined action to (re)shape collective identity³². Specifically, a largely self-conscious and extensive reshaping of collective identity from above can be regarded as a form of social engineering.

To sum up, I will adopt a sociological approach to collective identity as an artefact constructed and evolving over time as a result of the interactions between actors and their social milieu. In what follows, I will highlight two channels of collective identity-shaping: narrative and symbolic constructions of identity.

²⁸ Within the constructivist and optionalist approach, a whole range of versions and nuances can be found, from those who regard identity construction as a mere invention for instrumental purposes to those who consider it as a quite unself-conscious change of emphasis in or content of identity in order to adapt to an evolving context.

²⁹ This perspective appears to me as a more relevant understanding of the phenomenon and mechanisms of identity. Moreover, it is congruent with my previous conclusions on the (re)constructive dimension of collective memory.

³⁰ This balance between change and continuity in identity echoes the observation of the balance between change and continuity in the reconstruction of collective memory (see above, sub-section 2.1.2).

³¹ "Construction" should not be understood as the invention of an identity but as the shaping and reshaping of characteristics to modify certain identity features within given limits of factuality, relevance and credibility.

³² Combined efforts to reshape collective identity from above and below can be mutually reinforcing or in opposition.

3.1.2- The narrative and symbolic construction of identity ✓

Firstly, collective identities are built through a process of interpretation wherein we define and make sense of who we are through self-designation and designation by others. This process of interpretation is a form of story-telling that inscribes the happenings of one's existence in a temporal structure and a plot and thereby connects them and organises them in a coherent fashion. *'This process of interpretation, which is continuous though not always fully conscious, (...) transforms life from a mere chronicle of occurrences to a series of sequentially-ordered episodes deriving meaning from their relationship to the entire story that emerges in and through them'* (Hinchman and Hinchman, 1998: 119). Thus, narratives re-order, re-arrange and re-interpret life's happenings in a plausible way so as to make them meaningful, relevant and coherent³³ (Martin, 1993: 4-6; Hinchman and Hinchman, 1998: xvii; Novitz, 1998: 147-148). They further make it possible to encompass change and continuity in a consistent frame over time (Martin, 1993: 6). Specifically, story-telling can support or modify collective identities ✓ by linking individuals together as a group and ascribing them a specific identity³⁴. Indeed, narrative is *'an "utterance", (...) meant for oneself as well as for the Other'* (Martin, 1993: 6) and often the group is at once the sender and the main recipient of the identity narrative (Mach, 1993: 36). Thus, narrativity has an essential performative character insofar as group members adhere to the story-telling by *'tak(ing) (the collective identity) to exist and act(ing) accordingly'* (Carr, 1986: 161)³⁵. Importantly, such narrative identification with a group can be more or less deliberate and can stem from self-designation by group members and/or attribution of an identity (usually by political leaders) to individuals (Martin, 1993: 12-14). The role of leaders is particularly decisive since when they tell the story of the group, symbolically, it is the group that narrates its own story to itself. But such narratives can be constitutive of the existence, nature and activity of the group only insofar as they are shared and shouldered by group members. Thus, while the collective identity narrative can be the reflection of a genuine feeling of community, it can also be a form of mobilisation or persuasion (Carr, 1986: 156-157).

Secondly, the shaping of collective identity results from symbolic construction. The latter consists in the promotion and sharing of a symbolic repertoire³⁶. Indeed, symbols materialise, promote and

³³ This parallels the mechanism observed above for the narrativisation of the representation of the past. Broadly, the effects of narrativisation on the representation of the past can be extended to the narrative representation of identity.

³⁴ A debate exists on this aspect within the narrativist approach to identity. One position holds that narrativity is merely an articulate reflection of our identity. The other argues that narrativity has normative and behavioural effects which contribute to shape collective identity (on the debate, see Hinchman and Hinchman, 1998: 119-120; for an instance of the second position, see Novitz, 1998: 146). Consistently with the above analysis of narrativity and with the broader approach chosen on identity, the approach followed here is closer to the second conception.

³⁵ However, because collective identity is the result of both self-designation and designation by others the performativeness of the group's identity narrative is constrained by the possibility that actors exterior to the group do not acknowledge or even actively deny and oppose the group's identity narrative.

³⁶ The symbolic repertoire is a register of symbols which are common to a group and which are expressed in arts, myths, politics, etc. It is especially enshrined in rituals which are best suited to display and entrench it since they are repetitive, formalised and performative ceremonies (Connerton, 1989: 44-61). Thus, as will be examined

entrench social norms, values and representations of the world; they constitute a common emotional and intellectual framework for group members. Thereby, they shape people's understanding, thinking and behaviour along specific lines, hence fostering a sense of sameness with those who share the same symbols (and of distinctiveness from those who do not), thus supporting and maintaining collective identity (Mach, 1993: 38). In his book on Social Identity, Richard Jenkins reviewed a recent model of symbolic construction of collective identity³⁷ (1996: 105-107). This model underlines that '*community membership, (...), depends upon the symbolic construction and signification of a mask of similarity which all can wear, an umbrella of solidarity under which all can shelter*' (id.: 105). Indeed, through the construction and sharing of a common symbolic repertoire several processes favouring the development of a sense of community can unfold. Firstly, by offering meaningful images of the group for itself, collective symbols make the community visible and appreciable, and thereby foster a feeling of kinship and shared belonging. Moreover, the rhetorical reference to such notions as "community" or "we" has potent effects (id.: 105-106). Specifically, Connerton underlined the performativity of utterances encompassed in communal rituals: by using (and repeating) the "we", the community is objectified in discourse as a common speaker and common actor and recalls to itself the fact of its existence (1989: 58-59). Finally, shared symbols give group members the feeling that they share a common view on and understanding of things. They therefore promote a sense of collective identity among group members based both on the commonality of the representations of the world within the group and on the difference of these representations with those of other groups. Importantly however, this commonality does not mean that group members actually have the same values or understanding of things but, at least, that they believe it is so. Like the narrative dimension of identity-shaping, the symbolic dimension is a human artefact in which the commonality is a construct of the mind produced by group members and/or leaders. Such commonalities are nevertheless actual and consequential in so far as the people concerned believe in it and behave accordingly (Jenkins, 1996: 105, 111).

Collective identities based on symbolic and narrative representations of reality are open and ambiguous entities. Indeed both symbols and narratives are multi-vocal and complex reservoirs of sometimes incongruent and more or less imprecise and implicit meanings. They can therefore be diversely interpreted by different group members and subgroups or according to the circumstances. As a result, group members can share a common symbolic repertoire and narrative frame –and be aware of such commonality as a basis for their shared identity– while in practice bestowing different meanings on them, understanding them differently or emphasising different aspects³⁸. Thus, the sense of collective identity is based on the adhesion to the dominant symbolic and narrative representation

below, commemoration, a special form of ritual re-enactment, is at the crossroad of identity- and memory-construction.

³⁷ Anthony Cohen, The symbolic construction of community, 1985, Chichester: E. Horwood

of the community by all group members rather than on all individuals and subgroups having the same reading and understanding of this representation. At the same time, the diversity and fluidity of meanings of narratives and symbols and their openness to interpretation can serve several purposes. Firstly, this makes it possible for symbols and narratives to appear all-encompassing and thereby for the collective identity to accommodate very diverse (and even potentially conflicting) subgroups. This first aspect can be more or less self-consciously developed in societies featuring great social pluralism or divisiveness. Indeed, by promoting vague and multi-vocal symbols and narratives, tensions and divisions can be smoothed and the emphasis put on a more general or more abstract level at which commonalities can be found³⁹. Secondly, the diversity and fluidity of meanings and interpretations facilitate the evolution over time of the collective identity and its adaptation to changing circumstances. Moreover, they open the possibility to develop diverse images of the group for different audiences (the group itself, an enemy, the international community, etc.) (Bond and Gilliam, 1994: 1; Mach, 1993: 9; Martin, 1993: 7). Finally, the openness of symbols and narratives to a variety of interpretations allows individuals and subgroups to contest and modify specific features of the collective identity. This possibility of modification which rests on the multi-vocality and vagueness of the dominant narrative and symbolic repertoire is reinforced by the persistence –alongside the dominant representation– of other formulations that constitute more or less achieved counter-narratives and alternative symbolic repertoires (id.; Hinchman and Hinchman, 1998: xxiii, 235-236).

To conclude, collective identity can be described as a complex and changing human artefact which can develop when actually adhered to by those concerned. It is shaped and constantly reshaped through narrativisation and the promotion of a shared symbolic repertoire. It is a very fluid phenomenon since it is multi-vocal and multi-layered and evolves over time. It thus allows for various interpretations depending on the interpreters, the circumstances and the audience and preserves its relevance to the present. While there exists various ways of shaping and influencing collective identity (such as the diffusion of specific values through school curriculum, propaganda, etc.), I will focus on those processes which shape collective identity through the modelling of the collective representations of the past.

³⁸ For symbolic repertoire, see Jenkins, 1996: 107; for narratives, see Martin, 1993: 7

³⁹ In the extreme, the commonality can be that all group members are defined by their differences. This is one of the possible interpretation of the metaphor of the rainbow nation, as I will examine in the Part Two.

3.2- The representation of the past in the shaping of collective identity

In this section, I will examine the interplay between the collective representation of the past and collective identity. The collective representation of the past is a core component of collective identity. It is therefore the object and reflection of modifications aiming at (re-)shaping collective identity.

The role of memory as a basis for one's sense of (individual and collective) identity is widely underlined in the literature⁴⁰. Indeed, the sense of continuity and consistency in identity -its "sameness" component- is sustained by remembrance (Gillis, 1994: 3). This does not imply permanence or immutability as much as a feeling of continuity and coherence (Lowenthal, 1985: 197). Thus, for Halbwachs, collective memory *'provides the group a self portrait that unfolds through time, (...) and allows the group to recognise itself throughout the total succession of images'* (1980: 86; see also 1992: 47). Carr showed that memory is central for a sense of identity since the past plays an essential part in one's identity narrative. Following Dilthey⁴¹, Carr distinguished three categories of thought which enable human beings to develop an understanding of their lives. *Value* concerns the positive and negative appraisal of contemporary surrounding realities; *purpose* corresponds to the projection of these values in the future; and *meaning* refers to the constitution of a meaningful pattern out of what is remembered and valued positively or negatively from the past. Carr established the pre-eminence and centrality of meaning since *'it encompasses and orders the things we value and the purposes we pursue'* (1986: 76-77). He therefore concluded by emphasising the central role of the representation of the past in the constitution and shaping of identity (id.; see also Lowenthal, 1985: 41). Apart from its role in the narrative construction of collective identity, the collective representation of the past is also the source of most symbols supporting a sense of commonality. Indeed, many collective symbols are cultural or historical symbols taking roots in the past. At the collective level, the dependence of identity on memory is transposed into the need for any community to have a shared memory (Connerton, 1989: 3)⁴². Consequently, a *'real community'* can be defined as a *'community of memory'*⁴³ whose integrity and identity are preserved by the retelling to itself of its constitutive narrative (Middleton and Edwards, 1990: 5). Apart from constituting the very basis of a collective sense of identity, a shared representation of the past also determines the specific content and features of this identity. Indeed, it is not only that the (alleged or actual) existence of the group in the past makes its existence appear more meaningful and legitimate in the present but also that what the group imagines

⁴⁰ For example, see Gillis, 1994: 3; Halbwachs, 1992: 47; Lowenthal, 1985: 197; Mach, 1993: 63; Middleton and Edwards, 1990: 10; Starn and Davis, 1989: 4; Thelen, 1992: 1.

⁴¹ W. Dilthey, *Gesammelte Schriften*, fifth edition, vol. VII, 1968, Stuttgart: B. Teubner, p 201.

⁴² This does not necessarily imply a common (actual or mythical) past experience of group members and their ancestors but at least a common agreement in the present on the representation of the past (as will be examined below for the South African public representation of the past).

⁴³ This notion is taken from Robert Bellah and al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 1985, New York: Harper and Row.

it was in the past determines and reflects its self-image in the present. Thus, the content of the representation of one's past –i.e. what is remembered and forgotten, which memories are emphasised and de-emphasised and which interpretations are given of specific memories– impacts and depends on the group's conception of itself in the past and in the present. Moreover, the representation of the past constantly evolves or is modified to match the current changes in collective identity (Gillis, 1994: 3; Zerubavel, 1995: 3)⁴⁴.

Because the collective representation of the past constitutes a basis for collective identity, any modification of the former influences the latter (and, to a lesser extent, vice versa). Specifically, the collective representation of the past can become the object of more or less self-conscious modelling aiming at enhancing or matching specific identity features. Shaping the collective representation of the past with regard to collective identity then becomes a major dimension of the “politics of memory” which are the processes and actions whereby actors, and especially the state, draw on remembrance as a resource to further specific goals in the present and try to mould memories according to their values and concerns⁴⁵. Therefore, the very choice and interpretation of memories are disputed in that they are constitutive of identity and of its content so that being able to influence or model memory seems to offer control of the identity in the present and the future. Thus *‘it is not just that “he who controls the past controls the future” (G. Orwell) but he who controls the past controls who we are’* (Middleton and Edwards, 1990: 10). Specifically, acting upon the relation collective representation of the past/collective identity can serve two purposes. Firstly, the promotion of a shared representation of the past contributes to support the emergence of a collective identity and subsequently to consolidate its existence. Secondly, emphasising specific aspects of the collective representation of the past makes the latter fit for the desired collective identity or can favour the development of certain identity features. Therefore, given that the collective representation of the past and collective identity are multi-layered, changing and often contested collective representations, and given that the collective representation of the past is a central component supporting and shaping collective identity, the collective representation of the past –and its materialisation in commemorations– are at stake in the public sphere as part of the process of and contest around identity-shaping (Thelen, 1992: 7-17, Le Goff, 1992: 54, 98-99; Middleton and Edwards, 1990: 10). Collective representations of the past are at the core of the political and ideological battles whereby various social actors compete about the meaning and content of the past and about the particular collective identity it supports by propounding alternative (and often conflicting) representations of the past (Jelin, 1994: 50; Martin, 1993: 10). Two specific cases of contest can be highlighted. Firstly, a collective identity can rest on a narrative of change or continuity, of decay or improvement. As a corollary, the collective representation of the past is

⁴⁴ Without referring as such to the term “identity”, Halbwachs held a similar conception (1980: 118; 1992: 75, 119).

⁴⁵ In the “politics of memory”, representations of the past are not at stake only as a resource for identity-shaping. They can also be a means for opposed groups to legitimise their claims and role in the present (Thelen, 1992: 1-17).

moulded to emphasise either a break with the past or the continuity with it and to provide a positive or negative image of the past. Secondly, in the wake of very divisive or traumatic events, the contest around the collective representation of the past can oppose those who seek to belittle past divisions and traumas while easing memories of guilt and responsibility with those who try to prevent amnesia and impunity (Thelen, 1992: 10-12, 13-15).

To conclude, because it is an essential component of collective identity, the collective representation of the past is at stake in the “politics of memory” aiming at moulding, modifying and contesting collective identity. The shaping of the collective representation of the past linked to the modelling of identity is best displayed in commemorations which, by visibly and publicly objectifying collective representations of the past, offer the main locus for reshaping and contesting representations of the past and of identity.

3.3- Commemorations: at the confluence of collective representations of the past and of identity

Public commemorations are at the confluence of collective representations of the past, collective identity and politics. They are developed precisely in contexts when there is the feeling of a break with the past, i.e. when the threat of actual or potential forgetting provokes a need to actively protect traces of the past and maintain certain remembrances as a basis for present identity (Nora, 1989: 7, 12, 19; Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983: 4-5; Hutton, 1993: 5, 9). Commemorations support and entrench collective identities by materialising collective representations of the past in three ways. Firstly, they preserve remembrance and embody identity by localising them in concrete and specific loci⁴⁶, thereby making them visible and durable. More specifically, monuments –and other spatial remains of the past– offer the most stable and visible forms in which collective representations of the past can inscribe themselves since they constitute landmarks and survive over time and generations. In this way, they impose an enduring memory on the landscape within which humans organise their lives (Halbwachs, 1980: 140, 156-157; Savage, 1994: 143). Thus, commemorative monuments ‘*embod(y) and legitimat(e) the very notion of a common memory and by extension the notion of the people who possess and rally around such a memory*’ (Savage, 1994: 130-131; see also Rowlands, 1994: 136). Secondly, commemorations constitute a materialisation of the dominant public representation of the past. Each commemoration reproduces a specific commemorative narrative which typically constitutes a simplified and symbolic story about the events commemorated. In the form of ritualised remembrance, it establishes certain memories and conveys social norms and messages, thus diffusing and supporting the founding values

⁴⁶ Such loci can be temporal (day of celebration, minute of silence) or spatial (commemorative plaque, monuments) (Zerubavel, 1995: 139). I will put the emphasis on the latter which are most visible and correspond to my case-study.

of the group. Together, these commemorative narratives constitute *the 'master commemorative narrative'*, that is, *'a basic "story line" that is culturally constructed and provides the group members with a general notion of their shared past'* (Zerubavel, 1995: 5-6). The master commemorative narrative is that part of the collective identity narrative which concerns the past of the group. It is therefore one of the main mechanisms to create collective identities as "imagined communities" (id.: 214). Commemorations are thus central in making and supporting collective identity by reminding the community of its identity as represented by the master narrative (Connerton, 1989: 70). Finally, commemorations entrench collective representations of the past and of identity since they constitute specific forms of ritual. By concretely re-enacting past events, they materialise collective representations of the past and thereby the identity narrative of the group (Connerton, 1989: 61; Lewis, 1975: 13). Indeed, they provide a ritual event wherein individuals and groups materially experience and share remembrance collectively. Moreover, they transmit such collective representations of the past to new groups and especially to new generations (Connerton, 1989: 39-40).

Commemorations are, however, not merely a locus to display and entrench collective representations of the past and identity. They also serve to modify and even contest such collective representations (Zerubavel, 1995: 10-12; see also Gillis, 1994: 5; Hutton, 1993: 80-82; Thelen, 1989: 1126-1127 and 1992: 1). Indeed, as we saw in Chapter Two, social remembrance –including through its symbolic re-enactment in commemorations– necessarily involves an element of unself-conscious distortion as well as the possibility for deliberate manipulation, or negotiation between several variants. Thus, in commemorations, *'groups create, articulate and negotiate their shared memories of particular events. The performance of commemorative rituals allow participants not only to revive and affirm older memories of the past but also to modify them'* (Zerubavel, 1995: 5-6). A balance is thereby struck so that while each act of commemoration allows for a certain variance and evolution, their recurrence and coherence within the master narrative provides a certain continuity⁴⁷ (id.).

Commemorations can allow changes in the collective representations of the past at three different levels. Firstly, the very framing of the dominant representation of the past in a commemorative form entails transformation and distortion. Indeed, commemorations constitute an extreme case of selectivity and value-judgement in the narrativisation and material representation of the past. The content and manner of telling and displaying the past is determined in line with the broader master commemorative narrative and identity narrative. It is thereby influenced by an underlying ideological reference and by the values and modalities of social power. Moreover, it is shaped in a certain way so as to achieve specific rhetorical effects and target a particular audience (Schudson, 1995: 359; Zerubavel, 1995: 216). Secondly, within the dominant representation as it has been constituted, some modifications stem from the interplay between the deliberate "official" reconstruction and the

⁴⁷ This highlights once more the need -and mechanisms- to find a balance between change and continuity in identity.

persistence of popular remembrance (especially in the case of recent events) (Hutton, 1993: xvi, 71; Savage, 1994: 146). Further modifications result from the fact that identity and past narratives and symbols are multi-layered and multi-vocal. Thus, within the dominant representation, several alternative interpretations which are referred to by different groups, for different audiences or in different circumstances can coexist. They differ from each other by providing different emphases and interpretations of certain aspects of the commemorative narrative. Thirdly, change in the collective representation of the past displayed in the commemorative narrative results from the interaction between the dominant representation (and its variants) and oppositional counter-memories. The latter are usually borne by marginalised social groups or oppositional political groups. They offer different and sometimes incompatible versions of specific past happenings, or more broadly, of the collective past⁴⁸ (Bond and Gilliam, 1994: 1; Zerubavel, 1995: 10-12). For these counter-memories and the groups which bear them, commemorations provide a locus to oppose the dominant version of the past and to display their own. Such counter-memories are regarded as highly subversive since, even if they only oppose the commemoration of a specific event, they thereby also challenge and undermine the underlying master commemorative narrative and the collective identity.

In conclusion, commemorations are at the confluence of collective memory and collective identity and publicly materialise these collective representations. Therefore, they constitute a major locus where the latter are publicly constituted, moulded, modified, challenged and contested.

Thus, in this chapter, we have seen that collective identities are socially constructed through narrative and symbolic channels and are changing, open, multi-layered and relatively fluid representations of the collective self. Because the past is at the core of one's sense of identity, the representation of the past –inscribed in collective memory and materialised in commemorations– is a major component in the modelling of collective identity and is therefore at stake in the shaping of and contest over the latter. Drawing on this analysis of collective identity and its interplay with the collective representation of the past, I will examine in the next chapter the specific case of national identity and the representation of the national past.

⁴⁸ In this perspective Zerubavel modified Foucault's concept of counter-memory. While Foucault conceived it as a fragmentary oppositional representation of a limited event, Zerubavel chose to extend the notion by defining it rather as a coherent and subversive overview of the past offering an alternative narrative (1995: 11).

Chapter Four:

The nation and its past

In this chapter, I will draw on the two previous chapters to analyse the interplay between the nation and its representation of the past; in particular, I will examine how a shared image of the past constitutes a basis for and fosters national identity. Consistently with the constructivist approach to identity defined in the previous chapter, I will analyse national identity as a symbolic and narrative construct emphasising the image of national cohesion. To achieve this image of cohesion, an appropriate representation of the past is shaped. This entails creating a shared representation of the past, hence emphasising certain remembrances and promoting corollary forgettings. In this sense, the representation of the national past can be analysed as a social construct constituting a relatively homogenising and authoritative version of the past.

4.1- The construction of national identity

National identity is a human artefact resulting from symbolic and narrative processes of construction. Before examining the modalities whereby narratives and symbols support national identity by providing an image of national cohesion, I will define the scope and limits of this construction.

4.1.1- A constructivist approach to national identity

Following one of the main trends of the current literature on nation-formation and national identity, I regard national identity as mainly constructed. In Imagined Communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism, Benedict Anderson defines 'nation-ness, as well as nationalism, (as) cultural artefacts' and nations as 'imagined communities' (1991: 4-6). Indeed, nations are not concretely experienced as face-to-face relations with all members of the group but intellectually represented as communities; they are nevertheless thought of as a comradeship (id.: 4-7). Thus, this study will view nations not as the (natural) outcome of primordial group identities aspiring to sovereignty but as the expression of a collective act of will to nationhood⁴⁹ (Renan, 1990: 19-20; Coetzee, 1995: 20). This focus on the constructivist dimension highlights that, as an artefact, national identity is open to unself-conscious change and further to deliberate social engineering (James, 1996: 2). However, such an

approach does not mean that national identity is regarded as artificial or imaginary (as opposed to smaller and allegedly more “primordial” forms of human organisations such as kinship, villages, etc.). Indeed, beyond face-to-face contact, any identification with a human community is partly a representation of the mind (Anderson, 1991: 6; Jenkins, 1996: 110). Further, as underlined by Anderson, the constructive dimension of the nation (or, for that matter, of any other human community) should not be understood as falsity but as an actual and creative process (1991: 6). Such invention is actual and consequential insofar as members of the nation believe in and behave according to their identification with the nation and the specific contents of national identity.

However, focusing on the constructivist aspect of national identity does not mean believing that cultural invention subsumes all aspects of nation formation and national identity (James, 1996: 187-188). In particular, a distinction should be made between nation building and the formation of national identity. The former consists in creating and developing a national community and organising its modalities of existence (territory, administrative apparatus, etc.) It is a symbolic and material process which leads to the formation of a nation: it involves the formation of a national identity but also largely rests on material factors and historical causes. By contrast, the formation of national identity consists in the emergence (self-consciously promoted or not) of a collective sense of belonging to a national community and largely rests on humans’ understanding and representation of who they are as a community evolving over time. The formation of national identity is thus mainly a form of collective representations, an inventive process using narration and symbolism. Nevertheless, the specific contours and content of national identity are not shaped regardless of the context but within certain limits of factuality, relevance and credibility. Specifically, the “national” past is not merely invented but is reconstructed –albeit sometimes thoroughly modified– on the basis of older communal memories (Smith, 1993: 13-17; James, 1996: 115)⁵⁰. In the rest of this study, I will look at the formation of national identity and I will examine nation-building via a focus on the formation of national identity since my analysis is set at the level of collective representations (of the past and of identity) and of the influence of discursive practices on social reality. Thus, in Part Two, I will introduce the nation-building project of post-apartheid South Africa in the first chapter as a basis to then focus the analysis on the formation and content of a new South African national identity.

⁴⁹ This approach is suited to explain the formation of nations in multi-cultural societies where there is no self-evident “primordial” commonality and where it often results from state action (Anderson, 1991: 135; Smith, 1991: 110-115).

⁵⁰ See above on the limits of past reconstruction.

4.1.2- *The narrative and symbolic construction of the nation: a representation of unity*

In this sub-section, I will draw on the previous analysis of collective identity shaping to analyse national identity as the outcome of a symbolic and narrative construction. I will then show that the representation of the national past which emerges consistently with the formation of national identity constitutes a representation of the nation's cohesion.

Like other forms of collective identity, national identity can be analysed as the result of a symbolic and narrative construction. In his review of Cohen's model of symbolic construction of communities, Jenkins underlines that this framework is adaptable to the case of the national community. A basic element of national identity thus consists in the sharing of a common symbolic repertoire (1996: 110-111). The commonality thereby constituted is intrinsically reinforced since the role of national symbolism is to promote the image of the nation's unity and solidarity. This is not achieved by denying the stratifications and divisions of the nation as much as by emphasising the image of its coherence and its overarching values (independence, historical mission, etc.) (Mach, 1993: 110)⁵¹. Thus, national symbols are meant to be all-encompassing symbols, hence they are often broad and multi-layered, especially in very differentiated or deeply divided societies. Moreover, symbols and rituals support a sense of national identity since they embody national discourse and ideology in concrete and simple terms, thus facilitating their visibility and power of persuasion. Finally, they provide material forms (flag, anthem, statute, etc.) around which group members can gather, experience fraternity and enact the national identity narrative⁵². Consequently, symbols and rituals make visible and objectify the national community and thereby entrench its existence and '*help to assure the continuity of an abstract community of history and destiny*' (Smith, 1991: 77-78).

The construction of the national identity also has a narrative dimension. In Imagined Communities, Anderson examined the conditions for the emergence of the nation as a form of human community and its later spread over the world through different means and models⁵³. More specifically, he highlighted the role of the narrative –both literally and metaphorically– in the original imagining of the nation. He did not elaborate on the specific contours of particular national identity narratives but on how the imagining of any nation constituted it as a story of unity and homogeneity.

⁵¹ Such a symbolic emphasis on national cohesion succeeds all the better insofar as the nation is represented as a comradeship. It thereby appeals not only to the rationality and self-interest of its members but also to their feeling of belonging, devotion, sacrifice, etc. (Anderson, 1991: 7).

⁵² In this respect, Smith underlined that national symbols and ceremonies are all the more potent since through them the community is directly celebrating itself (as opposed to other forms of communal self-celebrations which resort to the mediating cult of a deity, such as the gods guarding and embodying antique Greek cities) (1991: 77).

⁵³ Thus, Anderson is not interested in the historical causes, evolution and features of the development of specific nations as much as in the technical, cultural and social mutations which made possible the imagining of the nation as a form of sovereign and limited community (Anderson, 1991: 9-47; for a criticism, see Smith, 1993: 19-20).

Indeed, he showed how, in (and through) novels and newspapers, a number of commonalities emerged: a shared and arbitrary sense of time linking actors and events merely by their synchronicity of time; a common space and social context characterised by a series of similar institutions and settings (therefore both impersonal and familiar to all) perceived as one's own; and feelings of identification with the heroes andonyms who share the same time and setting. Thus, the narrative form makes possible the imagining of the nation as a sovereign and limited community characterised by a common language, simultaneous and homogeneous time, a shared space and social setting, the juxtaposition and identification of diverse actors as a group and a common "story-line"⁵⁴.

This representation of the nation as homogeneous, serial and simultaneous was qualified by Homi Bhabha who viewed the national narrative not as the representation of the nation's actual cohesion but as a permanent effort to achieve and preserve an image of unity which is always incomplete and contested. Thus, in *Dissemination: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation*, Bhabha examined 'the complex strategies of cultural identification and discursive address that function in the name of "the people" or "the nation" and make them the immanent subjects of a range of social and literary narratives' (1994: 140). He underlined the tension between the alleged unity and homogeneity of the nation and its actual reality as diverse and divided (id.: 142-152). In particular, he stressed the impossibility to fully and truly incorporate the voices and experiences of the minorities (id.: 152-157). As a result, the thrust of the national narrative is towards a unification of representation and a closure of meaning never to be achieved. Analysing the 'ideological manoeuvres through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities', Bhabha underlined that 'the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of the anxiety of its irredeemably plural modern space –representing the nation's modern territoriality is turned into the archaic, atavistic temporality of Traditionalism. The difference of space returns as the Sameness of time, turning Territory into Tradition, turning the People into One' (1994: 149). Bhabha thus showed how, faced with the inescapable plurality of society, the narrative of national identity which seeks to promote an image of national cohesion attempts to shape diversities into commonalities and to devise essentialist categories which absorb and erase differences. Moreover, he underlined that, in order to represent and perform this image of national cohesion, the national narrative mainly resorts to an image of the past which is constructed to emphasise continuity and unity. He thus highlighted the significance of promoting a common image of the past as a basis for the representation (and sense) of national cohesion.

A common image of the past may provide a basis for the representation of national cohesion and thereby strengthen its existence and "credibility". At the national level, a shared representation of the past can support national identity by providing an image of "national" cohesion in the past or by

⁵⁴ Such imagining arises in a historical context combining the development of print-capitalism making books and newspapers a common commodity and the fragmentation of territory around vernacular languages, hence at once promoting and limiting within certain boundaries the emergence of the nation as 'print community'.

creating an agreement in the present on the national past. It can thus favour the development of a national identity with a specific content and support the continuity and unity of the people encompassed by this identity. Furthermore, by emphasising issues or periods of unity and by marginalising or reshaping elements of division, the representation of the past can contribute to mitigate present tensions and divisions. To that end, *'the language of culture and community is poised on the fissures of the present becoming the rhetorical figures of a national past'* (Bhabha, 1994: 142). Both narratives and symbols contribute to convey the image of a shared past as a basis for the story of national cohesion. Firstly, *'the master commemorative narrative focuses on the group's distinct social identity and highlights its historical development. In this sense it contributes to the formation of the nation, portraying it as a unified group moving through history'* (Zerubavel, 1995: 7). Thus, by giving the image of a common past, it is the existence and the given-ness of the nation in the present as well as the ineluctability of its common future and its perpetuation that are underscored (id.: 214). Similarly, objectifying the nation's past in tangible symbols, rituals and monuments allows to materialise the collective representation of the past around a given set of images and readings of the past and to emphasise long-term continuity, thereby making credible, real and rooted national community itself (Savage, 1994: 146).

To conclude, the sense of national identity is fostered by the representation of the nation as an actual and unified community, a representation which particularly emphasises the image of national cohesion. Consistently, the dominant representation of the past promotes the image of a shared national past and thereby supports the representation of the nation and of its cohesion. In the next section, I will examine how the image of a shared national past is achieved by combining selective rememberings and forgettings of the past, and further how this selective shaping of the national past is intertwined with –and even intrinsic to– nation-formation.

4.2- A shared past for the nation

In order to be shared and to foster group cohesion, the representation of the national past has to be continuously shaped and reshaped so as to promote elements favouring the development of national consciousness and belittling divisions. Therefore, the reshaping of the national past tends to emphasise past commonalities and to de-emphasise memories of differences and fractures. This can be achieved by changing emphases in, or interpretations of, what is remembered and commemorated (Martin, 1993: 14-15). Thus, Halbwachs underlined that while each group in society bears its own specific memory, because of the social need for unity and continuity, *'society tends to erase from its memory all that might separate individuals, or that might distance groups from each other. It is also why society, in each period, rearranges its recollections in such a way as to adjust them to the variable conditions of its*

equilibrium' (1992: 182-183). Shaping representations of the national past thus entails establishing some traditions and affiliations with past happenings as much as dismissing and excluding others (Bhabha, 1990: 5). As seen above, social remembrance is selective: remembering certain happenings means remembering them in certain ways and with certain underlying interpretations and encompassing "story lines". It further implies the corollary forgettings of alternative counter-narratives held by subordinated voices and/ or concerning marginalised events (Zerubavel, 1995: 8, 214; Rowlands, 1994: 136; Bhabha, 1994: 145-149). To understand how this shaping of the national past as combination of selective rememberings and forgettings constitutes an essential basis for national identity, I will firstly examine the specific case of the "forgetting" of past divisions and traumas which is intrinsic to the formation of national identity and the rhetoric of national identity. I will then review some of the works of the school of Subaltern Studies which has unveiled a broader organic link between the constitution of national history and the emergence and promotion of national identity.

4.2.1- *The forgetting of past violence and divisions*

The idea that the intertwining of rememberings and forgettings, and above all the necessary forgetting of past divisions, are intrinsic to the emergence and shaping of national identity was famously expressed at the end of the 19th century by Ernest Renan in his speech *What is a nation?: (...)* *the essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things (...)* every French citizen has to have forgotten the massacre of Saint-Bartholomew, or the massacres that took place in the Midi in the thirteenth century' (Renan, 1990: 11). Both Anderson and Bhabha commented and dwelt on Renan's quote. They specifically examined the modalities of the forgetting of past divisions and conflicts and its implications for the constitution of national identity. They both understood this constitutive forgetting as a way of entrenching national identity by asserting its existence and cohesion. However, their analyses are set at different levels. For Anderson, the constitutive forgetting is a dialectic of remembering and forgetting: remembering of certain past events and actors which are re-appropriated and constructed as the national past; at the same time, (actual or alleged) forgetting of past divisions in order to provide a conciliatory version of the past and thereby to preserve and even reinforce present national cohesion (1991: 199-203). Distinctly, Bhabha holds that the representation of the national past does not materialise nor achieve national cohesion (since the latter is always incomplete and contested) but rather represents it and attempts to perform it. In his view, the constitutive forgetting of past divisions and violence is the very basis of the imagining of the nation as a coherent and unified community. Moreover, it is the very process wherein more or less self-conscious re-shapings tend to achieve in the present the image of the nation's cohesion by homogenising its past and its population (1994: 159-161).

Anderson underlined that national identity is narrated retrospectively, starting from the national present and going backwards. In this process, past dramas and divisions are re-appropriated as (pre-) national and therefore regarded as past internal fractures. The massacre of Saint-Bartholomew was probably conceived in its time as conflict between Protestants and Catholics and/ or between two sides of a political contest within French aristocracy; further, the actors and witnesses of the massacres did not regard themselves as "French" nor the massacres as an internal rift. But through a nationalist re-appropriation of the past, both actors and events have been redefined with hindsight as (pre-)French while the massacre was conceived as a civil war. Such a representation presumes the existence of and identification with a national community which encompass all actors, determine their pre-eminent identity and is divided by the massacre. In a similar fashion, all traumatic and divisive events are represented with hindsight as (national) fratricide. This reveals a reshaping of the past in which past happenings are conceived as teleologically leading to nation-formation and the national present. As a corollary, past events are constituted as moments of the pre-national past and past actors as ancestors of nation's members⁵⁵. In this perspective, past divisions and conflicts have to be both remembered and forgotten: they have to be forgotten since they illustrate the lack of cohesion of the (pre-)national community in the past and potentially constitute divisive issues in the present. But, as underscored by Anderson, if these traumatic events are remembered, it is precisely as a result of state educational policy since, in the nationalist era, they have been integrated in the school curriculum which has presented them as '*family history*' (Anderson, 1991: 201). Thus '*having to have already forgotten tragedies of which one needs unceasingly to be 'reminded'*' turns out to be a characteristic device in the later construction of national genealogies' (id.). Therefore, it is because the national identity narrative strives to achieve the image of unity in the present and because the teleological representation of the national past considers and inculcates as national traumas and national ancestors particular past happenings and actors that such traumas have to be remembered/ forgotten, that is remembered as national and immediately forgotten as divisive⁵⁶. This representation of past traumas as fratricide is re-assuring since it is the sign both of the long term existence and continuity of the nation as well as of the superiority of its cohesion in spite of internal divisions (id.: 201-203). Dwelling on Anderson's analysis of the '*reassuring fratricide*', one can add that apart from entrenching the nation and its unity, such a representation of past traumas also contributes to define the nation's outline and content. Indeed, determining what is to be forgotten as divisive in the pre-national past rests on what is viewed in the present as part of the national community. Thus, imagining the contour and content of the nation in the present leads to consistently shape and selectively remember/ forget the national past.

⁵⁵ Analysing the exemplary work of Michelet, French (nationalist) historian of the 19th century, Anderson asserted that a typical form of such a reworking of the past is to make the dead speak (or to speak for them). In this way, the national narrative explains their lives and justifies their sacrifices in terms of the nation-to-come (1991: 197-198).

⁵⁶ Anderson however underscored the difficulty of extending such a representation of '*reassuring fratricide*' in the case of recent rifts which are experienced as personal traumas and which are still actual and painful (1991: 201).

Bhabha drew on Renan's quote while referring to Anderson's Imagined Communities. For him, Renan's statement illustrates the mechanisms through which the notions of "people" and "past" are remoulded along homogenising and essentialist lines. This remoulding lies in the very act whereby the nation is constituted and considered to exist, i.e. what Renan called the collective expression of the will to nationhood. The will to nationhood requires that past identities, differences and divisions be already forgotten as a pre-requisite for it to be evenly expressed and shared by all group members, and thus for the nation to be constituted. Thus '*Renan's will (to nationhood) is itself the site of a strange forgetting of the history of the nation's past: the violence involved in establishing the nation's writ. It is this forgetting (...) that constitutes the beginning of the nation's narrative*' (emphasis in original) (1994: 160). Therefore, in order to offer an image of cohesion, the narrative of national identity rests on the compulsory forgetting by all individuals of past differences and rifts, including the violence that took place for the new political formation to be constituted. Furthermore, it rests on the implicit forgetting by group members of the homogenisation and unification they are subjected to in the process of being established as a national community. Indeed, by being constituted as a nation, individuals have been established as "the people": they have been subsumed into the whole (being thus defined primarily by their national identity) and they have lost their specificity and diversity. In parallel, their pasts have been reduced to be the pre-national past and to announce and reflect the national present. Thus, '*to be obliged to forget –in the construction of the national present– is not a question of historical memory; it is the construction of a discourse on society that performs the problem of totalising the people and unifying the national will. (...) Being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification*' (emphasis in original) (id.: 160-161). This constitutive forgetting thus supports the imagining of the community as national and endows it with an identity which is newly defined and detached from (and superior to) past identities. Thereby, the constitutive forgetting further achieves the representation of national cohesion and unity. Therefore, the constitutive forgetting of past violence and divisions and of the homogenisation entailed by nation-building reflects the thrust of present discourse of national identity towards entrenching the existence and cohesion of national identity and establishing its priority over other (and especially past) identities which are rejected for both their diversity and divisiveness.

To conclude, the forgetting of past divisions is constitutive of national identity since it presupposes that the national community is presumed to exist in the past and in the present and since it aims at establishing and protecting (the representation of) national cohesion. Beyond the "forgetting" of past rifts, the whole constitution of a national past is intrinsic to the formation of a nation and the emergence and promotion of national identity.

4.2.2- *The organic link between emerging national identity and history writing*

The themes and insights which emerge in both Anderson's and Bhabha's analyses can be found – expanded, deepened and systematised– in the approach of the school of Subaltern Studies. The latter emerged in India in the late 1970s-early 1980s within the dissident-left milieu, as a challenge to orthodox Marxism (Sarkar, 1997: 2). Its original project was to criticise not only the colonialist historiography of India but also Indian liberal and orthodox Marxist nationalist historiographies. These historiographies shared the characteristics of being elitist, authoritative and stato-nationalist projects: they constituted totalising and homogenising descriptions of the past concealing past diversity and internal contradictions and were framed by a common master narrative, that of the emergence of the modern nation-state (Pandey, 1997:1; Chakrabarty, 1992b: 52; Chatterjee, 1997: 13-14). The original task of the school of Subaltern Studies was to show that the Indian national movement could not be represented as an homogenous and straightforward struggle striving for a specific goal – independence through the creation of a modern nation-state– which was unanimously shared and fully conceived from the start (Pandey, 1997: 1-2). Rather, Subaltern scholars undertook to focus on the agency and autonomy of subordinated and marginalised actors –and specifically on their autonomy of consciousness. In order to focus on popular history while escaping the rigidity of the Marxist category of “class”, authors of school of the Subaltern studies resorted to the concept of “subalternity”⁵⁷, defined as ‘*the general attribute of subordination (...) expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way*’⁵⁸ (quoted in Sarkar, 1997: 4). A major pitfall of this approach, however was that Subaltern scholars encountered difficulties knowing the subjectivity, agency and consciousness of subalterns insofar as the sources available to social scientists are official –or at least elitist– archives while marginalised and subordinated groups rarely leave their own records. This situation led Subaltern scholars to resort to discourse analysis and to rethink history as a socially constructed selection and representation of the past (Pandey, 1997: 3-4; Amin, 1995: 1). In parallel, Subaltern criticism of traditional historiography involved questioning and challenging the application of Western concepts and models (from both the liberal and Marxist traditions) to Indian history, e.g. “modernity”, “nationalism”, “class struggle”, or “secularism” (Chakrabarty, 1992a; Pandey, 1997: 2). These two developments –the questioning of the historical discipline and its categories as socially constructed and the challenging of Western theories and concepts and, more broadly, of Enlightenment thought– constituted the most recent thrust of Subaltern Studies.

⁵⁷ This notion has its source in Gramsci's Prison Notebooks (Chatterjee, 1997: 3-8; Sarkar, 1997: 4-6; Pandey, 1997: 3). For an analysis of “subalternity” as understood and used by Subaltern scholars, see Chatterjee, 1997: 3-13.

⁵⁸ This definition was proposed by Ranajit Guha in his preface to the first volume of Subaltern Studies (1982) which is considered as the manifesto of the school of Subaltern Studies.

As part of this shift, Subaltern Studies unveiled the organic link between the writing of history and the constitution of nation and national identity⁵⁹. They asserted that the writing of (modern) history is organically linked to the imagining of the nation and that the representation of the past conveyed by this history subsequently supports and promotes national identity. Firstly, the emergence of modern history (as opposed to annals and chronicles) parallels the constitution of nations. As was analysed by various students of western historiography, modern history emerged in Europe precisely at a time when nation-states and national identities were being formed (Anderson, 1991: 187-206; Nora, 1989: 9-11; Rowlands, 1994: 134-135; Wachtel, 1986: 217-218; White, 1987: 11-12). The school of Subaltern Studies analysed the similar emergence of (nationalist) histories which parallels the imagining of nations in non-western countries from the 19th century onwards. The writing of history presupposes a conception of a well-defined, autonomous and coherent communal self evolving over time, or, in other words, *'the consciousness of a solidarity that is supposed to act itself out in history'* (Chatterjee, 1993: 84). Indeed, history-writing rests on a conception of past happenings as related between them in a coherent and meaningful manner and as related to a social centre whose story is constituted by these happenings. The writing of history also implies the representation of this social centre as a community whose coherence and continuity is preserved over time and which undergoes a certain evolution (or "progress"). Thus, history is conceived as the story of a people and/ or a country, hence it is part of the imagining of the nation (id.: 95-98). In this sense, history constitutes a *'biography (...) of the nation-state'* (Chakrabarty, 1992b: 52)⁶⁰.

Such a representation of past events supports the emergence and strengthening of nation and national identity. Firstly, it pictures the existence of the nation as a given, continuous and autonomous community and thereby legitimises nationalist claims to independence. History writing is also part and parcel of the nationalist project to control the representation of oneself and to display the specificity and richness of national identity (Chatterjee, 1993: 76-77, 109-113). Above all, the representation of the national past contributes to support and strengthen the sense of national cohesion. Because it tells the story of the nation-state, history homogenises past happenings and actors as part of the pre-national past. Thus, *'the enterprise of writing History in the singular, with a singular collective subject, arose precisely in order to give nations a past'* (Pandey, 1997: 5). In the process, individuals are subsumed in "the people" and "the nation" while their memories are modified and reframed as "national history" (id.; Chakrabarty, 1992b: 52-53). As a result, the cohesion of the community in the past and its continuity over time are established as the dominant representation. Such a representation of the nation's cohesion however implies that certain events and voices be marginalised or reshaped. Firstly, certain histories and groups are de-emphasised in the representation of the nation. Thus, in India, the Muslim past is regarded as foreign and external to the "national past" (Chatterjee, 1993: 109-116). In

⁵⁹ While the works of Subaltern Studies writers focus on India (often through very detailed monographs), these authors assert that their approach and findings can be useful to analyse other non-western cases and to rethink Western concepts and approaches. See for instance Chatterjee, 1993: 13; Chakrabarty, 1992a: 1; Pandey, 1997.

this sense, what is defined in the present as the nation rests on and impacts on what is defined as the national past. Another silencing is that of the subalterns whose actions and consciousness are subsumed in those of the elite (Chakrabarty, 1992b: 21-22, 52-53; Amin, 1995: 192). In addition, divisive events or events which do not fit the dominant (nationalist) narrative can be reshaped so as to enhance –by contrast– the dominant tale (Amin, 1995: 1-3). Finally, the nationalist representation of the past also silences the repression and violence that took place at the origin of the nation (Chakrabarty, 1992b: 21-22). Because it thus portrays the nation as a coherent and autonomous community rich of its past, history contributes to form citizens and nationals by favouring awareness of and identification with national identity (Chakrabarty, 1992a: 19; Chakrabarty, 1992b: 56-57). Thus, “*history*” is one of the most important ways in which we learn to identity ourselves with the nation and its highest representative, the state’ (Chakrabarty, 1992b: 57). To this end, states more or less self-consciously promote their own representation of the national past. In particular, history is ‘*a compulsory part of the education of the modern person in all countries today*’ so that knowledge of, care for and identification with one's national identity be strengthened (Chakrabarty, 1992a: 19; see also, Chakrabarty, 1992b: 56-57).

In conclusion, the representation of the national past is intrinsically linked with and part of the emergence and development of national identity; in particular, the representation of national cohesion rests on and requires a shared representation of the national past, hence involving selective rememberings and forgettings. As part of this organic intertwining between emerging national identity and the representation of the national past, the latter is constituted as a homogenising, authoritative, statist and nationalist representation. In what follows, I examine the more or less self-conscious processes and strategies which underpin this nationalist reconstruction of the past.

4.3- Public history and the construction of a national past

In this section, I will examine the role and modalities of action of the (nation-)states in shaping and displaying their representations of the national past. This reshaping is partly unself-conscious. As analysed in the Chapter Two, the past which is remembered and commemorated is the past which is socially constructed and made available; the shaping of the representation of the past is therefore intrinsically informed by past and present power-relations and references to the social centre, i.e. the nation-state (Foucault, 1989: 28; Schudson, 1995: 359). However, the reshaping of the representation of the past is often self-conscious and deliberate: it has often been a priority high on the agenda of new regimes and nationalist movements promoting nation-building (Zerubavel, 1995: 214). It is all the

⁶⁰ Anderson develops exactly the same image of history as biography of the nation (1991: 204-206).

easier for the state to mould the representation of the past as its agency and impact are decisive ones. Indeed, as evoked above, *'memory-making is an act of enterprise'* since for any person or event to be remembered it must first be deemed commemorable by a group of people who must have the influence to convince others to commemorate it (Schwartz, 1990: 102-104). In this perspective, the various individuals, groups and institutions acting in the public sphere –and above all the state– can be seen as the main 'memory-makers' in society. Thus *'the history which became part of the kind of knowledge or the ideology of nation, state or movement is (...) what has been selected, written, pictured, popularised and institutionalised by those whose function it is to do so'* (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 1983: 12). The representation of the national past shaped and displayed by the state has a decisive and pre-eminent impact because of the great authority and legitimacy of those forms of knowledge and those institutions which are supported or promoted by the state (Rowlands, 1994: 136-137). Thus, *'nation-states have the capacity to enforce their truth games'* (Chakrabarty, 1992a: 19). This is all the more so insofar as they have at their disposal a range of activities which more or less directly impact on the representation of the past, especially those which are part of public history.

Public history is the field of historical production concerned with the application of historical skills and insights as well as the promotion of history outside the academia. It covers such activities as archives, museums, preservation of landscape and monuments, pageants, etc. (Howe and Kemp, 1989). State cultural institutions, universities, private historical societies, local authorities can all contribute to produce and display public history. The latter is thus at the crossroads of the official modelling of past representation (via cultural institutions) and of the popular reception and experiencing of it.

Several components of public history can be highlighted. A first domain is that of museums and monuments which constitute spatial loci of memory. They materialise remembrance in a tangible fashion and thereby portray the past in a particular way and establish it as a visible landmark. Museums strongly influence the representation of the past insofar as the authority, credibility and legitimacy of their displays are considerable. Indeed, their image is one of highly qualified expertise and "scientificity". Therefore, while *'exhibits are informed by the cultural, historical, institutional, and political contexts of the people who make them'* (Butler, 1998:5; see also Davison, 1992: 2; Brown, Wanless and Becker, 1992: 3-8), visitors are often unaware of the politics of representation, assuming that displays are simply factual and accurate (Davison, 1992: 10). A limit to the influence of museums on the public representation of the past is that while they contribute to spread historical knowledge, they attract only the better educated part of the population (id.: 14). On the other hand, monuments are very popular sites of public remembrance. They have a large influence on public representation of the past since they allow group members to physically come to a place materialising remembrance. Furthermore, they offer the possibility to concretely re-enact the past in commemorations. Such visits and ceremonies have a strong emotional impact on the audience; they thereby make remembrance easier and favour affective attachment to the past. A second –more immaterial– component of public

history is composed of public holidays and national symbols. Public holidays are temporal sites of memory which have a major role in shaping our basic views of the past. Indeed, people are familiar with them from early childhood since they are often part of early socialisation and education at school (Zerubavel, 1995: 217). Moreover, they are highly repetitive and are part of everyday life (would it be only by being marked by a day's leave, shop closures, etc.). They are thus a well-known feature of social life, even though people do not always know their meaning. At the same time, public holidays are strongly informed by the dominant representation of the past. The public holiday cycle is determined by the government and reveals which aspects of the past are deemed central and which are left to oblivion (id.: 216). Moreover, public holidays are relatively flexible and de-contextualised narratives of the events they commemorate since the only constraining frame is that of the date of the event/ the commemoration. The content and temporal boundaries of the commemorative narrative can thus be defined quite freely in order to provide a specific interpretation and '*to accentuate a desired moral lesson*' (id.). In a similar fashion, official national symbols (flag, anthem, coat of arms) are chosen by the government while being very common in everyday life and having very fluid and easily influenced meanings. Finally, public history is reflected in major public addresses. The latter can overtly or covertly convey representations of national identity and of the national past. These addresses are interesting to study since they display the image of the national past as the main governmental actors conceive it and want to publicise it. They are also revealing since they are largely mediated and commented upon, thereby contributing to shape public discourse on the national past.

The moulding of the representation of the past in the context of the nation-state amounts to produce a relatively homogenous and authoritative⁶¹ version of past events. It has often been analysed as a shift from memories to history. A common distinction is drawn between memory as a rather spontaneous recollection of the past of a specific group and history as a more detached and universal account of past events (Halbwachs, 1980: 78-87; Nora, 1989: 8-9). In the context of nation-formation, history takes control of memory in that it classifies and organises into a hierarchy of accuracy and validity –according to its claimed scientificity and objectivity– the diversity of individual and collective recollections. Such history is thereby '*universal, unitary and unifying: it invites all the members of a society, however diverse their situations and respective points of view, to be united in a collective past*' (Wachtel, 1986: 217). It thereafter appears constituted as a "national memory" absorbing and reshaping group memories into history or, as analysed by the Subaltern school, combining and conflating all voices and events in the "national past". What is important in this shift from memories to history is therefore the transformation of multiple and relative memories into a unified and authoritative (or sometimes even official) representation of the past claiming universal knowledge and the authority of

⁶¹ In this context, "authoritative" refers to two different levels: firstly, the representation of the national past is an authoritative version endowed with effects of truth and power and secondly, the moulding of this representation results, to a relatively large extent, from the actions of state members and institutions.

“effects of truth”. National history-making is therefore to be achieved through specific processes and strategies of homogenisation and officialisation of group memories. In her article *The effects of Truth: representations of the past and the imagining of community*, Anna-Maria Alonso underlined the nature of national history as official history and state project (1988: 41). She distinguished three main strategies of re-appropriation by the state of the memories of the subordinated and marginalised groups (1988: 44-45). *Naturalisation* is the process whereby actors and events are reified by being represented as objective categories or natural essences and thereafter by being used as “raw facts” by official history. *Departicularisation* is a form of universalisation and decontextualisation of specific historical facts so as to be made suitable for and appropriable by the dominant, all-encompassing representation. Finally, *idealisation* concerns the “cleaning” or refinement of diverse historical traditions so as to make them acceptable for all and adaptable to nationalist values.

To conclude, the modelling of the representation of the past in the national context favours a selective, homogenising and authoritative reshaping of the past and thereby provides all nationals with a representation of the past as a shared and national past. This in turn fosters identification with a national identity and reinforces the image of the continuity and coherence of the national community, hence nation-ness.

Conclusion of Part One

In conclusion of this first part, we can sketch the following framework, based on a constructivist approach to collective representations of the past and of identity. There exist in society collective representations of the past which are borne by specific groups or society as a whole and which are part of collective representations of society. As social constructs, these collective representations of the past are moulded –and constantly reshaped– under the influence of the social milieu, within certain limits of factuality, credibility, significance and relevance to the present. They thus embody and reflect the social factors and processes which have a shaping influence on them (values, institutions, power, rhetorical forms, etc.); when deconstructed, they can therefore provide revealing insights into these factors and processes. At the same time, collective representations of the past are closely intertwined with collective identities. Indeed, collective identity rests on humans' understanding and representation of the features and evolution of the collective self over time. The group's representation of its past is thus central to the formation and content of collective identity. In the specific case of national identity, one can unveil an organic link between the emergence and modelling of national identity on the one hand, and the shaping of a consistent representation of the “national” past on the other hand. The shaping of this representation of the national past involves selective rememberings and forgettings so as to provide the image of a shared national past and thereby promote national cohesion. The representation of the national past thus fosters the sense of national identity. At the same time, it is shaped as an homogenising and authoritative representation of the past: it is endowed with authority and publicity while being moulded by dominant discursive practices and being to some extent moulded from above through processes of public history. Finally, collective representations of the past are objectified and magnified through public commemorations which are at the core of the processes of formation and evolution of collective representations of the past and collective identity. Indeed, commemorations embody in concrete sites of memory those aspects of the past which are deemed the most significant, hence setting the past in specific images. They thereby magnify the selectivity and value-judgement at work in any representation of the past. Moreover, by being embodied in specific sites of memory, the collective representations of the past enshrined in commemorations are made more visible and durable, hence being significant landmarks for society and spreading the dominant representation of the past. At the same time, commemorations provide a locus to display variants or alternative representations of the past and to contest the dominant representation. Finally, by thus concretising but also modifying collective representations of the past, commemorations are at the core of the formation and evolution of collective identity, especially at the national level where commemorations are often largely and deliberately developed to embody the nation and its past. In the next part, I will draw on this framework to analyse the emergence of a renewed South African identity in the post-apartheid era and to examine the corollary modelling of a “new” national past.

∞ PART TWO ∞

THE “NEW” SOUTH AFRICA AND ITS PAST

Introduction of Part Two

Against the backdrop of the theoretical framework of the first part, Part Two is dedicated to analysing the interplay between the formation of a new national identity and the shaping of the public representation of the past in post-apartheid South Africa¹. As seen in Part One, there is a close intertwining between national identity and the public representation of the past insofar as the latter plays a part in the formation, content and evolution of the former while being influenced and shaped by it. In the “new” South Africa, this interplay appears even closer and more significant since dealing with the past has been put at the core of the formulation of the new identity and since it has been deliberately promoted by public actors and means. The new vision for South Africa rests on breaking with the past and fostering democratisation, reconciliation and national unity. These four elements are the cornerstone of the new regime, at once goals and basic principles. They all imply dealing with the past by acting upon its legacy and its representation; hence, they all involve overt or covert references to the past and intertwine with its current representation.

In this study, I examine collective representations, their shaping through discursive practices and what this reveals of broader social processes, power configurations and dominant values. I focus specifically on the interplay between public representations of the past and collective identity as well as on the crossroads and confluence of rhetorical forms. Evocations of these crossroads and points of congestion in discourse and of these mutually reinforcing effects between public representations of national identity and of the past constitute a tangled web underlying this second part. While I am aware that such an approach implies some repetitions, this pitfall seems inevitable insofar as I seek to highlight and analyse these processes of interplay and these points of congestion and combination while examining them from different perspectives.

I will firstly examine the nation-building discourse developed by the new regime, with a view of fostering the emergence of a democratic and inclusive national identity. I will then show that dealing with the past –through the promotion of a new public representation of the past– has been conceived as a cornerstone of the reconstruction of South African identity and society. In the following chapter, I will analyse how the emerging national identity establishes, promotes and strives for the aforementioned processes of breaking with apartheid, democratisation, reconciliation and nation-building, thereby resting on and embodying a certain image of the past. Finally, I will study the content of this new dominant public representation of the past and show how it reflects and supports the national identity narrative. Thus, while both Chapters 5 and 7 deal with national identity and Chapters 5 and 7 with public representations of the past, the two first chapters (5 and 6) are concerned

¹ Parts of Part Two rest on a research paper submitted for the 1997 Masters course ‘Civil wars, State reforms and Human Rights’ by Professor Mamdani. This paper was entitled ‘*the politics of memory in the “new South Africa”: dealing with the past as a basis for reconciliation and nation-building*’ and focused on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

with the motives, objectives, values and modalities underlying and modelling the process of reshaping the collective representations (of national identity and of the past) and the last chapters examine the content of these collective representations in the forms of the narratives which concretise them. As a corollary, Chapters 5 and 6 tend to provide more programmatic and expository accounts while Chapters 7 and 8 include a more critical perspective.

Chapter Five:

Nation-building in post-apartheid South Africa

In South Africa, since the mid-1980s, the idea of a new, more encompassing nation has been widely debated in academic and political circles (Liebenberg, 1994: 15-16). With the prospect of a new regime, the issue of engaging in a nation-building process became part of the public agenda. Even before the transition process gave its shape to the “new” South Africa, commentators foresaw that the post-apartheid state would embark on building a nation –and that such evolution would be perceived as natural and ineluctable. Thus, Nolutshungu predicted in 1993 that ‘*all the people who live within (South African) boundaries (...) will not only become citizens but will be declared “a people”, “the people”, and, before long, “a nation”*’ (607; see also Simpson, 1993: 18). This project of nation-building is, however, controversial. Some commentators have contested both the possibility and the desirability of nation-building in South Africa. First, these commentators have dismissed the possibility of building a South African nation because the cleavages –resulting from both cultural diversity and the polarisation of society inherited from apartheid– are still too sharp (Boyce, 1997: 1; Nolutshungu, 1993: 609; Simpson, 1993: 19; Degenaar, 1990: 11-12). The very desirability of such a process has also been challenged. The definite trend in academic literature is against nation-building which is deemed not only impossible but also intrinsically *Jacobin* and undemocratic since it would constitute a state-promoted homogenising process (Boyce, 1997: 2; Degenaar, 1990: 12; Liebenberg, 1994: 16-17; Mattes, 1997: 7-8). Instead, these scholars assert their preference for a civic or patriotic democracy based on constitutionalism and attachment to the state as well as on democratic values and processes (Adam, 1994; Boyce, 1997: 5; Degenaar, 1990: 12, 15; Nolutshungu, 1993: 619-623; Simpson, 1993: 20).

Foremost amongst the advocates of the democratic community thesis, the South African philosopher Johan Degenaar wrote a very influential article in 1990, entitled *The myth of a South African nation*. He defined the nation as the congruence of culture and state power and distinguished two types of nation: the first one consists in the congruence of communal (allegedly homogeneous) culture and power; the second type refers to multi-cultural situations wherein the commonality is to be found not in a communal culture but in common loyalty to a transcendent factor (1990: 2). Degenaar totally dismissed the first type for being primordialist, exclusivist and incompatible with constitutional limitations to the sovereignty of the people and for ignoring social plurality and constraining individualism (id.: 11-12). Within the second type, he isolated four transcendent factors which may constitute a national commonality: a common political culture, a culture of modernisation, a socialist culture and a democratic culture (id.: 7-11). Assessing the first three factors, Degenaar criticised each of them for particular pitfalls but also underlined for all three of them the risk that they

may be a concealed form of dominant culture, constraining rather than transcending communal cultures and resorting to non-democratic means (id.: 12). As for the last transcendent factor, that of a pluralist democratic culture², Degenaar argued that referring to the concept of nation in this case is misleading insofar as democratic culture by definition accommodates and depoliticises communal cultures, thereby breaking the congruence culture/power intrinsic to the concept of nation (id.). In conclusion, he invited South Africans to disregard nation-building and to dedicate themselves to creating democracy, best suited to tackle political, economic and social problems and to accommodate plurality (id.: 14-15).

In the early 1990s, a definite trend of academic discourse has thus been to challenge the soundness of a nation-building project. This view has however been overtaken in the “new” South Africa by the strong commitment of the state to nation-building and by its actual effort to build a nation through material and symbolic means. In this chapter, I will seek firstly to establish that, in the new dispensation, there is a strong political will to promote nation-building, with a deliberate focus on its subjective dimension, namely the emergence of a national identity. Secondly, I will show that the dominant project of national identity (and, beyond, of nation-building) is characterised by two features: the new South African identity is meant to be an inclusive and democratic national identity. I will thus refer to Degenaar’s analysis in *The myth of a South African nation*, while differing from his conclusions. Indeed, while the new dispensation has engaged in promoting a democratic culture and identity, this does not aim at the construction of a “mere” democratic community. Rather it is conceived as part of fostering a new national identity so that the current South African project can be defined as that of the construction of a democratic and inclusive civic nation. I need to underline from the outset that my approach in this chapter will be determined by two specific perspectives. Firstly, I will focus on one particular dimension of nation-building, its symbolic aspect, i.e. the emergence of a national identity. Indeed, the latter is a matter of collective representations and is shaped through discursive practices, hence corresponds to my general focus in this study; further, it has been deliberately promoted by the new government. Secondly, I will focus the analysis at the level of public discursive practices to determine the features of national identity which the new government seeks/claims to promote and/or which are shaped under the influence of broader social values and processes.

² Degenaar argued for a specific model of democracy, that of pluralist democracy. For him, the latter entails firstly to allow multi-party competition, and secondly to protect social pluralism and to foster mutual respect (1990: 11).

5.1- Striving for national identity

Following Gagiano³, I will view nation-building as the process which entails '*the integration of communally diverse and/or territorially discreet units into the institutional framework of a single state and the concomitant transfer of a sense of common political identity and loyalty to the symbolic community defined by the founding ideology of such a state*' (emphasis added) (quoted in Degenaar, 1990: 2). In line with the constructivist approach to national identity and with the distinction between nation-building and the formation of national identity examined in Part One, this definition highlights the constructive dimension of the nation-building process, aiming amongst other things at the emergence of a new political (national) identity. It further underscores the symbolic aspect of the national community and of the collective identity resulting from this process. Moreover, it emphasises the central role of the state in nation-building.

In post-apartheid South Africa, the new regime has resorted to a strong discourse of nation-building from the start (Boyce, 1997: 3). This state of affairs partly results from the ideological commitment of the ANC coalition to nation-building. It also stems from the influence of the international community where the nation-state is the dominant "norm" of existence for newly formed regimes and a quasi-condition for recognition by other countries (Anderson, 1991: 123; Nolutshungu, 1993: 612-613; Simpson, 1993: 18). Above all, the commitment to nation-building can be explained by a concrete concern with fostering the sense of collective identity and thereby both ensuring the cohesion of society and strengthening the new state and democratic order. This recourse to nation-building and national identity seems all the more necessary in South Africa as the society is deeply divided and as the new regime is fragile. The enormous societal cleavages which must be overcome in order to achieve national unity are indeed twofold: South Africa is a multi-cultural country of great social and cultural pluralism; above all, it is a society extremely polarised socially, economically and politically, as a result of the divisions bequeathed by colonialism and apartheid. Thus, opening the 1998 debate on '*Reconciliation and Nation-building*' in the National Assembly, Deputy President Mbeki defined nation-building in the South African context as '*the construction of the reality and the sense of common nationhood which would result from the abolition of the disparities in the quality of life among South Africans based on the racial, gender and geographic inequalities we have all inherited from the past*' (1998: 3). This situation of great social divisiveness, which undermines the cohesion of the society, also weakens the new regime. Indeed, the tremendous social and economic inequalities are likely to create tensions over the allocation of resources while dramatic political polarisation would threaten the legitimacy and authority of the government and reduce the chance of reaching a stable order. Other factors also have a part in the fragility of the regime, especially during

the initial period: they are, for instance, the rapidity of the regime transition, the threat of intervention by the military, the lack of democratic tradition, the culture of violence, or the lack of a substantial non-white middle-class. ✓

Promoting national cohesion is, however, a lengthy process and, in particular, achieving the relative socio-economic harmonisation necessary for national cohesion is still far from being done. New leaders have thus deliberately emphasised subjective factors, namely the formation of a national identity, as a decisive aspect of nation-building. Deputy President Mbeki strikingly expressed this view in his address when stating: '(...) *we have to deal with two interrelated elements. The first of these is that we must accept that it will take time to create the material base for nation building and reconciliation. The second and related element is that we must therefore agree that it is the subjective factor, accompanied by tangible process in the creation of a new material base, which must take the lead in sustaining the hope and conviction among the people that the project of reconciliation and nation building will succeed*' (emphasis added) (id.: 5). As a result, the new leaders have strongly promoted the formation of a new national identity, either by directly evoking its existence and content or by encouraging South Africans to identify together as a nation and to develop a sense of shared belonging. To that end, they have resorted to a range of images, themes, narratives and symbols which I will analyse in Chapter Seven.

This rhetoric of national identity is expected to further two goals: promoting national cohesion and supporting the new regime. Firstly, the discourse on national identity aims at achieving and preserving national cohesion and at containing internal cleavages. As noted in Part One, the national identity narrative is an attempt to bring about the unification of the community (Bhabha, 1994: 149-151). Specifically, in South Africa, it is meant to encompass subgroup identities in an inclusive and tolerant frame, thereby curtailing the tensions these engender (Alexander, 1995: 1)⁴. The discourse of national identity further seeks to go beyond political and social identities and divisions inherited from the past by creating a new transcendent collective identity. Significantly, both in legislation and in official discourse, reconciliation is strongly and continuously linked with national unity and the formation of a new inclusive national identity (Crouzel, 1996: 21-22; Wilson, 1996: 14-18). Secondly, the discourse of national identity is expected to strengthen and legitimise the new state and democratic dispensation, especially during the transition period when the latter are weaker, more contested and have much to achieve (Wilson, 1996: 9-10, 18; Mattes, 1997: 2; Simpson, 1993: 18). The new government and some jurists have thus resorted to cultural discourse –and, in particular to Africanist references– as part of the rhetoric of national identity, in order to concretise and popularise the new constitutional arrangement. This is especially the case when one deals with issues of “community” and

³ Gagliano J., 1990, 'The Contenders', in *The Myths Makers: the elusive bargain for South Africa's future*, Esterhuysen W. and du Toit P. eds., Halfway House: Southern Book Publishers.

⁴ Conversely, however, it can also foster the mobilisation of these identities and even spark off tensions between

reconciliation (Wilson, 1996: 10). A first instance of this practice can be found in the discourse describing “traditional” African societies as intrinsically democratic, highlighting the “tradition” of debate, consensus and consultation of the people by the king (Mandela, 1994a: 20). Another instance is the widespread use of the term *ubuntu* which refers to an African sense of humanity, community, and solidarity. In post-apartheid South Africa, *ubuntu* has been referred to mainly in connection with issues of reconciliation and nation-building; it is evoked in the Interim Constitution, in the new ethos of the civil service, in the act founding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and in some judgements of the Constitutional Court (Wilson, 1996: 10-14, Crouzel, 1996: 22). At the same time, it has been redefined more inclusively so that it not only characterises African society but also applies to all those professing such humanism. The rhetoric of national identity is also used to foster the legitimacy and authority of the new government and to reinforce the durability of the new dispensation. Indeed, this rhetoric is expected to favour (a quicker) identification with the new regime, hence to bolster the legitimacy and authority of its bureaucratic apparatus. Moreover, it is expected to found a sense of belonging and common good, over and above the individual-rational commonality, at a time when major policy choices on the allocation of resources and the re-organisation of society are likely to give rise to tensions and foster divisions (Mbeki, 1998). In this sense, democratic ‘*state-building and nation-building (have to) remain conjoined in the “new” South Africa*’ (Wilson, 1996: 10) insofar as social cleavages and strains on the new regime are so important that a strong feeling of identification with and belonging to the community and the state are needed.

To conclude, in post-apartheid South Africa, the new regime has embarked on a nation-building process and, in particular, has strongly and deliberately promoted the formation of a national identity. The emergence of national identity is indeed expected and meant to foster national cohesion and support the new regime. In the next section, I will show that this post-apartheid shaping of a national identity is part of a project of building a democratic and inclusive civic nation.

5.2- Promoting an inclusive and democratic national identity

The national identity and the broader nation-building process which are shaped in the “new” South Africa are informed by a specific vision of the nation, that of a democratic and inclusive civic nation. In this section, I will examine this model of the nation and analyse how it is reflected and promoted through various discursive practices (official addresses, legislation, dominant themes of public discourse). It is important to note from the outset that while discursive practices are consequential in that they contribute to shape social reality, they are very unevenly influential and

them or with the national identity if it constitutes a constraining imposition of nationhood (Boyce, 1997: 3).

actualised. Thus, they can have a material aspect (laws, for institutions) or be merely rhetorical (official addresses); they can be promoted from above only or more or less widely shared and endorsed by society; they can reflect specific intents and goals of the government and/or broader social channels and processes. It is also important to note that, in post-apartheid South Africa, national identity is a very open and debated issue so that the model which I will study coexists (and competes) with other models and conceptions (even, at times, within official discourse).

5.2.1- A model of an inclusive civic nation

In the literature on nation, nationalism and nation-building, a major distinction is usually made between two models of the nation. Thus, Anthony Smith opposes the “ethnic” conception of the nation, which rests on a definition of the nation as a community of descent and an emphasis on vernacular culture, to the “territorial” or “civic” conception of the nation (1991: 9-13)⁵. This second model is centred around four main features: the emphasis on a shared territory as the homeland for all inhabitants; the elaboration of common laws and institutions as a basis for the civic community; legal equality and citizenship for all nationals; and, finally, a common civic culture and ideology, i.e. a set of shared understandings, aspirations, sentiments and ideas. Smith underlines that these two models are ideal-types and that they are always combined in different proportions and forms in actual nations and nationalisms.

In South Africa, prior to the democratic transition, the model of the ethnic nation –i.e. the congruence of ethnic culture and power– was the dominant conception. Given the South African ethnic diversity, this ethnic nationalism took variously exclusivist forms depending on which groups were defined as ethnic communities and therefore deemed entitled to establish themselves as nations⁶ (Degenaar, 1990: 3-6). In post-apartheid South Africa, national identity is a fluid and much debated issue and a wide range of conceptions and approaches coexist. While some voices still promote exclusivism (Afrikaner nationalism, certain exclusivist Africanist trends), the prevailing conception – and that officially promoted by the new government– is in favour of the inclusion of all South Africans in a single nation, thereby breaking with the formerly dominant ethnic nationalism. Two factors can explain this break: firstly, the inclusive tradition characteristic of the resistance movement to apartheid, and secondly, the nature of the regime change as a negotiated transition. First, the main tradition in the resistance movement was an inclusive one both in that it was a national movement

⁵ The “ethnic” nation corresponds to the first type of nation in Degenaar’s typology (congruence of communal culture and power) while the “civic” nation corresponds to the second type (Degenaar, 1990: 1-2).

⁶ Thus, while the only nation recognised in 1910 was the white nation (either defined as the Afrikaner *volk* or more inclusively), during apartheid, the scheme establishing bantustans and homelands acknowledged a number of “African ethnic groups” as entitled to qualify as nations and beyond to form their own state.

whose vision encompassed the whole territory and in that it favoured non-racialism. Since the beginning of the 20th century, resistance to apartheid was not conceived as a sectional movement organised on a local basis and seeking the secession of local entities⁷. Rather it was conceived or organised as a national movement of the disenfranchised whose aim was to obtain rights of citizenship and to become part of a united South Africa. Further, the resistance movement aimed at “liberating” the greater whole of the South African territory, including the homelands and bantustans (Simpson, 1993: 20). Moreover, while the dominant form of resistance of the non-white population to colonialism and apartheid in the 20th century took the shape of nationalism, the latter did not aim mainly at ‘*evicting the foreign oppressor or assuring the cultural ascendance of a suppressed nation*’ (Nolutshungu, 1993: 608). Instead, it was mitigated by the influence of non-racialism and class ideologies, originating in particular from the Communist Party. African nationalism was therefore typically formulated in inclusive terms⁸ (id.; Alexander, 1995: 1-2). In particular, the official stand of the African National Congress has been in favour of the inclusion of all “ethnic” groups in one common and united territorial nation⁹ (Adam, 1994: 45; Degenaar, 1990: 14). A second aspect tipping the balance in favour of the inclusion of all South Africans in a single national community has been the nature and content of the transition from apartheid to the “new” South Africa. The regime change did not occur as a result of a military overthrow or the collapse of the old order but through a negotiated process in which the white minority preserved a large part of its power and privileges. Consequently, the white community has been included as part of the new nation and its interests and specificities have been largely accommodated in the new dispensation. Further, in spite of strong pressure from certain minority groups during the transition process, the disintegration of South Africa (and the homelands) into new states or a loose confederation was avoided, and the former homelands were reintegrated in post-apartheid South Africa (Nolutshungu, 1993: 611). Therefore, the “new” South Africa is based upon and establishes the wholeness of the population and the integrity of the territory.

Further, the founding constitution of post-apartheid South Africa provides a basis for the construction of an inclusive civic nation. Thus, the first three features of the model of civic nation can all be found in the 1996 Constitution. The first feature is the commitment to “territorial nationalism” which implies that national belonging is based not on any cultural feature or identity but on the identification of all South Africans with a common territory (Simpson, 1993: 13). The Preamble to the 1996 Constitution thus states that ‘*South Africa belongs to all who live in it*’ (Republic of South Africa,

⁷ Even for Inkhata, which was rooted in a specific territory and community, the main aim of the struggle during apartheid was not to achieve the secession and independence of their stronghold but to oppose apartheid.

⁸ In this regard, even Africanist movements (Pan African Congress, Black Consciousness) did accept the participation of whites (of “goodwill”) in the future dispensation (Nolutshungu, 1993: 608).

⁹ This dominant commitment notwithstanding, there have been and still are ambiguities and tensions between non-racialism and Africanism within its ranks (Boraine, 1989: 5; Filatova, 1997).

1996: 1). Inclusiveness and disjunction between power and cultural or racial features are further confirmed by the constitutional definition of South Africa as a non-racial democracy in which ethnic groups are defined and protected as sub-national communities (Preamble and section 235 on the right of self-determination) (Bekker, 1997: 19-22; Degenaar, 1994: 13). The 1996 Constitution also establishes a unified and universally shared system of laws and institutions. Moreover, it guarantees the commonality and equality of the rights and duties of citizenship (entrenched in the Bill of Rights) (Bekker, 1997). Therefore, the constitution establishes the first three tenets of a civic nation and constructs them as commonalities linking all South Africans, thereby setting up the basics for all South Africans to share in a democratic and inclusive civic nation. ✓

To conclude, given both the pre-dominantly inclusive commitment of the ANC coalition and the inclusive form of the negotiated transition, the ethnic model of the nation has been rejected as a vision for the “new” South Africa: in multi-cultural societies such as South Africa, it would entail the exclusion of all those who do not belong to the dominant culture and/or a *Jacobin* attempt to homogenise the whole of society into this culture (Degenaar, 1990: 6). Instead, the conception of the nation officially promoted in post-apartheid South Africa is the more inclusive project of a civic nation which has been inscribed in the institutional dispensation of the new regime. As a corollary, democratic culture is promoted and expected to constitute a shared political culture and complementary basis for the new South African nation.

5.2.2- *Fostering a common democratic culture*

To analyse the mechanisms whereby a national identity is shaped, Smith constructs a typology which differentiates nation-building processes in four situations: pre-independence and post-independence civic nationalisms and pre-independence and post-independence ethnic nationalisms (1991: 82-83). Post-apartheid South Africa is here considered to fall in the category of post-independence nationalisms since the new regime replaces the domination by a white community bequeathed by colonialism and constitutes the first dispensation in which the majority of the population has full political rights and participates in the government of the country. Specifically, it is a post-independence civic nationalism insofar as it has opted for a civic model of nation. Smith underlines that, among post-independence nationalisms, those which promote a civic conception of the nation are ‘*integration nationalisms (...) (which) will seek to bring together and integrate into a new political community often disparate ethnic population*’ (id.: 82). More precisely, outside Europe, there have been two main ways leading to the creation of civic nations in post-independence time. The first one is the process whereby the dominant ethnic core of the new state is taken as source of inspiration and model for the making of the new national political identity (id.: 110-111). The second path consists

in an attempt to create a '*supra-ethnic political culture*' for the new political community, hence bypassing reference to or framing on any pre-existing (allegedly primordial) features (id.: 112-113). In this second conception, the objective is to create a new transcendent and unifying culture which would serve as a basis for the emergence of feelings of shared belonging and common loyalty to the state and the community¹⁰ (Degenaar, 1990: 7). In South Africa, in the absence of a dominant "ethnic" or cultural core, and given the commitment to inclusive and democratic nation-building, an all-encompassing supra-ethnic political culture is meant to become the basis for the new national identity¹¹ (Simpson, 1993: 20). In line with the democratic and inclusive dispensation set up in 1994, democratic culture has been given priority among the four possible transcendent cultures listed by Degenaar (see above, introduction of this chapter); it has been put forward to constitute the basis for an emerging inclusive national identity.

The establishment of democracy as dominant discourse of the "new" South Africa and the objective to entrench it as a common transcendent culture result from the confluence of various circumstantial, ideological, structural and functional factors. Firstly, democracy is regarded as part of the very essence and *raison d'être* of the "new" South Africa: as opposed to apartheid, the new regime is rests on representative government, the guarantee of and respect for basic rights and freedoms, universal citizenship and the rule of law. This vision was asserted through the 1994 non-racial elections which concretised democracy and provided a founding ritual of the new dispensation (Crouzel, 1996: 18-19). Moreover, both the Congress Alliance and the white political elite feature democratic values – or at least democratic rhetoric – as part of their political traditions. The Congress Alliance was made of various –nationalist, socialist and liberal– traditions but has been decisively marked by a commitment to democratic practices and values and to constitutionalism, especially under the influence of its leaders (many of whom were jurists, such as Tambo, Mandela, and Asmal) (Wilson, 1996: 4). Moreover, some of the main aims of the resistance movement to apartheid were democratic objectives: obtaining rights of citizenship for all and establishing a representative government and the rule of law. On the other hand, within the white political elite, a tradition of liberalism and the rhetoric of human rights have also existed (for instance in the former Liberal Party or in the current Democratic Party), although they have usually been conceived to apply to the white population only (id.). Thus, some members of the former elite regarded apartheid as a democratic dispensation –albeit one restricted to "Whites" only. Thus, although the shift from an exclusivist regime to a multi-racial democracy constituted a

¹⁰ In this view, national culture is not defined in essential terms but '*as a particular sign system (...) which is open to other sign systems (...) a resource which influences other cultures and is influenced by them*' (Degenaar, 1990: 7).

¹¹ Irina Filatova however underlined the strengthening of Africanist tendencies (as illustrated in the ANC document *Nation formation and Nation building*, July 1997), especially as the 1999 elections approach. She nonetheless considered that this reinforcement does not necessarily constitute a major challenge for non-racialism, firstly because official commitment to non-racialism is constantly repeated and secondly because ANC discourse on nationalism is so fluid and open to debate that this document may only be the reflection of a minor or transient trend within the ANC/the government (Filatova, 1997; see also Wilson, 1996: 11; Taylor and Foster, 1997).

✓

dramatic change, democratic principles and rhetoric were already somehow part of the cultural and ideological background of (part of) the white elite. Democracy –albeit conceived in very different terms– was therefore a common language and shared value for South African political elites. In addition, the establishment of a common democratic ideology was made easier under the influence of the international context. Indeed, in the wake of the collapse of USSR and the changeover in Eastern Europe, the rhetoric of democratisation became the dominant discourse of the international community and democratisation was perceived as an irrepressible wave. In particular, since the early 1990s, a number of African leaders shifted their discourse and promoted a relative democratisation. This may have contributed to further entrenching the rhetoric and ideal of democracy in South Africa. Finally, within the South African context, democratic ideology and concerns were promoted at the beginning of the transition period since they constituted the major –and, at times, the sole– object of consensus between both sides in the negotiation process. Each side emphasised the democratic dimension of its political tradition and of its professed vision for the new South Africa. Furthermore, the focus on the procedures of negotiation and subsequently the writing of the constitution turned the highly controversial political debate on the future of the “new” South Africa into the more “technical” issue of writing down rules. Thus, *‘the constitution became the only viable political blueprint to bridge the chasm between seemingly incommensurable political positions’* (Wilson, 1996: 4-5; see also Crouzel, 1996: 21-22). Democracy was able to play this part because it constitutes a polysemous and broad ideology which can encompass very diverse views: from the vision of a socialist Azania to that of liberal consociational dispensation, people could all make use of democratic rhetoric and could all have democracy as framework of reference. Thus, the rhetoric of democracy and human rights functioned as a multi-layered discourse and was regarded as a goal and guarantee by both sides: on the one hand, millions of disenfranchised Blacks saw human rights as the restoration of full citizenship in a peaceful and just society; on the other hand, the white elite understood this rhetoric as the proof of *‘ANC’s commitment to an individualistic and liberal political economy’*, hence a guarantee against nationalisations or expropriations (Wilson, 1996, 5; see also, Foner, 1995: 168). Finally, democratic discourse has been spread through the constitutionalist rhetoric and ideology prevailing in the new public discourse. Constitutionalism consists in endowing the constitution (and other legal texts and processes) with a strong functional and symbolic power, regarding them as decisive in tackling many issues, but also as embodying and protecting the community (Wilson, 1996: 18-20; Dawes, 1996: 2-3). In post-apartheid South Africa, this perspective is embodied in the widespread use of democratic rhetoric (above all, of the language of human rights)¹² and by an intense legal activity as a tool to reform and reconcile the country (Wilson, 1996: 4-7, 19; Foner, 1995: 168). Further, constitutionalist ideology supports the conception that social cohesion and identity can stem from constitutional culture and patriotism. In this perspective, *‘it is envisaged that a communal culture will emerge from the*

¹² For instances of such rhetorical practice, see Asmal, 1992; Mandela, 1996y, 1996c, 1997f, and 1998f.

concrete praxis of citizenship', a human rights culture and the identification with a state of rights (Wilson, 1996: 6).

To sum up, during the transition period and in the "new" South Africa, democratic values and rhetoric have been established as a pre-dominant public discourse and common language between otherwise opposed groups; they are expected to emerge as new overarching political culture, hence to provide a basis for the constitution of a new national identity.

In addition to the promotion of democratic culture as common democratic culture and in addition to the creation of the institutional forms of an inclusive civic nation, a further commonality can be promoted to foster a sense of national identity and to support national cohesion in the form of a "communal" national culture. Indeed, apart from providing the legal-rational commonalities of territory, rule of law and citizenship, the fourth feature of a civic nation is to promote the sharing of a civic culture, i.e. common cultural symbols, values, experiences and understandings. Thanks to this civic culture, nationals are '*united, if not made homogenous, by common historical memories, myths, symbols and traditions*' (Smith, 1991: 11). Thus, beyond possessing a common citizenship –i.e. holding a South African identity document, having voting rights, etc.– and sharing in a common democratic culture –i.e. being committed to the Bill of Rights, believing in the virtues of debate and negotiation, or striving for equality–, the sense of belonging to the South African community also entails speaking certain languages, identifying with the homeland and certain symbols, sharing a past and so on. Many commentators precisely underline that, in spite of the persistent identification to (ethnic, religious and racial) subgroup identities, many South Africans express a pride in their South African citizenship and in their South African-ness and increasingly identify with the new state and territory (Mattes, 1997: 26-27; Simpson, 1993: 20; Adam, 1994: 47-48). While it is too early to tell whether democratic discourse and this fledgling "communal" national culture will constitute effective and enduring bases for a new South African identity, I will show in the remainder of this second part that the rhetoric of national identity very directly aims at fostering and supporting such a sense of identification with and belonging to the national community by promoting pride in and identification with values and cultural features as well as a common representation of the past and of the collective self.

To conclude, the cornerstone of reconstruction in post-apartheid South Africa has been an attempt to transcend the pluralism and polarisation of society so as to stabilise the new democratic dispensation, reconcile the people and preserve and strengthen social cohesion. In order to thus gather all South Africans in an overarching community, the new regime seeks to further the construction of a democratic and inclusive civic nation: the promotion of democratic culture is expected to entrench protection of and respect for social diversity and to allow the expression of this diversity while favouring the emergence of a common democratic culture and identity; the promotion of civic

nationhood –which reinforces the feeling of belonging to a community and of attachment to the state– is deemed necessary to foster social cohesion in an inclusive fashion, especially as long as great socio-economic unbalances persist. This project of construction of a democratic and inclusive civic nation encompasses both material and subjective aspects: it implies the establishment of a new constitutional order, redressing socio-economic unbalances, reconstruction of the country, moral and material compensation to victims, and so on. But it also necessitates acting upon collective representations of oneself and of other individuals and groups so as to establish a democratic and inclusive South African identity as an overarching identity. In order to act upon and transcend social differences and cleavages, a narrative of national identity –depicting South Africa as a democratic, reconciled and unified community – has taken shape in public discourse to foster the representation of (actual or imagined) commonalities and to portray South Africans as a community united in the present. The formation of such identity narrative further implies reshaping the representations of the past so as to make the very imagining of a national community possible in the present and so as to root the new national identity narrative in a congruent, credible, relevant and meaningful representation of the past. In the following chapters, I will firstly study the goals, modalities and channels of this process of reconstruction of the past; I will then analyse the nature and content of the new identity narrative; and I will finally examine the content of the new representation of the past and the interplay between this new narrative of the past and the broader identity narrative.

Chapter Six:

Reconstructing the South African past

In post-apartheid South Africa, dealing with the past has been conceived as a definite pre-requisite for achieving a new reconciled, peaceful and inclusive democratic national community. Dealing with the past encompasses two dimensions: addressing the material legacy of the past (economic and social inequalities, physical and psychological traumas, lack of education and unemployment of former political activists, etc.) and acting upon the representations of the past¹³. Insofar as this study examines collective representations and discursive practices, I will focus on this latter aspect. In this chapter, I will examine the need felt in post-apartheid South Africa to reshape the public representation of the past so as to deal with the past and act upon present realities as well as the modalities and channels of this reconstructive process. I will thus firstly show that in South Africa there has been a deliberate undertaking to reconstruct the representation of the past in line with the new dispensation and its goals. I will then examine the two main channels of public history through which the representation of the South African past is reshaped: the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (hereafter TRC) and its attempt to deal with past gross violations of human rights, and the culture and heritage policy concerned with cultural and historical diversity.

6.1-A voluntarist and presentist approach to the past

The current process of reshaping the past is based on the premise that the representation of the past –and its modification– can play a major part in modelling the “new” South Africa. This process can be characterised as a voluntarist and presentist reshaping of the representation of the past: it consists in a deliberate attempt to reconstruct the past and it is avowedly informed by the dominant values and goals of the new dispensation. First, I will examine why reshaping the representation of the past is deemed necessary, especially to secure the new democratic dispensation and to entrench reconciliation and national unity. I will then show that this undertaking to reshape the representation of the past is twofold: to address biases and silences of the former representation and to promote a representation which can be a shared representation of the past. Finally, I will analyse how this process of past reconstruction inherently gives rise to the emergence of a new authoritative public history.

¹³ However, these two aspects overlap and are sometimes distinguishable only intellectually; acting upon the representation of the past can contribute to address material issues. Thus, revealing information about past abuses can be a form of reparation for victims, improve psychological traumas, contribute to restore dignity, etc. Further, the representation of the past –and of its legacy– contributes to define those material issues which are deemed essential and need to be dealt with in priority. Thus, focusing the representation of the past on political activism and security forces while sidelining pass laws or forced removals is likely to entail addressing the material legacy of the former more than that of the latter.

6.1.1- The need to deal with the past

In post-apartheid South Africa, mainstream public discourse conceives the attitude of the South African society towards its past not as mere reminiscence but rather as a voluntarist handling of the past's legacy and representation (Boraine and al., 1994 and 1995; Asmal and al., 1996: 6-11; Davison, 1998: 147). As in the Zionist example studied by Zerubavel, the *'choice of an activist approach to the future (is) (...) intimately linked to an activist view of the past'* since both are part of the project of remodelling society and of founding a new identity (1995:25). This voluntarist approach to the past is inscribed in the Constitution. Thus, the Preamble to the 1996 Constitution starts with *'recognis(ing) the injustice of our past; (and) honour(ing) those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land'* and further states as the constitution's first goal to *'heal the divisions of the past'* (RSA, 1996: 1). This voluntarist approach to the past also constitutes a major aspect of the pre-dominant official discourse (Asmal, 1992; Asmal and al., 1996; Boraine and al., 1994 and 1995; Commission on national symbols, 1993; Kathrada, 1996b) and is further propounded by academics and representatives from civil society (Liebenberg, 1994 and 1996; Malan, 1994; Mamdani, 1996; Nuttal and Coetzee, 1998; Odendaal, 1996; Snyman, 1996; Storey, 1994).

In this context, dealing with the past through the reshaping of the public representation of the past is expected to foster two goals. Firstly, preserving the remembrance of the recent past and narrating it from the present is expected to support the new democratic dispensation: knowledge about and reckoning with apartheid's violence and injustice are deemed necessary to found apartheid's opposite, the new democracy and rule of law. In Part One, we saw that any narrative of the past is framed by a normative reference to the contemporary social order and dominant values (White, 1987). In post-apartheid South Africa, this normative reference consists in the values of democracy, reconciliation and national unity. By telling the story of the past, apartheid's violence, lack of democracy, injustice and divisiveness are contrasted with the (relative) peacefulness, inclusiveness, rule of law, universal franchise and commitment to democracy and justice of the "new" South Africa. The former are thereby morally denounced and the latter celebrated and fostered. The story of apartheid also constitutes the backdrop against which the Constitution and new legislation have been conceived and interpreted. Indeed, a range of constitutional provisions include a reference to the past and its legacy (Bill of rights, section 6 on official languages, etc.). These provisions *'act as reminders, constitutionally entrenched reminders, of an unpleasant past and an unequal present. As such, the courts will not be permitted altogether to forget the past when interpreting and applying the provisions of the constitution'* (Fagan, 1998: 250). Their *raison d'être* and significance are highlighted and reinforced by being intertwined and contrasted with the narrative of the apartheid past. *'The history of apartheid South Africa is thus primarily to be conceived of as a narrative foundation for the shared national identity which will secure a just constitutional or legal future'* (Dawes, 1996: 4-5; see also Asmal, 1992: 12-14).

Therefore, the story of the past told from the present of the “new” South Africa brings meaning and closure: by putting in perspective the old apartheid order and the new democratic one, it denounces the former and supports the latter.

Secondly, promoting a common representation of the past encompassing the stories and traditions of all South Africans in a respectful and inclusive manner is intended to foster reconciliation and national unity. The formerly dominant representation of the past undermined national cohesion by conveying demeaning images of non-white populations and compartementalising the diverse cultures in frozen stereotypes emphasising the differences between the so-called “white”, “Indian”, “Coloured” and “African” groups. As a result, it alienated non-whites and hindered the identification of the population as a whole with an overarching identity. It is thus firstly necessary to redress the prejudiced representation of non-white cultures so as to restore the dignity of these groups and to foster mutual knowledge and respect as well as to emphasise commonalities shared by all South Africans. Above all, there is a compelling need to address the representations of the past in order to deal with the deep divisions and traumas bequeathed by past oppression under colonialism and apartheid. As opposed to countries where amnesty or amnesia have prevailed, the South African project indeed seeks to base reconciliation on remembrance and redress (Boraine and al., 1994: 152-153; Meister, 1995: 17). Dealing with the traumatic past thus means to display a certain historical interpretation and moral pedagogy *‘with a view of teaching a particular interpretation of the country’s history, one expected to have a salubrious impact on its solidarity’* (Osiel, 1987: 6). This would involve publicly revealing and denouncing past abuses and reckoning with the suffering of victims as well as situating this traumatic period within the narrative framework of the broader South African past and collective identity.

Therefore, reshaping the representation of the past is deemed essential for both the consolidation of the democratic order and the promotion of national cohesion. In line with the project of building a democratic civic nation and the corollary goals of democratisation, reconciliation and national unity, the reshaping of the representation of the past currently at work in public history is intended to foster a shared and more balanced representation of the past, a process which is however ambivalent in that the public representation of the past is thereby inherently moulded as an authoritative representation.

6.1.2- The promotion of a shared and more balanced representation of the past...

The current undertaking to reshape the representation of the past has two dimensions: firstly, to promote a shared representation of the past as a basis for a new common identity; secondly, to redress the biases and silences of the former representation of the past. In post-apartheid public discourse, this undertaking has been conceived and labelled as the recovery of the “real” past.

The reshaping of the representation of the past aims firstly at promoting a shared representation which would foster a new overarching identity while having this identity reflect democratic values and national cohesion. As seen in Part One, there is a close link between shared memory and collective identity. But in South Africa, *'apartheid divided us so successfully that practically no South African can claim memories other than those forged in isolated vacuums. (...) Everyone of us has half a memory. Therefore everyone of us has a malformed identity (...)'* (Krog in Boraine, 1995: 115-116; see also Odendaal in Boraine, 1995: 14). Therefore, the new representation of the past is expected to provide a version of the past which could be shared by all South Africans as a basis for their having a common identity. However, in South Africa, the diversity and divisiveness of past experiences, memories and traditions are such that having a shared history cannot consist in representing a common past but in sharing a common representation of the (diverse) past. In other words, the new representation of the past does not aim at picturing the nationals (and their forebears) as having had the same traditions and past experiences and as having formed a unified community for centuries (which is what most nationalist histories attempt to do). Rather, the new representation of the South African past seeks to acknowledge the diversity of past experiences, traditions and cultures while promoting a common representation of past diversity and highlighting a number of commonalities and linkages between the various groups' experiences (territory, political system and so on). In this way, it attempts to foster an agreement on and common understanding of "what the past was like" and to inscribe the diversity of past experiences in one unified and shared public representation of the past. Thus, in South Africa, it is not the past which is common to all but its present representation.

The second objective of the current reshaping of the representation of the South African past is to redress and complement former representations. This implies revealing what has been forgotten, concealed or made to disappear; displaying a more accurate and less prejudiced representation of the past; and preserving and representing all memories and versions of history (Mandela, 1997h: 3; 1997f: 2). This undertaking thus aims firstly at giving public recognition to formerly marginalised voices, traditions and experiences, both by integrating them in the new public representation and commemoration of the past. While it originally focused on the representation of apartheid time, this undertaking of addressing biases and silences of the former representation of the past has been extended to other periods and events (early resistance to colonialism, slavery, etc.) and to further social and cultural aspects of the past (traditions, languages)¹⁴. The second objective of this undertaking of addressing former biases and silences is to change the discourse and forms of representation to suppress prejudices, contempt and paternalism (Mandela, 1997h). Thus, commenting on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Odendaal underlined that *'the implications of this new reality –of spelling people's names right and prefixing them with the titles Mr or Mrs– are enormous for society and the whole*

discipline of history' (1996: 3). This change in the discourse and forms of representation helps the restoration of individuals' and groups' dignity and to promote mutual respect between groups and cultures. It is sustained by the commitment to display and celebrate all cultures and traditions equally. ✓

In post-apartheid public discourse, the attempt to promote a shared and more balanced representation is conceived as an effort to recover the "real" South African past. This "recovery project" has its roots in the social history of the 1980s, an academic trend which sought to highlight "history from below", to write about the daily lives of the majority and to emphasise popular agency (Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 6-7). The recovery project is premised on the view that the "real" South African past was hidden under apartheid and that it must now be recovered (Minkley and al., 1996: 2-3). Its thrust is to represent the South African past in its integrity and accuracy or at least to achieve a more balanced view. This project thus aims at redressing the former representation by correcting the biases in both its content (overly concerned with "white history") and its forms (racist or paternalistic). Further, it is assumed that, by thus proposing a representation of the past which would be more accurate, representative and "objective", hence (supposedly) more acceptable to all South Africans, the recovery of the "real" past will also overcome the partisan divisiveness of former representations and promote a (new) shared representation.

For the recovery project, retrieving the "real" past consists in providing a representation which be representative of the past both in its accuracy and in its diversity. This undertaking is twofold. Firstly, recovering the "real" past involves drawing on personal and collective memories as an alternative source of knowledge about the past. Indeed, individual and collective memories are deemed to provide a new representation of the past, severed from the history sanctioned by former (academic and political) ruling powers (Braude, 1996: 41). Further, personal memories are regarded as a source of knowledge supposedly closer to the real experiences of people. At the same time, the accrual of individual testimonies is considered as constituting a new social memory (Minkley and Rassool, 1998: 99; Rassool, 1997: 3). This new social memory is expected to be widely accepted as a new authoritative representation of the past insofar as it is more representative and accurate and insofar as it results from a public and legitimate process of recovery (Odendaal, 1996: 2; Minkley and al., 1996: 6). Such reliance on the recording and publicising of personal memories to reveal the past and redress its representation largely informs several processes currently at work in public history: the development of oral history within the field of academic history since the 1980s; the recent trend of autobiographies which claim great information-value about the apartheid period; the conception of the TRC as a site where victims' and perpetrators' direct narratives are collected and listened to (Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 25-27; Minkley and al., 1996: 6; Minkley and Rassool, 1998: 90; Odendaal, 1996: 2-3). Secondly, it is assumed

¹⁴ This latter aspect concerning the recovery of formerly marginalised histories, cultures and traditions will be

that recovering the past requires an increase in the liveliness, diversity and representativeness of cultural forms, traditions and memories. Thus, the new government seeks to protect and promote diverse traditions by giving official recognition and support to eleven official languages, to religious cults, to “customary” law, a council of traditional leaders, etc. It is also committed to celebrate new sites, deeds and persons emblematic of hitherto silenced or marginalised traditions and therefore to preserve them and produce new common symbols out of them (Mandela, 1996w: 2-3; 1996h; 1997b: 1; 1997h; Mtshali, 1998l). A corollary aspect of this “recovery project” is the attempt to “democratise the past”. Indeed, in the new public representation of the past, memories are given the space to be told, they can be told in one’s own words and language and are listened to, believed, respected and valued. Thereby, those previously silenced are restored their voice and their dignity but also their own experiences whose reality used to be denied or marginalised. Moreover, by integrating a wide range of formerly marginalised cultures, the new public representation of the past is supposed to be more representative of South African diversity and fosters mutual knowledge and respect.

To conclude, through the recovery of formerly marginalised experiences, voices, and traditions, the new public representations of the past seek to be more comprehensive, less biased and widely shared and accepted by all South Africans. However, the current reshaping of the public representation of the past intrinsically contributes to construct this representation as an authoritative public representation of the past.

6.1.3- ... and the creation of an authoritative public representation of the past

In this sub-section, I will examine how, in the very process of being reconstructed as a shared and more balanced representation, the new public representations of the South African past are constituted as authoritative representations. I understand “authoritative” as an essentially ambivalent feature: according to the dictionary’s definition, on the one hand, an authoritative representation provides knowledge and can be trusted because it rests on reliable sources; on the other hand, it gives an impression of power and authority and is embedded in dominant social values and power relations. In this sense, my analysis of the new public representation of the past reflects Foucault’s analysis of hegemonic power’s discursive practices as releasing intertwined and mutually reinforcing effects of truth and power (1980a: 93): the authority of the representation –its reliability and accuracy– supports and entrenches the authority of dominant social values and actors which shape the representation – their legitimacy, popularity, and acceptability– which, in turn, strengthens the authority of the representation. It is important to underline that the “truth dimension” and the “power dimension” are

further elaborated below in the sub-section on the culture and heritage policy.

intrinsically and inevitably intertwined and mutually reinforcing. Thus, while the major trend in public discourse claims/strives to avoid the creation of a new master narrative, the current reshaping of the public representation of the past inevitably constructs it as an authoritative representation, intrinsically selective and normative and embedded in current values and power configurations. It is also important to note that hegemonic power is “effective” precisely because it not only has negative/repressive aspects (“power dimension”) but also positive ones (“truth dimension”) and because its modelling of social reality stems from both deliberate political manipulation and broad social dynamics. As a result, the intertwining and mutually reinforcing effects of these various forms of power make it difficult to differentiate between them and therefore endow the reshaping of the public representation of the past with great pervasive influence in the public sphere. In this sub-section, I will firstly show that the new public representation of the South African past comes to the fore as a reliable and trusted representation. I will then examine the underlying processes whereby it is constructed as a selective and normative representation, reflecting and supporting current social values and power configurations.

The reliability and credibility of the new public representation of the past has two sources: the popularity and legitimacy of the agents and processes reconstructing the representation of the past and the credibility and legitimacy of the “recovery project”. Firstly, the new public representation of the past appears credible because it is endowed with the legitimacy of certain public actors without being perceived as an official representation. Indeed, the new public representation of the past claims/strives to be multi-layered and multi-vocal, thus trying to avoid the formation of a new master narrative and the opposition between official representations and marginalised ones (Mandela, 1997h; Asmal and al., 1996: 9-10, 49-51, 214; Omar in Boraine, 1995). At the same time, the current reshaping of the representation of the past –through the TRC and public cultural institutions– is endowed with the authority and legitimacy attached to the new democratic dispensation. In this sense, the new public representation of the past –and its process of reconstruction– are perceived as reflecting *‘how the new democratic dispensation has given the majority of South Africans a ‘voice’ in a way which had never happened before’* (Odendaal, 1996: 3). The new public representation of the past also appears reliable thanks to the continuity between the leaders of the resistance movement and the new elites (in the government, the TRC, certain cultural institutions). Indeed, their popularity and legitimacy as actors and/or heirs of “the Struggle” is bequeathed on the representation of the past they promote; this mechanism is notably at play in the case of Nelson Mandela (Minkley and Rassool, 1998: 92; Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 28-29). The second source of reliability and credibility of the new public representation of the past lies in its underlying claim of recovering the “real” past. Indeed, the past “recovered” and reintegrated in the new public representation of the past appears reliable in that it consists of the stories and voices of everyday people, “average” South Africans, hitherto silenced by apartheid (Minkley and al., 1996: 27-28; Rassool, 1997: 28-29). It is *‘this assertion to occupy and represent*

the margins, "the previously neglected" that inversely authenticate(s) the claim on power to construct public history' and 'enable(s) popular histories to display themselves with increasing self-confidence as the recoverers of a nation's past' (Minkley and al, 1996: 6). Therefore, by representing the "real" past and beyond by "recovering" it from the margins of history where apartheid had confined it, the new representation of the past entrenches its own reliability and credibility.

Apart from supporting the "truth dimension" of the public representation of the past by endowing it with credibility, the "recovery project" also contributes to its "power dimension" by constructing it as a selective and normative representation. Both the claims of representing the "real" past and that of "recovering" the past conceal the selectivity at play in the current reconstruction of the public representation of the past; this selectivity rests on normative references to the dominant values and power configurations of the "new" South Africa. As underscored by the school of Subaltern Studies: *"History" (is) not just something "out there" waiting to be recovered; and the automatic presumption of "authenticity" for particular kinds of historical sources and evidence (...) is no less problematic'* (Pandey, 1997: 4). Indeed, what is defined and highlighted as the "real" past is not all that was silenced or marginalised by the former representation of the past but only certain aspects which are selected because they are deemed significant, relevant and coherent with the broader public representation of the past and narrative of national identity (Legassick and Minkley, 1997, 13; Minkley and al., 1996: 3-6). Such selectivity also underlies the notion of "past recovery": history is not simply hidden and recovered and the "gaps" in the representation do not exist as such, merely waiting to be filled through the reinsertion of formerly forgotten and excluded voices, memories and traditions. Rather, any project of "past recovery" inevitably selects some of the aspects which were not part of the former representation and labels them as "gaps". By highlighting these "gaps", the new representation can then show the pitfalls and biases of the former representation and display itself as recovering these excluded and silenced memories and thereby as providing a more balanced and accurate version of the past. In this sense, *'the gaps were created in order to be filled through the visibility of exhibition and ritual visibility of performance'* (Minkley and al., 1996: 2). Thus, in post-apartheid South Africa, the new public representation of the past focuses on certain "gaps" (fate of political activists; deeds of the security forces; etc.) more than on others (for instance the socio-economic situation in the homelands). The "real past" and the "gaps" emphasised in the new public representation of the past are selected and highlighted in line with the overall dominant representation of the past, the new identity narrative and dominant values (denunciation of apartheid, democracy, reconciliation and national unity). Indeed, we saw that any representation of the past is selective and that the process of selection is informed by normative references to the contemporary social order. The selective and normative dimension of the public representation of the past is all the more significant in South Africa since dealing with the past has been conceived as a cornerstone of the transformation of society so that the reshaping of the representation of the past is deeply embedded in

current objectives and dominant values of the new dispensation. The visible process of “recovering” the “real” past and “filling in the gaps” –through the TRC and the heritage policy in particular– thus makes it possible to highlight and entrench the new narrative of national identity and, in particular, to underscore the dramatic discontinuity and considerable improvement constituted by the shift from apartheid to the “new” democratic and inclusive South Africa (Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 24-29; Minkley and al., 1996). Importantly, however, the selectivity and normativity at play in the new public representation of the past are usually not even perceived, and rarely resented or contested, insofar as *‘the representation of the past conforms to and reinforces cognitive structures shaped by the master commemorative narrative’* (Zerubavel, 1995: 216). In other words, the biases inherent in the new public representation of the past are (unself-consciously) accepted insofar as they correspond to the broader collective representations of the past and of collective identity and to the dominant vision for society.

Therefore, through the reshaping of the representation of the past, and in particular with the undertaking to “recover the real past”, a new authoritative public representation of the past has emerged. It rests on mutually reinforcing effects of truth and power whereby the authority of the representation of the past supports the authority of the new dispensation which in turn strengthens the authority of the former.

To conclude, the new regime is strongly committed to actively reconstructing the representation of the South African past and addressing former biases and silences. This undertaking to recover the past and correct its representation is a significant expression of democratisation, inclusiveness and redress but it also inherently leads to the moulding of an authoritative version of the past, at once credible and normative. The task of reconstructing the representation of the past is largely achieved through public activities pertaining to public history. Above all, two main institution and sector feature the activism of the new public history and the remoulding of the representation of the past it promotes: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the culture and heritage policy.

6.2- Two main projects to reconstruct the South African past

In this section, I focus on two undertakings which play a key part in the current reshaping of the public representation of the past. Both have been (more or less self-consciously) conceived and are meant to deal with the past while being embedded in discourse of democratisation, reconciliation and nation-building. They are the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) whose task concerns the memory and representation of the traumatic apartheid past, and the culture and heritage policy dedicated to the preservation, reintegration and celebration of cultural and historical diversity.

6.2.1- *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission*

In the “new” South Africa, both practical modalities and ideological/ philosophical premises have tipped the balance in favour of dealing with the traumatic past through a truth commission¹⁵. In the wake of the negotiated transition, trials were not deemed feasible (or desirable) to deal with the traumatic past (Liebenberg, 1996: 129-130; Zalaquett, 1989: 44-47). On the other hand, general or partial unconditional amnesties were politically and morally unacceptable to the resistance movement. At the same time, the philosophy underpinning the dominant approach to the traumatic past sought to prevent amnesia and to foster reconciliation. The whole process was to be based on revealing, remembering and publicising past atrocities (Boraine and al., 1994; Boraine and Levy, 1995). In this perspective, *‘to be able to forgive one needs to know whom one is forgiving and why. That is why the truth is so central to this whole exercise’* (Tutu, 1995: 2); besides, *‘reconciliation begins when people deal with the past rather than ignoring it or trying to conceal it (...) truth is the beginning of reconciliation’* (Boraine in Boraine, 1994: 152-153). Thus, the linkage envisaged was to recover and display the “truth” about the past in order to make forgiveness possible and to favour reconciliation. Therefore, the combination of existing constraints and political objectives has paved the way to a focus on truth and reconciliation in the form of the TRC. The TRC was created by the 1995 Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act with the mission to provide *‘as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights’* committed between 1960 and 1994 (Republic of South Africa, 1995). Its task is twofold: holding public hearings of the victims and perpetrators of gross human rights violations (and proposing reparations for victims) and granting indemnity from prosecution to those perpetrators who gave a full account of their deeds (Boraine, 1996; Holiday, 1998: 46; Liebenberg, 1996; Frost, 1998: 142). The TRC –and the social and political dynamics surrounding it– are extremely complex, multi-layered and polysemous processes. It is thus impossible to provide a general account and detailed analysis of the TRC within the scope of this study. While keeping in mind the broader picture, I choose to focus on specific perspectives which not only concern the thrust of my work but also seem to me to correspond to dominant discourses and trends within the intricate universe of the TRC itself. Thus, I will firstly examine how the TRC is designed to support the democratic order and to foster national unity. On the basis of the analysis of the shift from memories to history analysed in Part One, I will then show that the TRC is at the confluence of the expression of personal memories and of the formation of a more authoritative and homogenising representation of the past: it takes part at once in the democratic and inclusive process of broadening and redressing the representation of the past and in the constitution of a new authoritative public representation of the past.

¹⁵ Apart from official statements and addresses by leaders of the government and the TRC, the discussion on dominant discourses about the TRC will include two books edited by Boraine in 1994 and 1995 insofar as they are multi-vocal works which are the outcomes of broadly-attended and largely-debated conferences which strongly shaped the fate of the TRC and were attended by both leaders of the new government and future TRC commissioners/staff members.

The TRC –in both its conception and functioning– is directly associated with the task of supporting democracy and fostering national cohesion. Firstly, as examined in the previous section, revealing and stigmatising the past makes it possible to break with it so as to found and legitimise its opposite, the “new” democratic South Africa (Omar in Boraine, 1995: 132; Asmal, 1992: 9-14; Asmal and al., 1996: 10; Minkley and al., 1996: 9; Wilson, 1996: 15; Osiel, 1987: 16-17). Morally, this means highlighting the opposition between the political atrocities of the apartheid regime and the new democratic dispensation (James in Boraine, 1994: 134; Sachs in id.: 145; Osiel, 1987: 2-9). Legally, the new order is strengthened in that revealing and condemning past abuses contributes to the consolidation of the rule of law and the deterrence of future human right violations (Neier in Boraine, 1994.: 3; Asmal in Boraine, 1995: 28). As the main instrument to achieve this purpose, the TRC organises the recovery of and reckoning with the truth about the violent past and entails a (moral) denunciation of past abuses. Moreover, it provides a public setting in which the rule of law is visibly and publicly respected and in which victims are heard (Odendaal, 1996: 2-3; Minkley and al., 1996: 7-9). The TRC therefore founds, highlights and legitimises the constitutional break with apartheid while displaying and fostering the legitimacy and morality of post-apartheid South Africa. Secondly, a very striking feature of the approach adopted to deal with the past through the TRC is the link openly made between establishing a common truth about the past, reconciling society and fostering national unity. This connection has been present from the start in discussions of the ways of dealing with the past and of fostering reconciliation. It is reflected in the metaphor of the “healing of a nation”¹⁶ which not only assumes the nation to already exist but also refers to the latter with the strong organic image of the nation as a body (whose health and integrity are meant to be re-established by truth). This connection is also exemplified in the very title of the act founding the TRC: the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act. Above all, in the content of the act, *‘discussions of truth seem to lead naturally into questions of reconciliation, national unity, and nation-building’* (Wilson, 1996: 14). Indeed, the TRC is conceived to strive for reconciliation, which is a pre-requisite for national unity and a stage of nation-building. Moreover, it is expected to enable all South Africans to have a common knowledge of past events (and of how other groups experienced apartheid), thereby favouring the constitution of a collectively shared representation of the past. Thus, one dimension of the TRC is to be a nation-building process both in that it furthers reconciliation and in that it promotes a shared representation of the past which are two bases for collective identity and national cohesion (Wilson, 1996: 14-18; Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 25-27; Minkley and al., 1996: 8-9; Boraine, 1995: 81). This perspective –strikingly formulated by Sachs for whom the TRC *‘is the meaning of everything. It is the*

¹⁶ This metaphor is the title of the book recording the proceedings of the second conference preliminary to the creation of the TRC (Boraine and Levy, 1995). More broadly, the lexicon of “healing” and “wound” is a recurrent theme in discourse on the TRC and on reconciliation. See for instance, Republic of South Africa, 1995; the Preamble to the 1996 Constitution; Boraine and Levy, 1995; Tutu, 1995; Mandela in Degenaar, 1990: 1; Mandela, 1994p, 1995r; 1998hr; Mbeki, 1998. As I will show in the next chapter, this image of healing is also central to the new identity narrative.

*creation of a nation*¹⁷ (in Boraine and al., 1994: 146)– seems to inform the understanding by many new leaders of the nature and functions of the TRC. To conclude, the TRC can be described as exemplifying and fostering the approach promoted by the new public history which links the reshaping of the representation of the past with the promotion of a new democratic order and of national unity.

The TRC is also symptomatic of post-apartheid reshaping of the representation of the past in that it is caught between promoting a more balanced and shared representation of the past and contributing to the formation of an authoritative representation. Indeed, it is at the crossroad of the articulation of individuals' and groups' memories –through its process of inquiry and hearings– and of the shaping of an authoritative and homogenising representation of the past –through references to the work of the TRC in public discourse (media, official addresses) and through the elaboration of its final report. Firstly, a widely shared view on the TRC is that it has given a voice to those silenced by apartheid (Braude, 1996: 41; Lalu and Harris, 1996: 24; Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 25; Minkley and al., 1996: 6; Odendaal, 1996: 3). Indeed, by relying on personal remembrance to record the past in the form of *'everyday stories of ordinary South Africans'* (Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 25), the TRC breaks the silence about the past in two ways. Firstly, by very directly and personally letting witnesses tell their own stories in public hearings, it inscribes these accounts in the public (i.e. open and debated) sphere for the first time. Secondly, by enabling them to express their stories in their own words and, further, in their own tongues, the TRC breaks with the previous ideological oppression of a dominant discourse and a dominant culture. It thus appears as a democratic and respectful public process: it is a site of direct testimony by victims and perpetrators; it is the setting where people are given back their voices, their dignity and their lives; it is the place where a variety of stories can be told and heard for the first time and where these can be given public recognition and widespread publicity.

At the same time, through the TRC, personal memories are made into a new public representation of the past. As noted in Part One, the shift from memory to history consists in the transformation of individual, subjective, particular and private memories into collective, objective, universal and public history (Nora, 1989: 8-9; Wachtel, 1986: 217). Such metamorphosis can indeed be observed in the TRC: in a first step, individual stories are legitimised and publicised in order to be established as the real and authentic record of the past; in a second step, they are then objectified and collectivised and their accrual is constituted as the new public history. Firstly, the credibility of individual testimonies as accounts of the "real" past rests on the legitimisation of the witnesses and on the publicity and visibility of the TRC process. The legitimacy and credibility of the stories and

¹⁷ I here consider Sachs to voice a dominant trend of official discourse because of his position within the ANC (later the Constitutional Court) and because he made this statement during a conference on the TRC where he was present in his official capacity.

witnesses are due to the following factors: witnesses are regarded as everyday people, “average” South Africans hitherto silenced by apartheid; they are first hand witnesses who tell their own stories in their own words (Minkley and al, 1996: 6; Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 25); moreover, they tell their stories with little interruption and questioning of data as would have been the case with a legal (by nature adversarial) process (Wilson, 1996: 16). The authenticity thus emanating from witnesses’ accounts is heightened by the visibility and publicity of the TRC process, highlighting by contrast the break with the secret, “hidden” past. The TRC itself indeed evokes the different places where the truth is traditionally (supposedly) told: the court, confessional, therapy session, or intimacy of a private discussion (Minkley and al., 1996: 8-9; Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 25). Further, the visibility of the TRC hearings –which are public and largely mediatised– constitutes another “guarantee” that the truth is being told. Finally, mediatisation (especially broadcasting on television) constructs these everyday stories in a ‘*real and live*’ display of recent history (Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 25). Thereby authenticated as the “real” past of the oppressed majority, witnesses’ testimonies are further subjected to historicisation –i.e. collectivisation and objectification of individual and small group memories (Nora, 1989: 9). That ‘*the stories the people are telling are turning out to be far stronger than just individual tales; (and that) they are contributing to a new social memory for South Africa*’ (Odendaal, 1996: 3) is a view widely shared amongst participants in and commentators of the TRC. The generalisation of individual narratives results from several inherent mechanisms of the TRC. Firstly, the TRC selects and establishes as representative certain cases it inquires and witnesses it hears, thus fixing ‘*upon particular cases and events in order to create the “global truth” of an abusive period*’ (Wilson, 1996: 17). A second process whereby individual memories are turned into public history is narrativisation. Indeed, framing events in narratives gives them meaning by attributing sense, closure and morality. This certainly informs the way witnesses and perpetrators tell their stories before the TRC. Self-consciously or not, witnesses construct their narratives as an (overt or covert) argumentation (with such objectives as showing dignity, pride or anger; underlining the cruelty of their fate, the heroism of their kin, etc.; or asking for truth, justice, revenge, and reparation). Moreover, they tell their stories as part of a broader ensemble and strategy (recovering knowledge of past events, establishing the truth, promoting reconciliation and so on). The historicisation process is further achieved through contextualisation. Indeed, in an approach similar to the social history of the 1980s, individual stories are considered as raw materials that need to be put in a broader historical (mainly political) context so as to be fully restored to their truth and meaning (Lalu and Harris, 1996: 29, 34-37; Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 25-27; Minkley and al., 1996: 6-8; Rassool, 1997: 20). Such is explicitly the mandate of the TRC, especially in view of its final report. But this contextualisation is far from neutral and operates with reference to certain subtexts underlying the TRC and the new identity narrative. Indeed, as the product of a political compromise and by focusing on “gross human right violations” during a limited time frame (1960-1994), the TRC inevitably selects as interesting or relevant certain stories (killings, torture, abductions) but not others (land dispossession; disruption of family as social and economic unit due to

migrant labour; state of near famine in homelands, etc.) (Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 26-27; Ramphela in Boraine, 1995: 35-36). The TRC thus tends to reduce the past to a “resistance versus domination” dichotomy whereby the former is mainly constituted of political activists and the latter of the security apparatus (Minkley and al., 1996: 3-5). Even within its own framework, stories are unself-consciously remoulded to appear relevant and meaningful according to its own goals: historical truth, reconciliation, and national unity. Thus, as a result of the reshaping of individual narratives by both witnesses themselves and the TRC, a collective story emerges, endowed with the features of narrativity: morality, fullness and closure. This reshaping thus supports the view that, through the TRC, the representation of the past is told *‘as a “tale”, witnessed as having a beginning, middle and end. It is a narrative with a moral message, a “picture of great courage and pride, of sacrifice, strength and community” leading progressively to “our history and our nation”. (...) Finally we are offered a closed, completed apartheid past filled with the visual knowledge of abductions and death, of torture and disappearances, of hardship and the maiming of innocents’. There are no alternative possibilities, no doubts but rather the underlining transition to the truth of reconciliation. As a mnemonic device for organising personal and historical time, the visibility of the TRC marks a break, an interruption “signalling the beginning and end of an era” of apartheid’* (Minkley and al.: 1996: 9). Therefore, through these multiple and combined processes, individual stories are framed and subsumed into a predetermined context and encompassing narrative which give them their broader –and “real”– meaning. In this way, the TRC appears as *‘a nation building process which construct(s) a revised national history and (...) write(s) into being a new collective memory’* (Wilson, 1996: 15; see also Odendaal, 1996: 3). It therefore plays a part in the reshaping of the representation of the past as an authoritative representation of the national past.

To conclude, the TRC is a key institution of public history and a key site for displaying and reshaping the representation of the past. Placed at the core of a variety of goals, values, functions and expectations, it is at the crossroad of diverse, ambiguous and at times, opposed dynamics relating to the new public representations of national identity and of the past. Thus, it supports and reflects the drive towards democratisation and nation-building. Further, the TRC has a part in the reshaping of a more accurate and inclusive representation of the past and in the corollary shaping of a new homogenising and authoritative representation. The same dynamics are featured by the culture and heritage policy.

6.2.2- The culture and heritage policy

The realm of culture and heritage is another important site for the voluntarist approach to the past. Indeed, culture and heritage play a decisive part in the formation and content of collective identity and are therefore always highly emotional, sensitive and contested matters (Department of Arts, 1996: foreword; Mandela, 1997h: 1; Odendaal, 1996: 5). Moreover, in South Africa, as a result of

colonialism and apartheid, the cultural sector features important biases and inequalities: it is marked with eurocentrism and with strong racial and cultural prejudices both in the representations of histories and cultures and in the organisation and resource allocation of cultural institutions (Davison, 1998: 149-150; Mandela, 1997h: 1-2). Under apartheid, non-whites' pasts and cultures were totally under-represented¹⁸, and when they were displayed, it was in a very demeaning and prejudiced manner (id.). Typically, museums were divided in two categories: natural history museums and cultural history museums. The former displayed the "traditions" and "customs" of "Natives" –set in an ethnographic immutable past– but also their anatomy¹⁹, alongside displays of the natural world (wildlife, planets). The latter exhibited what were viewed as the higher forms of life –labelled "history" and "culture"– of the colonisers (and other "superior races") (Smith, 1987: 3-4).

From the late 1980s, professionals of the cultural sector and academics have begun to question the practices and premises of heritage's preservation and representation as well as to engage in a transformation process (Davison, 1998: 151-153; Odendaal, 1996: 3-10; Smith, 1987; Davison, 1992; Dominy, 1992; Khan, 1992). In the wake of the regime change, the debates and contest about cultural issues were heightened. Issues commonly raised included the following: whose heritage is/should be preserved/commemorated? Who has the right/authority/legitimacy to decide what should be conserved as well as to represent and interpret traditions, memories and cultures? Who are the custodians of culture (museums, diverse cultural institutions, or communities)? (Klopper, 1996: 1-5; Khan, 1992; Davison, 1998: 150; Waldman, 1996). In this context, the new government seeks to foster and frame the transformation process in the cultural sector by engaging in a dramatic re-structuration of the culture and heritage policy (Department of Arts, 1996; Klopper, 1996: 2-3; Odendaal, 1996: 3-10). This policy aims firstly at complementing and correcting representations of cultures and histories displayed by cultural institutions. Thus, one aspect consists in suppressing prejudiced and demeaning sub-texts to museum displays and legends, archives constitution, or public commemorations. (Mandela, 1997h: 1-2). Moreover, the Arts and Culture Department seeks to extend the scope of heritage's conservation and display to all cultures, groups and histories, in particular, those (formerly) marginalised²⁰ (Department of Arts, 1996; Mandela, 1997h: 2; Harris, 1997). Thus, it has created the Legacy Project, *'established to acknowledge the previously neglected, marginalised and distorted South*

¹⁸ Thus, *'less than 1% of about 4000 declared national monuments in South Africa related to pre-colonial African heritage'* (Davison, 1998: 150). Another estimate indicates that *'98% of the 40 000 buildings and sites protected by law are symbolic of a white heritage'* (*Weekly Mail*, May 13, 1991). See also, Mandela, 1997h: 1; *South*, (May 23, 1992); *Star*, (May 28, 1992).

¹⁹ Body casts are still displayed in the South African Museum in Cape Town wherethe distinction South African Museum/Cultural History Museum materialise(d) the opposition natural/cultural history museums.

²⁰ This aspect of the transformation policy is not dissociated from that of promoting a more accurate and less prejudiced history. Thus, evoking the centenary of the "Anglo-Boer War", the Culture Minister stated: *'an appropriate commemoration of the war is envisaged (...) within the broad principles of inclusivity, reconciliation and a balanced historical perspective. The broad impact of the war, not only on the Boers and the British, but also on black South Africans, will be captured.'* (Mtshali, 1998 1: 1).

African heritage and *'tasked with the establishment of new and diverse monuments, museums and commemorations'* (Mtshali, 1998l: 1) ²¹. A third aspect of the undertaking to complete and correct cultural representations is to adopt a broader (and less eurocentric) notion of culture and past remains so as to encompass not only buildings and material artefacts but also environmental resources, oral traditions, important historical sites, etc. (Department of Arts, 1996: 13, 18; Davison, 1998: 150; M&G, September 19, 1997: 2). This evolution is concretised in the shift from the notion of "national monument" to that of "national heritage"²². The latter is broader and more diverse than the former; further, it refers to past remains, cultures and traditions as a richness commonly inherited from the past by all South Africans. A second goal of the transformation policy consists in democratising cultural institutions. As part of the reform of the public sector, cultural institutions are subjected to new management principles and to the new civil service culture. They strive to be broadly representative, accountable, transparent and consultative of interest groups and communities in their decision-making (Department of Arts, 1996: 18-19; Mtshali, 1998m; Davison, 1998: 150-151; Harris, 1996: 2). Further, the functioning of cultural institutions is informed by the new priority given to broad accessibility of the public: these institutions are expected to target new (disadvantaged) audiences, and to "take culture to the people" (Butler, 1998: 2; Harris, 1996: 2; Davison, 1998: 151).

The policy aiming at transforming the cultural field is strongly informed by the values, choices and concerns of the new regime. Like the TRC, the post-1994 cultural policy is clearly linked with democratisation, reconciliation and nation-building, which it is self-consciously expected to foster. The White Paper thus indicates: *'the arts, culture and heritage have a vital role to play in development, nation-building and sustaining our emerging democracy. They must be empowered to do so'* (Department of Arts, 1996: 13). Firstly, the culture and heritage field is conceived as both reflecting and supporting the democratisation process. On the one hand, the new democratic dispensation provides a change of political culture, values, priorities, and methods which make possible and underpin the policy undertaken to transform the cultural sector. Thus, *'with democracy we have the opportunity to ensure that our institutions reflect history in a way that respects the heritage of all our citizens'* (Mandela, 1997b: 2; see also Department of Arts, 1996: 11, 13). On the other hand, the heritage sector fosters tolerance, human dignity, mutual knowledge and respect, and portrays diversity as a source of strength. These values can, in turn, sustain and reinforce democracy. President Mandela thus stated: *'when our museums and monuments preserve the whole of our diverse heritage, when they are inviting to the public and interact with the changes all around them, then they will strengthen our attachment to human rights, mutual respect*

²¹ The Legacy projects to be established in 1998-early 1999 include the commemorations of the Blood River battle, of women's contribution to the resistance movement and of Samora Machel, the centenary of the "Anglo-Boer war", the opening of a Nelson Mandela museum, and the celebration of Khoi-San heritage (Mtshali, 1998 l).

²² The White Paper defines 'national heritage' as *'the sum total of wildlife and scenic parks, sites of scientific and historic importance, national monuments, historic buildings, works of art, literature and music, oral traditions and museum collections and their documentations which provides the basis for a shared culture and creativity in the arts'* (1996: 13).

and democracy (...) (1997h: 3). Therefore, heritage policy and democracy are seen as mutually reinforcing: heritage is re-organised to reflect new democratic values and processes and is, in turn, deliberately promoted to foster democratic culture.

The second sub-text to the transformation of the heritage and culture sector is the strong connection established between culture and heritage on the one hand, reconciliation, national unity and nation-building on the other hand. The Culture Minister strikingly formulated this view in the following statement: *'the expression of the country's history through monuments, museums and other forms to commemorate what is meaningful to all South Africans, has the potential to contribute to reconciliation and nation-building in the Country'* (Mtshali, 1998 l: 1). Sharing myths, symbols and understandings of the past is regarded as a decisive factor supporting collective identity; as a corollary, the existence of a joint heritage is promoted as a basis for the new nation (Department of Arts, 1996: foreword, 38; Mandela, 1996h: 1; Mtshali, 1998 l: 1). Conversely, through nation-building, knowledge of and pride in the different cultures, traditions and forms of art are promoted and the emergence of a shared cultural identity is fostered (Department of Arts, 1996: 18, 38). Many newly independent countries thus emphasise cultural policy as a basis for national unity and as part of the nation-building process. Thus, the creation of a national museum is considered as an important symbol of independence while internal tourism (nationals touring their own country and discovering their own culture and heritage) is commonly held to foster a sense of national identity (Stone and Molyneaux, 1994: 21). In this regard, South Africa has strongly developed tourism not only in the direction of foreigners but also of nationals. Displaying South Africa as unity in diversity, "a World in One Country", tourism policy seeks to develop knowledge and liking of South African cultures and traditions in their diversity. It thereby attempts to foster a sense of (national) belonging and the development of commonalities. Analysing the brochures of SATOUR, the national South African tourism body, Minkley, Rassool and Witz concluded: *'the visit to the cultural locality is presented as a way to know oneself and to learn about the other and so to become a nation. Acts of visiting, looking, taking in and learning in tourist contemplations and celebrations are to be encouraged as part of the process of nation-making'* (Minkley and al., 1996: 22). Therefore, heritage policy and nation-building are tightly intertwined: the latter influences the restructuring and orientations of the former while heritage is meant to provide a basis for the emergence and strengthening of a new national identity.

In conclusion, post-apartheid South Africa has actively and deliberately engaged in the reshaping of the representation of the past. Such a reconstruction of the public representation of the past is deemed influential in the shaping and consolidation of the "new" South Africa since it contributes to a break with the past, entrenches democracy and fosters reconciliation and national cohesion. Because it is deeply embedded in present values and objectives, the new public representation of the past takes

the form of a shared and more balanced (i.e. more accurate, reliable and inclusive) representation, which echoes the concerns for national cohesion and democratisation. At the same time, by being interwoven with dominant goals and values and by being largely shaped through public processes, it is constructed as an authoritative and presentist representation of the past in that it stands out as an authorised, credible and legitimate representation of the past and in that it is congruent with (and supports) the dominant values and vision of society. The ambivalent nature of this public representation of the past and its intertwining with the new vision for South Africa are materialised in both the TRC and the culture and heritage policy which are the two main projects for reshaping the public representation of the past. In the next chapter, I will examine the new identity narrative and how it embodies and promotes a break with the past, democratisation, reconciliation and national unity, thereby also encompassing a certain representation of the past.

Chapter Seven:

Constructing a new national identity narrative

In Chapter Five, we saw that insofar as overcoming the great cleavages of the South African society –in particular socio-economic inequalities– will be a long and difficult process, leaders of the “new” South Africa have emphasised the role of subjective factors in fostering reconciliation and national cohesion. They have thus deliberately and significantly resorted to a narrative of national identity in order to promote a shared sense of belonging, support national cohesion and entrench the new dispensation. In Part One, we analysed the narrative of national identity as a narrative and symbolic construct which contributes to the emergence of a sense of national identity and to the shaping of its content by creating and/or representing commonalities between all nationals and giving an image of the nation’s cohesion. The narrative of national identity develops mainly at the level of public discourse and is decisively influenced from above by the main political leaders and other major public figures. While in Chapter Five I examined the vision and values underlying the shaping of the new national identity –the project of a democratic and inclusive civic nation–, in this chapter I will study the specific images, symbols, rituals, recurrent and dominant themes of public discourse and emerging story-lines which form the content of the new national identity narrative. I will further analyse how these images, symbols and rhetorical references function in order to appear all-inclusive, to foster commonalities and to give an image of national cohesion. Against the backdrop of the four core values and goals of post-apartheid South Africa defined in this study –rejection of apartheid, democratisation, reconciliation and national unity– I will thus analyse public discourse since 1994: taken-for-granted and commonplace images such as the “new” South Africa or the “rainbow nation”, official addresses at key events (inauguration of the President, signing of the final constitution, opening of the TRC or commemorative holidays), recurrent symbols and lexicons (democracy, reconciliation), ritual forms and public story-telling about the nation’s identity (especially when told by political leaders). On this basis, I will analyse the new national identity narrative around three main axes (reconciliation and national unity are examined in the same section since they are considered as interdependent and are addressed together in public discourse): the insistence on the discontinuity with the past order, as embodied in the image of the newness of the nation; the emphasis on democratisation; and the focus on reconciliation and national cohesion, as illustrated both in the rainbow metaphor and in a narrative of survival and healing.

7.1- Marking the newness of the nation

A first aspect of the new identity narrative consists in emphasising the break with the past, denouncing the old order and celebrating the advent of the new dispensation. This feature is very visible in the frequent use of the qualifier “new” applied to post-apartheid South Africa, and especially in the commonplace metaphor of the “new South Africa”. The new national identity narrative thus rests on a break and contrast with the past, which is embodied in ritual celebrations of beginnings.

7.1.1- Temporal discontinuity or the Otherness in the past

In many newly independent countries, a myth of origin represents the national community in terms of common ancestry and goes back to a remote past whose events of glory and suffering have united the community and endowed it with its distinctive character. In South Africa, this nationalist representation of a common ancestry would be contrary both to historical accuracy and to the common sense and collective representations of South Africans. At the same time, focusing on the past experiences and culture of the majority of the population through the adoption of an “Africanist” conception of national roots would leave out important sections of the population and would be contrary to the current project of democratic and inclusive nationalism (Wilson, 1996: 18). As a result, the representation of the nation’s past and identity in post-apartheid South Africa cannot merely emphasise the ancientness of the nation or its continuity with and revival of past “traditions”²³. Rather, the very *raison d’être* of the new dispensation is to overcome past divisiveness and conflict and to promote reconciliation, peacefulness, non-racialism and democracy. In this sense, *post-apartheid* South Africa is the *new* South Africa, a dispensation which has not only succeeded apartheid South Africa but also broken with it and overturned it²⁴. As a corollary, the main locus of differentiation, the main Other to which post-apartheid South Africa opposes itself, is not other nations but its own past, the main discontinuity is not spatial but temporal, hence the emphasis on newness as part of the national identity-making (Wilson, 1996: 17-18; Dawes, 1996: 15-16). Therefore, the “new” South Africa needs time and again to underline the break with the previous regime and to stress the historical discontinuity brought about by the coming of a democratic South Africa. Thus, the post-1994 identity narrative is that of a break with the apartheid past, emphasising the newness of South Africa and marking the birth of a new democratic and non-racial South African nation (Republic of South Africa, 1995). The discontinuities commonly highlighted in this narrative are the shifts from division to unity,

²³ The “invention of traditions” is thus relatively limited in the current context. It mainly concerns the “revival” of “African cultural traditions” in the perspective of integrating them in the new multi-cultural nation. Another instance may be the emphasis on the continuity between the “struggle” and the new government (see below, Chapter 8).

²⁴ The phrase “the new South Africa” was used to evoke post-apartheid dispensation long before the changeover. Thus, in 1977, bishop Tutu said: ‘*we are experiencing the birth pangs of a new South Africa, a free South Africa*’ (1994: 21).

from divisions and oppression to the nation and from oppression and exploitation to democracy and prosperity (Republic of South Africa, 1995; Bengu, 1995f: 1; Mandela, 1997b: 1-2). The new public discourse explicitly highlights apartheid's notions of history, culture, nationhood, truth, race, and social order while ritually rejecting them –through the TRC, cultural institutions, official discourse²⁵, etc.– and asserting a new vision (Wilson, 1996: 18). The apartheid definition of the South African nation is thereby inverted to its counterpart, a vision of a democratic, peaceful, non-racial and inclusive South African nation, proud of its cultural diversity and open to Africa and the world. In this sense, the legacy and significance of the past is acknowledged in the “new” South Africa, albeit as a reverse model. The insistence on the “newness” of post-apartheid South Africa is thus to be differentiated from the qualification of South Africa as a “young” country in the early 1900s. While both mark transitions and beginnings, they rest on different assumptions: a “young” country evokes a country without much history while a “new” country assumes a too long and too bad history which one prefers to forget or break with²⁶.

One of the main ways of marking the break with the past constitutive of the “new” South Africa consists in celebrating the beginnings of the new dispensation; beginnings indeed demarcate a distinct collective identity and contribute to determine its content (Schwartz, 1982: 376; Zerubavel, 1994: 7). As noted by Nora, modern nations conceive their constitution as “births” rather than as “origins”, as beginnings rather than as roots (1989: 16-17). Indeed, they seek to narrate their formation as nations as a break with the past rather than as continuity, hence speak of “birth” which *‘symbolises at one and the same time a point of separation from another group and the beginning of a new life as a collective identity with a future of its own’* (Zerubavel, 1995: 7). In the “new” South Africa, the 1994 non-racial democratic elections are established as the founding event of the new dispensation. Setting the birth of the new nation in the 1994 elections contributes to sidelining the continuity with the politico-territorial dispensation created in 1910 as well as the slowness of the emergence of the “new” South Africa (begun in 1990 or even before), which is summed up in one emblematic event. Edward Said underlined that a beginning is the *‘first step in the intentional production of meaning’* (1975: 5). In this sense, the 1994 elections are not only symbolic of a change of regime and collective identity but also of the content of this change. In a speech on the first anniversary of the 1994 elections, Education Minister Bengu articulated both the vision of these elections as the beginnings of the “new” South Africa and the deliberate choice of society they embody: *‘Today marks the birth of a new nation in our country (...) On this day, we began a journey that took us away from the past of a deeply divided society (...) towards a future of democracy, peaceful coexistence and prosperity’*²⁷ (1995f). If the South African transition had been one of mere negotiations between political elites for a redistribution of power, leading to a change of

²⁵ See for instance addresses by President Mandela on the occasion of the celebration of public holidays.

²⁶ My supervisor Professor André du Toit suggested this remark on the difference between “young” and “new” country.

²⁷ This last sentence is very similar to a key sentence of the postamble to the 1993 Interim Constitution.

majority or to power-sharing without popular elections, the “birth” of the “new” South Africa would probably have been seen in President de Klerk’s 1990 speech, thereby emphasising political opening and inclusiveness, consociational power-sharing, and progressive and moderate rebalancing of political and economic resources instead of emphasising universal franchise, majority democracy and political changeover. As Said further indicated, a beginning ‘*constitutes an authorisation for what follows from it*’ but ‘*(such) authority limits as much as it enables*’ (1975: 34). Defining the time and content of the beginning of the “new” South Africa implicitly determines its representation of the present and the past as well as its future evolution and orientation; in so doing, it excludes other options and representations. Thus, articulating the founding of the “new” South Africa in terms of reconciliation and liberal democracy largely rules out the alternatives of criminal prosecutions for political atrocities or of socialist policies of redistribution.

7.1.2- Rituals of beginnings

To entrench its beginnings, South Africa experiences the need –common to other (radically) new regimes– to emphasise its break with the past and to establish a temporal border between past and present so as to reject the old order, assert and legitimise the new one and protect itself from a repetition of the past (Connerton, 1989: 7). In order to be publicly known, remembered and entrenched, this break has to be embodied and displayed in public ceremonials (id.: 8). This appears to be one of the core functions of the TRC whose ‘*main subtextual statement is how previous victims of the state are now having their story documented in an official setting, demonstrating how the balance of power has shifted away from the perpetrators to the victims*’ (Wilson, 1996: 16; see also Asmal and al., 1996: 12-13). By constructing and telling the story of the past as domination and violence, the TRC thus underlines the break with the past and thereby legitimises the new regime as an overcoming of injustice by justice and a replacement of an authoritarian order by a democratic one (Republic of South Africa, 1995; Wilson, 1996: 18; Dawes, 1996; Minkley and al., 1996: 9). Official addresses delivered on symbolic and ritual occasions such as the celebration of commemorative public holidays constitute another way of asserting the break with the past²⁸. Indeed, a more or less overt subtext of these addresses consists in evoking the story of the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid and celebrating the “new” South Africa. These themes are particularly developed on the celebration of Freedom Day which commemorates the 1994 elections and the coming into force of the Interim Constitution. More broadly, since 1995, the president and major government officials have sketched a

²⁸ President Mandela strikingly illustrated this break when referring to the 1994 elections as the starting point to measure time. In 1996, he stated: ‘*as we enter our Third Freedom Year (...)*’ (1996f; see also 1997f; 1998f). Such conception that the advent of a new regime constitutes the beginning of a new era recalls the more radical undertaking of the 1789 French revolutionaries not only to start counting years at the birth of the Republic (1792) but also to change the calendar.

representation of the past and of the new identity through their addresses on commemoration of public holidays²⁹. The narrative which emerges from this mainstream official story-telling broadly consists in the following: the past is regarded as a very negative era which is rejected while the broader story is one of continuous improvement from the past to the present towards the future thanks to the dedication of “the people” and of its leaders to democracy, reconstruction and national unity (see further Chapter 8).

However, a crucial ambiguity intrinsic to this narrative of newness is that the evocation of the past –even if only to “judge” or dismiss it– implies a recollection of the past (Connerton, 1989: 9-10). Indeed, ‘*beginning, the new image of society’s continuity, (is not) even thinkable without its element of recollection -of recollection both explicit and implicit. The attempt to establish a beginning refers back inexorably to a pattern of social memories*’ (id.: 13). Thus, the “new” South Africa is not defined merely as a break with the past but also as a contrast with the past, hence includes a covert or overt reference to the past. This ambiguity is, firstly, inscribed in the very nature of the TRC. Indeed, its dominant narrative is one of ‘*new beginnings*’ (Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 25), but at the same time, as a site of memory, the TRC is born out of the ‘*will to remember*’ (Nora, 1989: 19) and the desire to ‘*celebrate*’ the past, *i.e. to perform publicly and duly, to observe and honour with rites and festivities, to publish abroad, praise and extol*’ (Asmal and al., 1996: 12). Here lies one of the tensions inherent in the TRC whereby what is underlined is as much the past as the break with the past itself (Wilson, 1996: 17; Braude, 1996: 64). A similar ambiguity can be found in the new Constitution. Indeed, the latter “creates” and founds the “new” South Africa thereby being the symbol *par excellence* of its beginning. Thus, the 1993 Interim Constitution claims to open ‘*a new chapter in the history of our country*’ (Republic of South Africa, 1993). But the Constitution is also conceived as a vision for the present (and future) on the basis of recalling and rejecting the past. As the postamble to the 1993 Interim Constitution (entitled ‘National Unity and Reconciliation’) puts it: ‘*the Constitution provides a historic bridge between the past of a deeply divided society characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful coexistence for all South Africans (...)*’ (emphasis added) (Republic of South Africa, 1993). In this sense, the “new” South Africa cannot merely forget the apartheid past since its very *raison d’être*, vision and institutions have been justified and assessed against the backdrop of the old order. Thus ‘*however much the rhetoric of national unity insists on the purity of our newness, its need to do so by contrast to the old and as a victory over the old, its need to do so at all, contaminates the present with the Klang³⁰ of the past*’ (Dawes, 1996: 20).

²⁹ See President Mandela’s following addresses 1995r, 1996hr, 1996f, 1996w, 1996h; 1997f, 1997h; 1998hr; 1998f.

³⁰ ‘Hegel’s name for the ringing at the origin of language, a sound which Heidegger also describes as that of a bell’ (id.: 20, footnote 68).

To conclude, a first aspect of the new narrative of national identity is to emphasise the newness of the South African nation and specifically to define it as a model different from and contrary to apartheid. But by highlighting and entrenching the break with the past and the newness of South Africa, the new identity narrative inherently includes a reference to the past. Such implicit reference to the past also underlies the other aspects of the national identity narrative –promoting a democratic culture and fostering reconciliation and national unity– which also seek to deal with the legacy of the past and transcend it.

7.2- Entrenching democracy

In Chapter Five, we saw that the discourse of democracy has been put at the core of the new dispensation: democracy is meant to found the new regime but also to constitute the common political culture which would be a basis for the new South African nation. In this section, I will examine how the narrative of national identity depicts and promotes democracy as essence of the new regime and, in particular, how the Constitution is endowed with great symbolic significance in public discourse.

7.2.1- *Promoting democratic culture and identity*

The national identity narrative strives to depict and foster democracy as the very essence of the “new” South Africa and of what being a “new” South African means. This undertaking rests on two mechanisms: firstly, the rhetoric of democracy is widely diffused in public discourse and is constituted as a common language for South Africans; secondly, the “new” South Africa is performatively portrayed as a democracy.

Firstly, democracy is constructed as part of the essence of the “new” South Africa in that the rhetoric of democracy is promoted and established as a common language (hence, at least partly, common culture) for “new” South Africans. In Chapter Five, we saw that democratic discourse emerged as a common language and framework during the transition period and in the “new” South Africa. Democratic rhetoric could thus be established as a pre-eminent and shared discourse because it constitutes a widely inclusive discourse. Firstly, democratic values and concepts are easily acceptable. Thus, representative rule, tolerance, or equality are seemingly less partisan, less questionable and therefore more likely to be accepted than, say, liberalism or social redistribution; furthermore, certain values and concepts of democracy such as equality or universal franchise intrinsically refer to all people as having something (right, status, etc.) in common (Crouzel, 1996: 21-22). Secondly, democracy is often loosely defined and/or open to a variety of interpretations and can therefore

and process. Thus, public discourse conflates two approaches: on the one hand, it regards democracy as achieved and actualised in the “new” South Africa; on the other hand, it considers democracy as a process whereby South Africans must become familiar with democratic values and processes and whereby “democracy”, “rights” and “freedoms” must be given a concrete and actual content (Mandela, 1998f: 1-2). By performatively identifying the “new” South Africa as a democracy, public discourse thus aims both at familiarising people with the democratic concepts and culture and at spreading the view that democracy is already part of the nature and functioning of the “new” South Africa.

7.2.2- *The symbolic significance of the Constitution*

The representation of the Constitution in public discourse is part and parcel of the promotion of democracy as component of the new national identity. In post-apartheid public discourse, the Constitution is indeed established as a key symbol of the “new” South Africa: it is regarded as having a vital role and significance in the transformation of South Africa; these instrumental functions attributed to the Constitution rest on the performative powers with which public discourse endows the Constitution.

In South African public discourse, the 1993 Interim Constitution and, later, the 1996 final Constitution have been regarded as instruments to act upon the legacy of the past, to transform present realities and to achieve the vision for the future. Thus, the constitution strongly and explicitly integrates a reference to apartheid and its legacy which it directly aims at addressing. The final constitution states as one of its main purpose ‘*to heal the divisions of the past*’ (Republic of South Africa, 1996: preamble; see also Mandela, 1997f: 1). Moreover, it is deemed to provide the guarantee that the apartheid past will not repeat itself (Dawes, 1996: 3-6; Fagan, 1998: 250-251; 1998hr: 1). On 1997 Freedom Day, President Mandela thus commented that ‘*the new constitution, and its place in the hearts of our people, is a powerful assurance that never again will South Africa allow such things to happen*’ (1997f: 2). Finally, the Constitution is considered to set the vision for the future and to entrench the rights, freedoms and broader conditions which will bring about a positive transformation of South Africa (Mandela, 1996hr: 1, 1998hr).

This representation and construction of the Constitution as a cornerstone of the transformation of South Africa rests on the vision that the Constitution is a vital national symbol, endowed with performative powers. In this sense, the new Constitution is not only conceived as setting out a vision and project for the “new” South Africa but also deemed able to (partially) perform them. The performative role attributed to the Constitution rests on the view that the Constitution firstly embodies, hence performs, the values of “the Struggle”, and secondly epitomises the “soul” of the

“new” South Africa. Firstly, the constitution is represented as embodying the ideals and values of the resistance movement and as achieving the objectives of the “Struggle” (Mandela, 1996c; 1996y: 2; 1997f: 1; Dawes, 1996: 2-3). This linkage was made at the signing of the final Constitution which was the occasion of a very solemn ceremony taking place in Sharpeville (CA, December 11, 1996). Through this ceremony and through official addresses given on this occasion and later on the commemorations of Freedom Day and Human Rights Day (formerly Sharpeville day for the resistance movement), a strong link was made between the new Constitution, the resistance movement and the issue of human rights (Mandela, 1996c; 1997f; 1998hr; 1998f). Further, the constitution has been used as emblem of the regime change and of the “new” South Africa. Thus, the symbolic gesture chosen by President Mandela to acknowledge the suffering and the contribution to the “Struggle” of the Uppington Fourteen was to present them a copy of the Constitution (Mandela, 1997f: 2-3)³¹. Secondly, the constitution is seen to embody the “soul” of the “new” South Africa and to entrench its highest aspirations and values (Fagan, 1998: 262). Thus, the formulation of values or principles in the constitution is expected to performatively foster their emergence and consolidation. President Mandela for instance commented that *‘the new constitution has strengthened our unity, both in the democratic manner it was written and in the hopes it embodies’* (1997f: 1) and asserted that *‘the diversity of colours and languages which once used to divide us are now a source of strength. The basic law of our land, our Constitution, declares that we are all one’* (emphasis added) (1998f: 1). As a result, the Constitution is very often evoked and extolled in official public discourse and is portrayed as an object of pride, admiration and care for all South Africans³². The new government has further undertaken a considerable effort to publicise the constitution and its content and to highlight its significance. Thus, pocket-size and illustrated versions in the eleven official languages were printed and distributed in large numbers. In addition, the constitution is given a central part in the commemoration of Freedom Day (and, less directly, Human Rights Day) and, in 1998, the government declared the week surrounding Freedom Day to be Constitution week in order to popularise *‘this memento of our democracy’* (Mandela, 1998f: 2). Therefore the constitution is represented and expected to be at once a cornerstone, guarantee, manifesto and embodiment of the new South African identity and values.

To conclude, a second dimension of the new national identity narrative consists in representing the “new” South Africa as essentially and actually democratic, while fostering the actual democratisation of the regime and promoting democratic culture amongst South Africans. The third and last main aspect of this narrative lies in the attempt to foster reconciliation and strengthen national cohesion.

³¹ The Uppington Fourteen were a symbol of blind repression and iniquitous injustice: originally charged with murder and later granted bail, they saw their charge altered to treason under the 1986 state of emergency and were sentenced to death in 1989. An internal and international campaign was organised to publicise their case and save their lives (Mandela, 1998f: 2-3; CT, April 28, 1997).

³² President Mandela described it as living *‘in the hearts of our people’* (1997f:) and stated: *‘we cherish our constitution’* (1998f: 2).

7.3- Fostering reconciliation and national unity

As evoked earlier, the task of fostering national unity in the “new” South Africa encompasses two main issues: transcending cultural diversity through the creation of a respectful and inclusive overarching identity and overcoming the divisions, suffering and injustices bequeathed by colonialism and apartheid so as to reconcile all South Africans. In order to foster and support national unity, the new identity narrative has thus undertaken to performatively portray South Africans as already united by commonalities through their belonging to the same “rainbow nation”; it also seeks to lead South Africans to progressively identify together and become aware of their commonalities as victims of a traumatic past and beneficiaries of a better present which allows their healing process. In this sense, as in the case of the democratic essence of the “new” South Africa, a crucial ambiguity of the national identity narrative is that national unity is at once considered to be partially achieved and actualised in the new South Africa and to be a process whereby South Africans are called upon to find commonalities and identify together and whereby commonalities and national cohesion are expected to grow and strengthen as the “new” South Africa constructs itself.

7.3.1- *The rainbow metaphor*

The metaphor of the rainbow nation as a symbol of a unified South Africa, inclusive and respectful of all races and ethnic groups in their diversity, was introduced by Archbishop Tutu (who took it from the American political tradition) (Coetzee, 1995: 20). It gained further publicity when President Mandela, in his 1994 inaugural speech as President, stated *‘we enter into a covenant that we shall build the society in which all South Africans, both black and white, will be able to walk tall, without any fear in their hearts, assured of their inalienable right to human dignity –a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world’* (1994p: 2). In the early years of the new regime, the metaphor of the rainbow nation was widely used by the President and other major political and social actors. It was also taken up by the media, academics, and foreigners to refer to the “new” South Africa and its “miracle”. While it is now much less used by public figures, it has spread and persisted at a second level of public discourse and social memory, in the discourse of businessmen, tourist promoters, advertisers and the “average man”. Thus, even though it has been criticised from the start, above all in the past two years, the metaphor of the rainbow nation has had a strong resonance in the public realm³³.

³³ These reflections arose in a discussion with Professor Gary Minkley (History Department, UWC) (May 1998).

The metaphor of the rainbow nation was promoted to address the issue of social pluralism and polarisation and to promote national cohesion. It portrays social diversity and division as united in a new national community. Indeed, the image of the rainbow depicts the nation as a diversity of “colours”, i.e. races, ethnic groups, cultures, and religions, co-existing and co-operating across racial, ethnic, cultural and religious boundaries and achieving unity in their diversity. Beyond peaceful coexistence, this metaphor emphasises the interdependence of all groups by referring to the rainbow which is ‘*something intrinsically though not sharply divided yet indivisible*’ (Filatova, 1997: 50). Moreover, the rainbow metaphor represents as very positive the accommodation of cultural diversity within a united framework since all colours remain visible but match together so as to give way to a new (more beautiful) whole. The discourse of “rainbowism” therefore promotes the image of national cohesion as a diversified but tightly intertwined thread. It therefore supports the performative discourse of the national identity narrative, striving to construct a new common identity and to achieve national cohesion. The performative dimension of the rainbow metaphor lies firstly in that it portrays South Africans as members of a (rainbow) nation. As analysed in Part One, designation by leaders and/or self-designation as “we”, “community” or “nation” can contribute to promote the collective state of mind and sense of belonging which founds national identity (Coetzee, 1995: 1). Moreover, the metaphor of the rainbow nation performs the image (and sense) of national cohesion by redefining social pluralism as a series of religious, ethnic, racial, and cultural identities, diverse in their content but of similar type, therefore turning irreconcilable difference in a plurality of similar categories which can be combined and unified as collection of this diversity³⁴. By thus weaving together the themes of diversity and unity, the metaphor of the rainbow nation further concretises and publicises the discourse of multi-racialism, which was a constant and major trend of the resistance movement to apartheid and has been entrenched in post-apartheid official discourse³⁵ (Bekker, 1997; Coetzee, 1995: 20; Turner, 1997: 7). Moreover, this metaphor sidelines the notion of ethnic nation as congruence of communal culture and power and fosters the notion of civic nation accommodating pluralism in the same territorial, legal and political framework. The rainbow metaphor is therefore broadly inclusive of all South Africans thanks to the tolerance and openness of its underlying subtexts of multi-racialism and civic nation. It is also broadly inclusive in that it constitutes a very open-ended categorisation. Indeed, the rainbow metaphor defines as the commonality between all South Africans the very fact of having an identity different from other South Africans³⁶ (Taylor and Foster, 1997; Boyce, 1997: 4). As analysed in Part One, it thus provides an all-encompassing symbol in a situation of great social diversity by focusing on a very general level at which a commonality can be found.

³⁴ Anderson and Bhabha underlined that the representation of social diversity in terms of serial categories is part of the imagining of the nation (see above, Part One, 3.1.2).

³⁵ See for instance Mandela, 1995r; 1996f; 1996y; 1996c; 1997f; 1997h; 1998f; Ngubane, 1996f.

³⁶ Some voices have precisely criticised the rainbow metaphor because, by referring to ethnic and racial identities, it perpetuates these identities as the defining experience of all South Africans (Boyce, 1997: 4; Taylor and Foster, 1997)

Because of its metaphorical nature, the image of the rainbow is multi-layered and multi-vocal: it is open to a variety of interpretations and possesses a diversity of implicit meanings. It can therefore function as an inclusive symbol in that people can adhere to the image of the “rainbow nation” while understanding it in various ways and bestowing many different symbolic meanings on it. For instance, for those South Africans familiar with Christian culture, the metaphor of the rainbow nation refers to the Bible where the rainbow is the symbol of the alliance between Yahve and all human beings after the Flood. In this sense, it is the icon of the new (inclusive) covenant founding post-apartheid South Africa and of God’s blessing, a religious reference so essential in South African political culture³⁷ (Darbon, 1996: 5-6; Mandela, 1994p: 2). At the same time, the metaphorical nature of the “rainbow nation” makes it possible to conceal certain things. Thus, it makes it possible to talk about social pluralism without directly using the notions of “race”, “blacks”, and “whites”. Further, by focusing on the representation of the nation as cohesion of cultural and racial pluralism, the metaphor of the rainbow highlights one specific aspect and marginalises other factors of divisions such as the considerable socio-economic disparities (Habib, 1996: 4). In this way, it fosters the sense of national cohesion: on the one hand, the metaphor emphasises an aspect –collective identity and cohesion– which is now relatively consensual and for which discursive practice can have a performative effect; on the other hand, it sidelines a very divisive issue –socio-economic inequalities and redistribution– which remains a major pitfall and on which symbolic and narrative devices have very little influence.

To conclude, the metaphor of the rainbow nation seeks to promote a sense of collective belonging and to foster national unity. It performs the image of national unity by portraying a broad and inclusive commonality and functioning as a multi-layered and all-encompassing representation. This metaphor, which appeared in the early years of the “new” South Africa, has been essential to highlight the existence of a commonality between all South Africans (albeit that of their diversity) and therefore the very possibility of finding commonalities, hence the viability of the “new” South Africa. The rainbow metaphor was pre-eminent in public discourse because it was more or less self-consciously promoted by political and social leaders but also because it found deep resonance in the public, the media, the business community and the international community and symbolised the image of the South African “miracle”. However, it seems to be a rather contextual and transient symbol. Indeed, it was promoted at a time when there was an urgent need for a representation of national cohesion and inclusiveness. Further, it addressed a situation of extreme social divisiveness where national cohesion could only be represented as coexistence and interdependence of the various communities but not (yet?) as solidarity and similarity. As nation-building progresses, however, nationhood is expected to deepen so as to go beyond mere coexistence and turn into solidarity and shared feeling of

³⁷ The religious dimension was at the core of both Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid rule and of the resistance movement (theology of liberation). It is still influential in post-apartheid South Africa, especially in the approach to reconciliation (Boraine and al., 1994; Boraine and Levy, 1995; Storey, 1994; Tutu, 1994; Tutu, 1995).

community³⁸. Beyond the rainbow metaphor and its representation of unity in diversity, the symbolic and narrative representation of stronger commonalities is thus expected to be both source and part of the progress of nation-building and of the strengthening of national identity. The narrative of reconciliation and healing precisely constitutes a more thorough attempt to foster reconciliation and to promote and embody national unity.

7.3.2- *The narrative of survival and healing*

In his paper *'Forgiving and Forgetting: Lincoln and the Politics of National Recovery'*, Robert Meister examined the strategies for new political orders to deal with post-traumatic situations and to guarantee a durable settlement in which victims and perpetrators are able to live together³⁹. Two options are open: one of identification in which both sides fuse together in a new common identity as survivors of a same traumatic event, and one of representation which views pre-existing identities as fixed and requiring recognition as such in the new order (1995: 1-2). The latter implies an *'ineliminable difference (...) (which) becomes the basis for a counter-hegemonic claim to power'* in which case *'a long-term cycle of mutual threat and reprisal is always a danger'* (id.: 2-3). Conversely, the identification strategy is more likely to guarantee peace and unity in the long-run. In this strategy, in the wake of a traumatic and divisive situation, a new identity narrative is developed which represents the various communities as linked by a common experience of past trauma and unifies them in a new shared identity as survivors of this traumatic past. Such a narrative seeks to favour healing of the social body and to found national cohesion. In South Africa, the current way of dealing with the past can be seen as a choice for creating a new common identity by promoting a story of survival and healing. This is exemplified in the TRC Chairperson's opening address at the first hearing of the TRC: *'We are meant to be a part of the process of the healing of our nation, of our people, all of us, since every South African has to some extent or other been traumatised. We are a wounded people because of the conflict of the past, no matter on which side we stood. We all stand in need of healing'* (emphasis added) (Tutu, 1995: 1)⁴⁰. In this representation, all South Africans share a common experience of a traumatic past and a same need of healing.

³⁸ Significantly, while most public evocations of the South African community merely evoke coexistence, co-operation and interdependence (Mandela, 1995r; 1997f; 1998hr; Mbeki, 1998), in a media briefing about the 1996 Freedom Day, the Culture Minister stated: *'this Freedom Day is about moving towards a time in the not too distant future where we will no longer need to speak of the rainbow nation, and of the need to work towards it as we will just be one nation with many cultures'* (Ngubane, 1996f).

³⁹ Meister originally focused his analysis on the narrative of national cohesion propounded by Lincoln after the American Civil War. He nevertheless suggested that his framework can be used in other post-traumatic situations.

⁴⁰ In various occasions, President Mandela echoed this representation: *'the feeling of freedom that infuses every South African heart, (...), underlines the fact that we have all, in one way or another, been victim to the system of apartheid'* (1996f: 3); *'as we seek to know the truth about our divided past, nothing is more painful than confronting the terrible hurts that we inflicted on each other during the last decades of apartheid rule'* (1997f: 2); *'we have been liberated from a system that held us all in its chains'* (1998f: 1).

The elaboration of the South African narrative of shared trauma, survival and healing –embodied in and processed through the TRC and public discourse– revolves around a shift in the representation of the past: from a representation which portrays the social, economic and political oppression of the majority by a racist and criminal regime to one which focuses on apartheid as an authoritarian regime responsible for human rights abuses⁴¹. As a corollary, the narrative of the apartheid past shifts from a representation of social identities as opposing (racially divided) victims and beneficiaries of apartheid to one which focuses on an overarching identity –South African-ness– and which portrays all South Africans as traumatised by the deeds of a regime of criminals⁴². Meister distinguishes two variants of the narrative of survival and healing: in the first case, perpetrators both identify with their victims and see themselves from their victims’ points of view; in the second case, perpetrators see themselves as being victims of past traumatic events of which they then become “survivors” (1995: 10). In South Africa, these two variants seem to coexist and intertwine. Indeed, through the TRC and the broader attempt to document past abuses, and in particular through the testimonies of victims, perpetrators are faced with their victims’ versions of their deeds and the white community as a whole is expected to listen to, acknowledge and remember stories of apartheid’s oppression (Grunebaum-Ralph, 1996; Borraine, 1996). At the same time, as expressed by Archbishop Tutu or President Mandela (see above), all South Africans are portrayed as victims and survivors of apartheid. For this second variant, the argument goes as follows: even whites were victims under apartheid because they were living in a country at war, indeed at war with itself, divided by conflict, racial hatred and fear (Mandela, 1997f: 2); in addition, they were victims of prejudice, ignorance, racism and lack of human and cultural exchanges⁴³; a further proof of their having been victims is that they all feel liberated and better off in the “new” South Africa (Mandela, 1996f: 3; 1998f: 1). Therefore, through both variants of the narrative of survival and healing, all South Africans are encouraged to regard themselves as victims and survivors of apartheid. The narrative then goes on to unite them as all undergoing a shared process of healing and as all acquiring a common knowledge –and common “memory”– of apartheid’s abuses. *‘Being authentically South African then comes to mean having a shared experience of the traumas of apartheid and the subsequent process of healing’* (Wilson, 1996: 15). Indeed, one core function of the TRC is to promote public knowledge and recognition of past abuses and to foster knowledge, awareness and debate amongst the whole South African population. It is therefore expected to be a catharsis for the nation, that is to liberate past hatred, anger, and suffering through public revelation and acknowledgement of the past and therefore to give way to healing and appeasement. At the same time,

⁴¹ This reshaping is reflected in the TRC focus on gross human rights violations and its 1960-1994 timeframe.

⁴² In *Dealing with the past*, Rosenberg, followed by Adam and Neier, differentiated criminal regimes which commit abuses and injustices systematically from regimes of criminals in which the responsibility for abuses is not that systemic of the regime, but that of some military or political leaders. They associate the former case with Eastern Europe, the latter with Latin America and view South Africa as combination of both (Borraine and al., 1994: 95-96, 144, 146).

⁴³ See this excerpt of Mandela’s autobiography: *‘A man who takes away another man’s freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is prisoner behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness. (...) The oppressed and the oppressor alike are robbed of their humanity’* (1994a: 617).

such revelation and acknowledgement of apartheid's past foster shared knowledge of the past and allow the constitution of a common representation of the past. In this sense, as analysed in the previous chapter, the new South African collective memory is not one wherein all South Africans have a common (mythical or actual) past but one in which they share in the present a common understanding and representation of the past.

The implications of such a strategy of common trauma, survival and healing are central to the new South African identity narrative. Firstly, *'the end of the story is the unity rather than the autonomy of victims and perpetrators'* (Meister, 1995: 6), since the peaceful settlement sought in the wake of past traumas is based not on the separation of previously antagonistic groups but on their association and reconciliation in a new entity and the creation of a common identity defined as 'national'. The narrative of survival and healing is therefore a cornerstone of reconciliation and national cohesion. Secondly, the aim of the story is not so much to favour reparation for past injustice but to found a new beginning and establish a new covenant which consists in a *'collective pledge to remember the past to avoid repeating it'* (id.: 8). This pledge is concretised in the strong emphasis on the rule of law and the protection of human rights in the new legal framework (the Constitution and Bill of Rights). The image of a pledge to prevent the repetition of the past and to foster democratisation and unity is also illustrated in the dominant discourse on national reconciliation: *'We have to acknowledge that we, as a country and as South Africans, assume an historical responsibility for what happened. Many of us fought against it, all of us are going to give the guarantee that it will not happen again'* (emphasis added) (Sachs in Boraine, 1994: 128)⁴⁴. This pledge is further entrenched through the intrinsic reference to the apartheid past in the constitutional arrangement and through the TRC process of recovery and reckoning of apartheid abuses. Moreover, this collective pledge not to repeat the past, to respect human rights and to avoid internal strife is sometimes evoked as a new covenant replacing the former myth of the Afrikaner covenant with God⁴⁵ and uniting all South Africans. It is thus a founding act of the "new" South Africa and a symbol of the new nation since it gathers all South Africans in a common "sacred" alliance and commitment. Rhetorical references to this pledge thereby perform the image of national unity and unify all South Africans around overarching values: denunciation of apartheid, commitment to work together and join efforts for reconciliation and reconstruction, and commitment to democracy. Thirdly, the narrative of survival and healing downplays the recognition, reparation and commemoration deserved by victims. Thus, former victims and perpetrators are put on an equal moral footing as being victims of the same traumatic event (Meister, 1995: 6). An ambiguity of this moral equalisation is that the process of identification requires victims to identify with the shame of

⁴⁴ See also Mandela, 1994p; 1995r; 1997h; 1998hr; 1998f.

⁴⁵ A cornerstone of Afrikaner nationalism was the myth of the covenant which the Voortrekkers entered with God on the eve of facing Dingaan's army (1838). They interpreted their victory over the Zulu impis at the Blood River battle as a sign of their election by God and of their well-founded right to settle in South Africa, own the land and rule the people.

perpetrators and perpetrators to identify with the humanity and dignity of victims (Meister, 1995: 15; Storey, 1994: 3-4). What happens then when, as often in the South African case, there seems to be neither shame, repentance and contrition nor understanding on the perpetrators' side (Braude, 1996: 59, 63-64)? Moreover, the recognition and reparation due to former victims are also belittled insofar as victims *'are morally expected to dedicate themselves to the "proposition" that peace is victory enough'* (Meister, 1995: 6). This perspective is illustrated in the conception that amnesties decided by the TRC may not meet the demands of justice but that they are the *'price to pay for peace, for the common good'* (Verwoerd, 1996: 75-76). More broadly, this narrative rests on a shift from justice (legal but also social justice) to reconciliation and peacefulness. The pitfalls of such an approach are that marginalising the claims for legal justice and, above all, downplaying the tearing apart of families, forced removals and other structural effects of apartheid, and, as a corollary, sidelining the need for social justice, is likely to harbour frustrations and socio-economic tensions, hence to undermine peace and reconciliation (Mamdani, 1996: 6-8; Robins, 1997b). Finally, former victims and perpetrators are put on equal footing as commonly benefiting from the "new" South Africa. By depicting the transition from apartheid to post-apartheid as a story not merely of unity but of clear improvement of the situation (Thelen, 1992: 11-12), the national identity narrative establishes the "new" South Africa as a strongly positive gain for all South Africans. However, it thereby conceals that, under apartheid, the status and conditions of victims and beneficiaries (as well as within these categories) were different, that individual situations have diversely been affected by the changeover and that, in the present, they still largely differ. By telling the story of the "new" South Africa as that of an improvement, the narrative of common trauma and healing ignores that both the perception and the reality of improvement are very unevenly shared, hence that individuals' expectations and assessments of the current situation are very diverse⁴⁶.

Therefore, the narrative of survival and healing constitutes a thorough attempt to promote national cohesion and reconciliation by favouring the common identification of all South Africans as victims and survivors of apartheid, as holders of a common knowledge (or "memory") of the past and as beneficiaries of the new democratic, peaceful and inclusive South Africa. This fourth dimension of the narrative thereby seeks to dramatically re-found social identities by transcending existing divisive identities (races, ethnic groups, status as victims or beneficiaries of apartheid) so as to establish South African-ness as pre-eminent identity. This narrative of survival and healing is however not devoid of ambiguities and pitfalls, especially in the short term, since it entails a relative forgetting of the past and sidelining of present disparities and since it requires a dramatic recasting of individual and collective representations of the self and of the past.

⁴⁶ In this respect, the following excerpt from an interview Mrs Kondile gave after her hearing by the TRC is revealing: *"It is easy for (Nelson) Mandela and (Desmond) Tutu to forgive ... they lead vindicated lives. In my life nothing, not a single thing has changed since my son was burnt by barbarians ... nothing. Therefore I cannot forgive"* (quoted in Krog, 1997; see also Robins, 1997b).

To conclude, the new identity narrative emerging in post-apartheid South Africa seeks to entrench a break with the past, democratisation, reconciliation and national cohesion. Through specific narratives, images or broader discursive practices, it concretises these values and supports processes which aim at actualising these principles and spreading them so that they be held and shared by all South Africans. Insofar as the subjective dimension of the reconstruction and reconciliation of South Africa is deemed pre-eminent, especially in the short term, the national identity narrative is thus expected to promote South African-ness as prevailing identity and to define it as essentially democratic, peaceful and inclusive; as a corollary, it strives to recast pre-existing identities to make reconciliation possible and to foster national cohesion. The various contents and forms of the new identity narrative examined in this chapter all encompass a more or less direct, overt and strong evocation of the South African past order and identity. They thereby all entail a certain representation of the (recent) past. As I will now examine, the new narrative of the past is thus closely intertwined with the new identity narrative which it reflects and supports.

Chapter Eight:

New representations of the past

In Part One (Chapter 4), we saw that the representation of the national past is part and parcel of the national identity narrative. Indeed, in congruence with the identity narrative, the narrative of the nation's past seeks to portray the nation as a community which has a distinctive identity and moves through history. It therefore tends to encompass key events and actors in the "national past" and to endow them with meaning and significance retrospectively. It further strives to erase from the collective representation of the past all that might separate groups and to match contemporary values, mores and objectives of the community, hence promoting selective rememberings and forgettings of the past. Moreover, in the two previous chapters, I have shown that, in post-apartheid South Africa, there is a close interplay between the national identity narrative and the representation of the past since dealing with the past has been conceived as a cornerstone of the construction of the "new" South Africa; since the goals, modalities and channels of the public reconstruction of the representation of the past have been informed by the new dominant values and objectives; and since the essential features of the identity narrative –and the specific images and narratives which concretise it– include a reference to the representation of the past. As a result, one can expect the new public narrative of the past to avowedly and strongly reflect and support the new vision for society and the new identity narrative, characterised by a break with the past, democratisation, reconciliation and national unity. In addition, we saw that the representation of the past has taken form as a presentist and authoritative representation, meant to take its place among the collective representations and cognitive structures of the "new" South Africans. The new prevailing representation of the past therefore constitutes a dominant representation of the past, a new master narrative. In this chapter, I will firstly analyse the new narratives of the past which have emerged as part of the construction of the "new" South Africa, while focusing particularly on the new dominant narrative. I will then examine how the latter is objectified and entrenched in the new national symbolism.

8.1- A renewed perspective on the past

In South Africa, in the wake of the regime change, a new vision for society has emerged, accompanied by a renewed perspective on the past, which has been deliberately promoted. As a result, the narrative of the past has been (self-consciously or not) reshaped and a new dominant narrative has emerged. It is a presentist and authoritative narrative –albeit more accurate, reliable and representative than former ones–, concerned with fostering reconciliation, democratisation and national unity.

Replacing the narratives of the past formerly prevailing under apartheid, the new master narrative proposes a conciliatory representation of the past. It is occasionally challenged or contested by alternative narratives of the past.

8.1.1- The narratives of the past prevailing under apartheid

Under apartheid, the representation of the past was openly political and strongly partisan. Two main competing representations coexisted: the dominant official narrative of the past and the narrative promoted by the resistance movement. Both narratives had several variants, were multi-vocal and challenged by voices on their own side; further, they evolved over time. In this sub-section, I will focus on some of their main features which reflect the constructivist nature of the representation of the past and its congruence with the representation of collective identity; I will further examine these representations as they crystallised during the 1980s, in a context of heightened polarisation and conflict.

Under apartheid, the official representation of the past started its narrative in 1652, with the arrival of the first white settlers, and thereafter focused on the settlement of the white community, on its advance and conquest of Southern Africa and on its socio-economic development, political organisation and ways of life. The overarching story-line of this representation was a tale of the progress of civilisation, order and socio-economic development brought about by white settlers and their descendants against (or in spite of) ignorance, barbarism and traditionalism. The representation of the past shaped by Afrikaner nationalism strongly informed apartheid's official narrative. Emerging in the early 20th century, Afrikaner nationalism portrayed Afrikaners as an homogenous ethnic group characterised by a common language, a shared (Calvinist) faith and destiny, that of occupying, developing and ruling South Africa⁴⁷. Afrikaner nationalism rested on religious beliefs, and in particular the myth of being God's chosen people in South Africa, as well as on a racist ideology asserting the supremacy of the Afrikaner volk (and more broadly the "white race"), hence its well-founded right to own and rule the land. The shaping of an adequate representation of the past was a cornerstone of Afrikaner nationalism and of its capacity to gather and mobilise people. The seminal event of this Afrikaner representation of the past was the Great Trek which was deemed to symbolise the determination, solidarity, attachment to the land and ability to survive of Afrikaners as well as their key role in the conquest and socio-economic development of South Africa and, above all, their covenant with God (Bellamy, 1996: 112-113; Thompson, 1985; Saunders, 1988). Most of these features

⁴⁷ Strikingly, Afrikaner nationalism pictured Afrikaners as "indigenous" people of Southern Africa by spreading the myth of simultaneous settling of Bantu and Afrikaner groups in Southern African as well as by rejecting their being colonialists insofar as they had themselves been victims of English imperial power (Bellamy, 1996: 112-113; Cornevin, 1979).

persisted in the official representation of the past promoted by the apartheid regime after 1948. Significantly, most symbols, monuments and public holidays of the apartheid regime celebrated events and heroes taken from "Afrikaner history" rather than from "English history" (let alone non-white history)⁴⁸. As a corollary of this focus on the white past in South Africa, the official representation totally misrepresented the experiences, stories, and cultures of non-whites, either by altogether silencing them or by demeaningly portraying them. Colin Bundy thus highlighted that apartheid's official representation of the past narrated the social, political and economic development of a whole country while silencing certain "active forces" of history (e.g. black workers and peasants) and marginalising the majority of the population (1988: 2-4). When they were depicted in the school curriculum, public monuments or official discourse, non-whites, and in particular Africans, were represented as backward and ignorant savages or as bloodthirsty barbarians (or, in an updated version, terrorists) (id.; Bellamy, 1996: 117; Cornevin, 1979; Saunders, 1988). The official representation thus made little room for the autonomous representation of the history, traditions and cultures of non-whites and, when it did, it portrayed them as ethnographic subjects set in a backward and immutable time and displayed them in natural history museums (see above, Chapter 6.2.2).

To sum up, apartheid's official representation of the past constituted a very narrowly focused narrative portraying white history and achievements. It presented white rule and domination as well-founded and beneficiary for the whole of South Africa while marginalising the majority of the population and silencing the alternative representations and claims of the resistance movement.

The resistance movement developed an alternative vision for South Africa, and as part of this, shaped a coherent and ideologically motivated representation of the past. The main thrust of this alternative narrative of the past was to construct the representation of the past as the story of the contest between white domination and (essentially non-white) resistance and opposition to this domination. The main-story line is developed in several variants: white racial domination, oppression and exploitation were termed "colonialism" when the story was begun in 1652; "national exclusion", when it was started in 1910; and "apartheid", when it was started in 1948. This alternative narrative thereby constructed the representation of the past as the narrative of the liberation struggle. In the 1980s, this narrative of the liberation struggle was the outcome of two different sectors: the activist context of the liberation movement and the academic context of the "social history" movement. The former reshaped the representation of the past through leaflets, informal story-telling and ceremonies, songs, and public rallies. The movement of social history, a trend of historical writing standing out in the 1980s, was at the crossroads of two renewed approaches to history: 'history from below' was a trend of academic history seeking to research individual and collective conditions of workers, sharecroppers, urban blacks, etc.; 'people's history' constituted an attempt to encourage people to

⁴⁸ On apartheid's symbols, monuments and holidays, see Brownell, 1993; Rand Daily Mail (March 23, 1981); CA

appropriate history by writing about their past, that of their firm, township, etc. and by learning the history of the struggle through popular history books and booklets, slides, tapes and TV reports (Minkley and al., 1996: 3-6; Rassool, 1997: 27-29; Minkley and Rassool, 1998: 91-93). These two different –activist and academic– sectors had common goals and biases in reshaping the past. Firstly, they aimed at re-integrating “the people” in the representation of the past and at highlighting the experiences of the majority and the daily life of the average (wo)man. Moreover, activist and academic representations of the past as narratives of the liberation struggle tended to emphasise non-white voices, histories, and traditions as well as contemporary experiences, symbols and actors of the resistance movement. As a result, a set of alternative symbols, heroes, myths and commemorative days –most of them avowedly turned towards political mobilisation and contest– was constituted⁴⁹. Although under apartheid it was not allowed to be displayed publicly, this alternative lore was widely shared, spread and transmitted to new generations a narrative of the past alternative to the official one. While they thus shared similar objectives and biases and in spite of attempts to link them, activist and academic reshaping of the past intervened at different levels of public discourse and had a different influence on public knowledge of the past. In what follows, I will focus on the activist narrative of the past prevailing in the 1980s to examine the devices whereby this narrative of the past boiled down to the story of the contest between resistance and apartheid and to show that this representation aimed at fostering political resistance and mobilisation.

In the narrative of the liberation struggle, a range of more or less deliberate devices contributed to shaping the representation of the past as the story of resistance. Firstly, the representation of the past was not that of the contest between apartheid and resistance as much as that of the resistance to apartheid. In other words, the focus was on resistance and apartheid was merely constructed as its polar opposite (Minkley and al., 1996: 16-17). Thus, apartheid was mainly depicted in terms of abuses by the security forces and death squads, trials, states of emergency or symbolic removals (Alexandra), which were the sites of encounter between apartheid and active resistance. As a corollary, more systemic effects (pass laws, forced removals) or aspects less affected by the conflict (for instance, parliamentary politics) were relatively sidelined. Secondly, resistance was projected as the interpretative framework and foremost dimension of social reality. Thus, the narrative of liberation struggle represented people by constructing them in essentialist categories –such as “women”, “blacks”, “peasants” or “exiles”– which were intrinsically conceived as marginalised or oppressed groups and whose identity was structured around their domination and exploitation by apartheid and/or around their role in the resistance movement (Minkley and al., 1996: 3; Rassool, 1997: 29). Moreover, resistance was shown to extend everywhere by depicting all forms of resistance and protest as part of

(June 2, 1987), Weekly Mail, (December 13, 1991). On apartheid’s public holidays cycle, see Annex 2.

⁴⁹ On ANC symbols, anthem and national days, see ANC, 1989. See also UDF (1987; 1987?), Rand Daily Mail (March 23, 1981).

the “liberation struggle”. Thus, all forms of institutional resistance –mass action, underground activism, exile organisations, armed struggle and peaceful protest– and all political parties and groups were encompassed in the overarching evocation of the “resistance movement” (Mandela, 1997b: 2). Furthermore, more localised, less “progressive” or unrelated forms of protest (such as certain rural protest movements of the 1940s and 1950s) were also homogenised as part of the resistance movement to apartheid. The alternative representation of the past thus tended to conceal that *‘apartheid did not always produce resistance, and that resistance was not always occasioned by apartheid’* (Minkley and Rassool, 1998: 94). Finally, the narrative of the liberation struggle could depict resistance as a dominant feature of social reality because it was at the crossroads of two narratives of the struggle: one focusing on the labour movement, non-racial class struggles and exploitation by the capitalist system; the other focusing on *‘organised national struggle, (...) on heroes and leaders and on state oppression’* (Callinicos, 1991: 258-259; see also, Minkley and Rassool, 1998: 92-93). It thus encompassed both socio-economic and political aspects of daily life and promoted the image of resistance on all fronts. The third device whereby the narrative of the liberation struggle emphasised the significance of resistance in the daily experiences of individuals and in the nation’s life lay in its focus on active resistance. Thus, the narrative of the past tended to narrow down the representation of resistance to that of “the Struggle”, that is active resistance rather than mere opposition. In particular, the narrative emphasised large socio-political organisations such as the ANC and, later, the mass democratic movement (UDF and MDM) as well as the armed struggle, whether in exile or underground (Rassool, 1997: 28; Mamdani, 1996: 3-4; Mandela, 1997b: 2). Moreover, the chronology of the narrative of the liberation struggle focused on the 20th century, in particular on the apartheid era which was marked by a stronger and more successful resistance movement. It further emphasised three periods –late 1950s-early 1960s, early to mid 1970s and mid to late 1980s– which correspond to the highlights of active resistance to apartheid; likewise, it marginalised periods when resistance was low or repressed by the security forces. In this way, the narrative of liberation struggle produced the image of a strong and continuous resistance to apartheid.

The narrative of the liberation struggle prominent in the 1980s thus represented the past as a contest between apartheid and resistance, or, rather, as the story of the resistance to apartheid. This narrative was informed by strong presentist concerns: it aimed at promoting the cause of the resistance movement and at extending political mobilisation (Odendaal, 1991: 362; Rassool, 1997: 28). Indeed, by boiling down the narrative of the past to that of resistance and by highlighting the continuity of resistance from the past to the present, the narrative of the liberation struggle established resistance as the main feature and essential concern of the population in the past and in the present. Further, by highlighting the ancientness, scope, popular support, well-founded cause, great leaders and humanist values of the resistance as well as the abuses and injustices of apartheid, this narrative underlined the legitimacy and strength of resistance, hence the ineluctability of its victory. In the context of

heightened polarisation and conflict, parts of the alternative representation of the past, and especially its most political aspects, came to be more openly proclaimed and displayed. Thus, ceremonies on alternative public holidays were organised, on such occasions as the commemoration of the 1960 Sharpeville killings, the 1976 Soweto events or the Blood River Battle⁵⁰. They were celebrated both as symbols of the strength of resistance and as mark of state oppression and violence (UDF, 1987; UDF, 1987?). Although prohibited and often fiercely repressed, these commemorations were marked by marches, stay-away, boycotts or mass public meetings. In this context of tension and confrontation, their symbolic and emotional power was such that they could in turn trigger off more protest and unrest. In 1986, the state of emergency was thus re-imposed just a few days before the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprising in anticipation of widespread unrest (Lowry, 1995: 15).

From the 1980s, and above all in the 1990s, the activist narrative of the liberation struggle gained wider publicity and came to the fore in the public sphere. The pre-eminence it gained in the mid- to late 1980s resulted from a set of contemporary developments. Because of the growing political instability and conflict in the 1980s, the socio-political contest between the apartheid regime and its opponents came to be regarded as the prevailing feature of the time. As a result, representing the past and the present in terms of a conflict of apartheid versus resistance constituted the most relevant framework to represent and interpret reality. Further, if apartheid and resistance had been for decades a major dimension of black people's lives, the heightened political conflict of the 1980s affected more people, more intensively than before. Moreover, it increased knowledge and awareness of the situation amongst both the white population and the international community. For all these audiences, the apartheid versus resistance scheme therefore appeared as the most relevant and meaningful paradigm. Moreover, the narrative of liberation struggle gained pre-eminence because it received greater publicity and was better channelled through the distribution of leaflets, echoes in the media, or the organisation of commemorative ceremonies which received mass participation and support. Finally, the activist narrative of the liberation struggle was highlighted and publicised because it was more or less directly supported and echoed by some trends of historical scholarship. Indeed, as noted above, social history – through its focus on “the people” and on resistance and oppression– both nurtured and reflected the activist narrative of liberation struggle (Minkley and al., 1996: 3-4; Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 6-7).

In the early 1990s, with the beginning of the regime transition, the narrative of the liberation struggle, which was more in agreement with the spirit of the time and the ‘sense of history’ than the official apartheid narrative, became the prevailing representation⁵¹. On the one hand, government's

⁵⁰ See for instance UDF (1987; 1987?), *Natal Mercury* (December 17, 1987), *Star* (December 18, 1988).

⁵¹ In this new political context, the narrative of the liberation struggle evolved and certain features characteristic of the 1980s were modified. For instance, while in the 1980s, the narrative of the struggle combined the representation of class struggle and national contest, in the 1990s the latter was clearly prevailing. In this paragraph, I do not seek to analyse these modifications as much as to show how this narrative became dominant in the public representation of the past.

qualified acceptance that apartheid had failed and its commitment to change challenged and sidelined apartheid's traditional paradigm, including its representation of the past. On the other hand, the re-integration of the resistance movement in the political sphere and the publicity given to its views led to highlight its representation of the past. At the same time, the narrative of liberation struggle appeared the most relevant perspective on the present since, intrinsic to this narrative, was the vision that the apartheid system was to be overturned and replaced by a new, more democratic and representative regime. Indeed, the process of regime transition confirmed the vision of the ineluctable death of apartheid and victory of resistance, later evoked by President Mandela in these words: '*at each turn of history, apartheid was bound to spawn resistance; it was destined to bring to life the forces that would guarantee its death*' (1997b: 1). It thus fitted the representation of a national liberation movement bringing about a regime change (albeit not in the form of military victory).

To conclude, under apartheid and during the transition period, two main representations of the past –the official narrative of apartheid and that of the liberation struggle– coexisted and competed. Both were part and parcel of a paradigm and vision for South Africa, hence were strongly ideological and largely moulded by present concerns. The 1994 elections and the advent of the “new” South Africa witnessed the emergence of a new project and a new identity narrative for the country. In congruence with the latter, the representation of the past has been remoulded and a new narrative of the past is emerging. Because the “new” South Africa has made a priority of dealing with the past and because its new identity narrative is strongly informed by the legacy of the past and its representation, the emerging dominant narrative is obviously and avowedly political and presentist.

8.1.2- *The new dominant representation of the past: a conciliatory narrative*

In the “new” South Africa, the emerging narrative of the past is moulded by the broader project of breaking with apartheid, promoting democracy and fostering reconciliation and national cohesion. This new dominant representation therefore constitutes a conciliatory narrative which seeks to promote an inclusive, consensual, unifying and positive representation of the past. To that end, the conciliatory narrative makes use of the narrative of the liberation struggle which it appropriates while selectively modifying it, thereby preserving remembrance of the past while “taming” divisive and painful memories. Thus, while in the next sub-section I will show that the narrative of the liberation struggle has persisted as such –in a softened and “updated” version– in the “new” South Africa, in this sub-section I will examine why and how this narrative is absorbed and modified as part of the new dominant conciliatory narrative and how the new conciliatory narrative thus supports and reflects the new narrative of national identity.

The new representation of the past constitutes a conciliatory narrative which aims at transcending the partisan division and competition formerly existing between the representations of the past while proposing a representation that would be shared by all and be acceptable to all. It thus seeks to limit opportunities of divisions and conflicts in the present about past issues or about the very representation of the past. In this way, the conciliatory narrative tries to promote a representation of the past that favours the healing of the South African society at two levels: healing of the divisions and sufferings bequeathed by apartheid (and colonialism) and healing of the social and cultural divisiveness of society and of the former exclusion of and lack of respect for non-white experiences, memories, traditions and cultures. The thrust of this conciliatory narrative is thus threefold: to be consensual by addressing the biases and prejudices of the former official representation and by downplaying the divisiveness and suffering of the past; to be inclusive by incorporating formerly marginalised histories and voices in such a way that they add up rather than totally replace the events and actors portrayed in the former official representation; to be unifying and positive by portraying national cohesion, non-racialism and democratisation as possible and desirable. This new narrative which seeks to reach consensus, curtail the divisiveness of the past and promote a shared representation is, however, not devoid of internal ambiguities and contradictions. In particular, it needs to strike a balance between two sets of tensions. Firstly, the search for consensus and general acceptability of the representation can conflict with the will to incorporate formerly marginalised voices, events and actors while preserving (albeit downplaying) old ones. Indeed, partisan representations of the past can persist so that each side finds that its "own" past is not sufficiently emphasised and the other's too much. Secondly, the choice to reintegrate and celebrate cultural and historical diversity in its richness can be in tension with the emphasis on commonalities and the promotion of unity.

The new conciliatory narrative is ambivalent towards the old narrative of the liberation struggle: its thrust is to absorb and transform the liberation struggle narrative in order to neutralise it and to transcend its divisiveness while preserving and emphasising elements deemed useful and meaningful in the present. On the one hand, elements of the old narrative of the liberation struggle persist in the new conciliatory narrative as a result of both spontaneous developments and deliberate actions. Firstly, the old narrative of the liberation struggle persists because there is some continuity between the resistance movement and the "new" South Africa: some leaders, values and objectives of the "new" South Africa are the extension of those of the resistance movement; besides, the new regime and government are widely regarded as heirs of the resistance movement. Parts of the liberation struggle narrative borne by supporters of the resistance movement and incorporated in its paradigm therefore persist in the "new" South Africa. Further, some leaders of the new dispensation deliberately seek to highlight this legacy so as to benefit from the legitimacy and popularity attached to it. Moreover, elements of the old

narrative of the liberation struggle are preserved in the new narrative because the former is considered to narrate the “real” South African past in that it claimed to portray the daily life of average South Africans and to re-integrate hitherto marginalised stories and cultures. The new conciliatory narrative can thus gain legitimacy by referring to the old narrative of the liberation struggle as the story of the “real” past; it thus also supports and reflects the “project of recovering the hidden past” which is furthered in the “new” South Africa (see Chapter 6 above).

On the other hand, the new conciliatory narrative, which thus rests on and uses the older narrative of the liberation struggle, also seeks to modify it and smooth its edges. Indeed, the new South African identity narrative is one of dealing with the past in order to overcome it rather than one of doing away with the past and promoting forgetting. Therefore, the new narrative of the past does face and incorporate the reality of a divisive and painful past: as noted in the previous chapter, it is part of the narrative of a “new” country not of that of a “young” country. Thus, the conciliatory narrative seeks to act upon the representation of the past as a contest between apartheid and resistance so as to provide a representation of the past conforming to the new political context, and, in particular, one which can be less divisive. This conciliatory reshaping of the old narrative of the liberation struggle is made necessary by both contextual and ideological factors. Firstly, the advent of the new South Africa has officially sanctioned the “death” of apartheid and the break with the past order. Therefore, the contemporary representation of the past cannot maintain a narrative which depicts apartheid as an evil to oppose and resist in the present. Indeed, while the “new” South Africa –like the old narrative of the liberation struggle– portrays the past as a contest between apartheid and resistance, it relegates this contest to the past. Instead, it emphasises in the present the contrast between apartheid and the “new” South Africa, thereby replacing an ideological opposition by a temporal opposition and partisan exclusiveness by all-encompassing inclusiveness. Therefore, the key distinction between the narrative of the liberation struggle and the new conciliatory narrative is that while both depict the past as a contest between apartheid and resistance (albeit with different emphases and underlying subtexts, as I will soon examine) and while both highlight the strong influence of the past on the present, the former emphasises elements of continuity between past and present and seeks to root what is regarded as the main reality of the present –resistance to apartheid– in the past, while the latter is constructed on the vision that the present constitutes an irreducible break with the past. Secondly, the advent of the “new” South Africa has brought about a new more conciliatory mood amongst both the public and major public actors. The latter are aware of the divisive potential of the narrative of the liberation struggle and favour instead the promotion of a consensual representation of the past. The narrative of the liberation struggle is deemed divisive because it represents the past as a political and ideological contest: it can therefore support the persistence of divisions and conflicts along the lines of past divisions or it can favour the use of the representation of the past as a resource in present partisan debate or contest. Moreover, it is open to a manichean formulation which tends to exclude from the

new regime those who did not resist apartheid while tending to portray the past in racial terms (“black resistance” versus “white apartheid”), thereby contradicting and undermining the vision of the post-1994 South Africa as multiracial. Finally, the memories of abuses, suffering and injustices –which were part of the narrative of the liberation struggle and served to foster political mobilisation– can be divisive in the “new” South Africa. Indeed, they can keep people in mourning, thereby hampering their adaptation to the new situation and to the new collective identity. They can further undermine reconciliation and heighten claims concerning the reallocation of resources in compensation of past injustices and abuses.

In order to adapt to the new more conciliatory political situation, the new conciliatory narrative seeks to smooth and appease the memories of the apartheid past conveyed by the narrative of the liberation struggle. In one article, Steven Robins spoke of “taming the memories of the past”, a notion he took from a study by the Japanese anthropologist Yoneyama ‘*on the ways in which Hiroshima’s city leaders and the business community sought to “tame memories”, to wipe away the bloodstains and to smooth the jagged edges of the bombed city*’ (1997a). In post-apartheid South Africa, taming the memories of the past consists in suppressing, or at least belittling, the divisiveness of the past and of its representation. Thus, the narrative of the liberation struggle is re-appropriated but modified in a conciliatory fashion so as to be less painful and divisive and to become consensual, inclusive and unifying. In this way, *‘the story which brings the national past together (...) is the repression and resistance narrative which characterised the anti-imperial histories but with the conflicts of the past (the anti-apartheid struggle) now belonging to all in the multicultural African nation of ethnic diversity. South Africans become a community, conflicts inexorably lead to a pre-determined nationality and history becomes cast as a “collective heritage” which reflects “cultural diversity” in a democratic “World in One Country”*’ (Minkley and al., 1996: 24). Significantly, this conciliatory representation also impacts strongly on individual memories. Thus, the recent trend of autobiographies and historical biographies is informed by a subtext of redemption, reconciliation and healing, shifting away from “*cause*” writing’ associated with the political struggle in which the impetus was towards (internal or external) exile or death (Nuttall, 1998: 6, 75; see also Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 13-14). To sum up, in post-1994 South Africa, the new narrative of the past needs to make use of the old narrative of resistance versus apartheid, but does so in a conciliatory fashion, while taking into account the dramatic change resulting from the advent of a new democratic and inclusive dispensation.

Modalities of reshaping of the old narrative of the liberation struggle by the new conciliatory narrative

The re-appropriation and modification of the liberation struggle narrative by the new conciliatory narrative rests on the taming of divisive and painful memories through new emphases and

interpretations of the representation of the past. Thus, the new conciliatory narrative undertakes: firstly, to show that the dichotomy apartheid/resistance can be transcended, hence that reconciliation and national cohesion are possible; and secondly, to highlight the positive aspects of the past and, as a corollary, to celebrate the “new” South Africa which is portrayed as embodying these positive aspects.

Firstly, the conciliatory narrative emphasises that albeit real and very deep, the division in two sides –apartheid/resistance– can be transcended and that people can be reconciled and united. The conciliatory narrative shows that the division apartheid versus resistance is not an essential dichotomy, thereby breaking with the narrative of liberation struggle which promoted a clear-cut and partisan association of apartheid with evil and of resistance with good. Thus, the conciliatory narrative highlights that the resistance side is not free from violent and traumatic deeds (although these cannot be equated with the scope of apartheid’s evil) and that neither race or group can be simplistically associated with good or evil. This vision is concretised in public discourse and, above all, underpins the choice to have the TRC deal with all gross human rights violations, those of the resistance movement as well as those of the apartheid regime (Boraine and Levy, 1995; Asmal and al., 1996; Mandela, 1996hr: 1; 1997f: 2). A complement to this representation that evil and good are present on both sides, is the view, promoted by the new narrative of reconciliation, that all individuals and groups can repent and change⁵². Furthermore, the conciliatory narrative depicts apartheid’s evil as systemic rather than personal and focuses on specific abuses and injustices, particularly gross human rights violations. Thus, by showing that the evil of apartheid lay in the system rather than in individuals and was the work of some (extremist) personalities (death squads members for instance) and top-rank officials, the conciliatory narrative avoids making the white community feel guilty and or antagonising it. The same result is achieved by focusing on the denunciation of apartheid as gross human rights violations rather than more systemic effects (pass laws, forced resettlements, etc.). Indeed, ethically it is easier for whites to dissociate themselves from deeds that even at the time were (usually) illegal and deemed reprehensible (even though “useful”) by a growing section of the white population. Besides, personally, they can easily see themselves as not guilty and not responsible for apartheid (except in a quite “abstract” and distant way), which would be more difficult with a focus on pass laws or racially unequal allocation of resource whose advantages were shared by all whites. Secondly, in order to transcend the division apartheid/resistance, the conciliatory narrative redefines the notion of who were the victims of apartheid. As noted in the previous chapter, the new identity narrative portrays all South Africans as victims through the narrative of survival and healing for which *‘we have all, in one way or another, been victim to the system of apartheid’* (Mandela, 1996f: 2). It thereby inverts the narrative of the liberation struggle which depicted the victims of apartheid as being the people

⁵² This vision is largely imbued with religious conceptions of sin, redemption, forgiveness and reconciliation (see, for instance, Storey, 1994) and is underpinned by the variant of the narrative of survival and healing which favours the identification of perpetrators with their victims (see above, Chapter 7).

subjected to the oppression, exploitation and violence of apartheid, i.e. mainly and structurally black people. Moreover, the dichotomy resistance/apartheid is transcended by portraying conflicts and divisions not as those opposing two ideologically antagonistic sides but as internal tensions and struggles tearing apart a national community. This vision seems to underlie the following excerpt of President Mandela's address on 1996 Human Rights day: *'it is only natural that all of us should feel a collective sense of shame for the evils that, as compatriots, we inflicted upon one another'* (emphasis added) (1996hr: 2; see also, 1994p). As analysed in Part One, the device of representing the past as fratricide makes it possible to presume the existence and cohesion of the community one wants to foster (Anderson, 1991: 201-203).

Therefore, the new conciliatory narrative rejects manichean and essentialist representation of the dichotomy apartheid/resistance and portrays reconciliation as possible and desirable. It thereby highlights a number of commonalities shared by all South Africans: they can all do evil but also be redeemed; they all share a common status as victims of the apartheid system; they are all members of a same fatherland.

The second device whereby the conciliatory narrative appropriates the narrative of the liberation struggle while modifying it in a conciliatory fashion lies in focusing on the positive aspects of the past while reshaping or sidelining its traumatic and divisive dimensions. The narrative of the liberation struggle often chose to emphasise the evil of the apartheid regime and the abuses of the security forces as well as the violence and oppression undergone by the people and/or the freedom fighters. It could thus highlight the necessity and justness of the freedom struggle and mobilise supporters. While still referring to the past mainly as apartheid versus resistance, the conciliatory narrative displaces this divisive and painful representation. Instead, it seeks to highlight the positive features of the resistance movement and to depict the past as midwife of the new South Africa rather than as conflict, division, suffering and mourning. It emphasises those aspects of the liberation struggle narrative which focused on the achievements, great leaders, objectives and values of the resistance movement (such as humanism, non-racialism, dedication to better life, sense of sacrifice, or vision for a "new" South Africa). An underlying connection with the present complements this representation: it consists in underlining that the leaders and values of the resistance movement are largely those of the new dispensation, as epitomised by Nelson Mandela.

At the same time, those leaders, values and objectives are recast so as to be detached from their partisan context and portrayed as acceptable to all "new" South Africans "of goodwill". Thus, the representation of the main leaders of the new government (formerly leaders of the resistance movement) insists on their commitment to reconciliation and national unity, on their dedication to better the lives of all South Africans and on the things they have achieved for the country as a whole. Similarly, the conciliatory representation depicts values and objectives not as those of certain South Africans only (the freedom fighters) but as universal values which should be shared and promoted, in

the present, by all South Africans. The conciliatory narrative, for instance, portrays non-racialism as the major tradition of the resistance movement⁵³ and links it back to the 1955 Freedom Charter. It thereby emphasises the ancientness and strength of this tradition in South Africa, underlines the commitment of the new leaders to this value, calls upon South Africans to adopt it and gives historical depth and meaningfulness to the metaphor of the rainbow nation. In addition, values and symbols of the resistance movement and of formerly silenced cultures and traditions are publicly acknowledged and celebrated as a collective heritage of the South African nation. More specifically, the conciliatory narrative represents dead victims and heroes as having fought for the sake of the nation to come and as being precursors of the “new” South Africa⁵⁴ and depicts the “new” South Africa as complementing and achieving the struggles of past actors⁵⁵. Another way of universalising the values of the resistance movement is to invoke these in the context of the “new” South Africa. Thus, current leaders still resort to the rhetoric of struggle and sacrifice as resources for mobilisation but the struggles and sacrifices they evoke are not a partisan contest but a common fight to better society; they are fights against crime, misery, illiteracy, unemployment and so on (Mandela, 1996hr; 1996y; 1998f; Mbeki, 1997). In this way, the values and leaders of the resistance movement are portrayed as presaging those of the “new” South Africa, without appearing as a partisan representation or antagonising former supporters of apartheid. Therefore, the representation of the past is turned towards the present more than the past: it is more concerned with supporting and celebrating the “new” South Africa than with remembering, commemorating and mourning the past.

Further, the conciliatory narrative not only shows that the values, objectives and leaders of the resistance movement are embodied in the “new” South Africa (in a consensual manner beneficial to all) but also that “the Struggle” is completed in the “new” South Africa. In this perspective, the leaders of the resistance movement are now leaders of the “new” South Africa and their ideals and objectives are now turned in principles and policies, so that the “new” South Africa embodies the hopes and objectives of the Struggle. This representation has several overt or covert corollaries. Firstly, it implies that the “new” South Africa marks the victory of the resistance movement and the death of apartheid. By portraying all South Africans as victims of the apartheid system and the ideals and values of the resistance movement as universal and “good” values for all, the conciliatory narrative represents all South Africans as better off in the “new” South Africa. As seen above (chapter 7), such representations however conceal the diversity of conditions in the past and in the present and tends to constrain popular demands and expectations that past injustices and abuses be redressed. A corollary ambiguity

⁵³ This representation is challenged by some social scientists who recall that non-racialism was only one of the trends in the resistance movement and became clearly pre-eminent only recently, with the mass democratic movement of the 1980s (Bekker, 1997; Filatova, 1997; Foner, 1995: 171).

⁵⁴ See the national re-appropriation of Enoch Sontonga, Steve Biko or the youth of the 1976 uprising (Mandela, 1996y; 1996h; 1997b) and of such ancient heroes as Makanda, Shaka, etc. (Lekota, 1991).

concerns the manner of representing and considering apartheid's legacy in the present⁵⁶. Indeed, the dominant narrative of the "new" South Africa underscores that apartheid has been overturned and that a new, better dispensation has been established. How, then, to take into account, represent and deal with the persistence of apartheid's effects in the present? The issue is how to qualify and oppose those effects without defining them as apartheid and without turning against the new dispensation. For officials, the issue is further how to discourage and minimise claims, expectations and demands of the people about addressing and correcting those legacies of apartheid. Several devices of the new narrative combine for this purpose. As just evoked, the narrative of healing strongly highlights the improvement intrinsic to the "new" South Africa as well as the first positive achievements of the new dispensation. As a corollary, the representation of the past as socio-economic exploitation and disparities is marginalised. As noted above, in the 1980s, the representation of the "Struggle" encompassed two main trends: one focusing on the labour movement and non-racial class struggles, the other on the national liberation movement and political conflict. The conciliatory narrative, reflected in both public history and academic discourse, promotes this latter aspect while marginalising the former (Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 28-29; Mamdani, 1996: 5-7; Rassool, 1997: 28; see also Mbeki, 1998). Indeed, the change concretised by the new South Africa affects mainly, at least in the short term, citizenship, human rights, national integration, and political organisation rather than socio-economic conditions. Focusing on the former aspects thus makes it possible to portray the new South Africa as a dramatic and highly positive change and to downplay dissatisfaction and claims stemming from the latter. As a corollary, socio-economic issues are silenced or sidelined by being portrayed not as part of the legacy of apartheid but rather as apolitical and technical problems which the government is taking care of and which people should patiently cope with (Robins, 1997b). In this way, the conciliatory narrative is also constructed as a narrative of patience and acceptance.

In conclusion, the new dominant narrative of the past is a conciliatory narrative striving to promote reconciliation, national cohesion and inclusiveness, to appease suffering, divisions and bitterness inherited from the past, and to portray the past as midwife of the "new" South Africa. It thereby entrenches and celebrates the "new" South Africa and fosters patience and acceptance of present disparities and problems. This dominant (official) narrative of the past is however not the only narrative which has emerged and been modified in the renewed context of post-apartheid South Africa. Indeed alternative narratives have been promoted as more meaningful, accurate or relevant by other groups or in other circumstances.

⁵⁵ President Mandela thus stated '*we are confident that by forging a new and prosperous nation, we are continuing the fight in which Steve Biko paid the supreme sacrifice*' (1997b:5; see also 1996y; 1996w; 1996h).

⁵⁶ Inspiration for this argument comes from a discussion with Professor Minkley (History Department, UWC) May 1998.

8.1.3- Alternative representations and memory stakes

Alternative representations of the past emanating from other groups or used by state for different goals or in different circumstances often coexist with the dominant narrative. They can be developed either to sustain an alternative project for the country or, more narrowly, to constitute a resource for partisan contest and mobilisation (Zerubavel, 1995: 10-11; Thelen, 1992). In the “new” South Africa, besides the dominant conciliatory narrative, two main alternative narratives coexist: the narrative of the liberation struggle, “updated” and softened in congruence with the new context, and the new National Party (NP) narrative.

An updated narrative of the liberation struggle is still used occasionally, either by some members of the new government and the ANC or by other organisations and voices of the former resistance movement. This narrative is mainly used in a context of partisan politics to denounce and stigmatise one’s political opponents and to gather one’s supporters and entrench their support and solidarity. In the new context of democracy and reconciliation, the current narrative of the liberation struggle constitutes a softer version than that promoted in the 1980s. On rare occasions, new leaders make use of the narrative of the liberation struggle rather than of the conciliatory narrative. This is especially the case for partisan politics, when the new government or ANC members clearly want to oppose the NP and other former supporters of apartheid. By resorting to the representation of the past as extreme polarisation and ideological contest between apartheid and resistance, they recall the role of the NP (or alternatively some members of the business community or, very rarely, white South Africans) in the apartheid regime and portray themselves as holders of more humanist and positive values. They thereby bestow blame and reprobation on their opponents while fostering partisan mobilisation and solidarity and refreshing their own link with the resistance movement and the legitimacy and popularity attached to it. Further, the narrative of the liberation struggle portrays the political stage as a clear-cut ideological contest between two paradigms and choices of society. Evoking it in the present contributes to a dramatisation of the issue at stake and encourages people to take side instead of being undecided or moderate on the issue.

Mainly, the updated narrative of the liberation struggle is a representation promoted by other heirs of the resistance movement, in particular the Africanist movements (PAC, Azapo) or certain trends and personalities situated at the left of the ANC (Winnie Mandela, Bantu Holomisa, on certain occasions COSATU) who refer to it as their main discourse or on certain occasions only (debate on land restitution; polemics around the TRC, etc.). These alternative voices and parties resort to this representation for partisan politics, when criticising the NP and former personalities of the apartheid regime but also when opposing the new government and/or the ANC. In their view, the conciliatory narrative is a modification –or even a betrayal– of the spirit of “the Struggle”. They reject the

representation of an absolute temporal discontinuity between the apartheid order and the “new” South Africa, considering that the ideological and political polarisation between apartheid (which the NP is regarded as continuing) and the resistance (deemed to be now embodied by the government and/or the ANC, PAC, Azapo, etc.) remains a relevant and meaningful distinction in the present. They further consider that the project of reconciliation entails a certain forgetting of the past by encouraging victims and perpetrators to identify together, by promoting a consensual and conciliatory representation of the past and by marginalising the issue of socio-economic unbalances inherited from apartheid. In this perspective, the struggle should go on insofar as the “new” South Africa has not achieved all the goals, demands and ideals of the resistance movement and insofar as the political, social and economic impact of apartheid remains enormous. The conception underlying the persistent use of the liberation struggle narrative by these dissident voices is thus as an alternative to the official narrative. Resorting to the liberation struggle narrative indeed allows dissidents to challenge the representation of who constitutes the victims (in the past) and beneficiaries in the present –i.e. all South Africans or only those oppressed/ supporting the struggle– and of what were the goals and aspirations of the past to be achieved in the present –reconciliation versus purge or trials, non-racialism versus africanisation, political versus socio-economic harmonisation and reconstruction, etc. The representation of the past promoted by these dissident voices and parties thus continues the narrative of the liberation struggle in that it favours a representation of the “Struggle” as suffering and sacrifice and insists on the need to continue the struggle against apartheid and its legacy in the present. This representation of the past is further strongly informed by mourning and by repetition of the past. At stake for these dissident voices is an attempt to condemn parties and personalities formerly associated with apartheid but also to show that, in acceding to government, the ANC has become too conciliatory with white economic and political power and has forgotten the “true” legacy of the “Struggle” and the meaning of the sacrifices of the people.

A good illustration of the contrast between the conciliatory narrative officially promoted by new leaders and the narrative of the liberation struggle used by other voices formerly associated with the resistance movement can be found in the commemoration of the twentieth anniversary of the Soweto uprising on June 16, 1996. In the “new” South Africa, June 16 has been established as public holiday and recast as Youth Day (see below, section 2.2). In 1996, the main official commemoration was a public meeting in Pietersburg where President Mandela addressed 30 000 people. This commemoration was put under the banner of ‘Youth Action for Nation-Building, Reconciliation and Youth development’. It was thus clearly turned towards present concerns and was largely devoid of references to the actual 1976 events and to “the Struggle”. *‘Apart from the multicoloured South African flag, there were no political banners in sight, no ANC colours, no struggle T-shirts and there was a total absence of the iconic image of Sam Nzima’s photograph’* (Minkley and al., 1996: 18). The ANC Youth League chose to focus the commemoration on reconciliation and nation-building as well as on teaching the nature and

significance of June 1976 to young white people. It further offered a “soft” representation of the 1976 uprising by defining the meaning of the day as the role of youth in transforming society, an interpretation adequate to foster in the present young people’s activism towards reconstruction and development. The official commemoration thus met the objectives and subtexts of the conciliatory narrative: it adopted a consensual and all-encompassing representation of the event, focused more on present than on past, fostered reconciliation and supported the current political objective of mobilising the youth. Conversely, Azapo chose to emphasise the remembrance of the Soweto uprising itself through the representation of the very events of that day and the mourning of those who died. Azapo national organiser thus stated: *‘we will be looking at what we got of substance since then and reminding people about June 16. We want people not to lose the meaning of that day’* (Star, May, 1996). He further announced Azapo’s intention to campaign to have Youth Day renamed in a fashion that “truly” reflects the events, meaning and symbolism of June 16, 1976 (Star, May, 1996; Star, June 12, 1996).

At the other end of the political spectrum, the representation of the past promoted by the National Party aims at dissociating itself from the evil of apartheid and at proving the genuineness and intensity of its transformation. Firstly, the NP attempts to downplay past violence and abuses. Thus, it has denied that the former government ordered and approved abuses and only acknowledged the authorisation of such unconventional actions as information gathering or disinformation (Braude, 1997: 57). As a corollary, the NP puts the blame for abuses on “incontrolable” and “deviant” individuals and/or presents these abuses “in context” as necessary or inevitable “excesses” understandable in the situation (cold war) and mentalities of the time (id.). Thus, *‘NP officials have admitted that apartheid was (...) a tactical mistake or an experiment ‘that did not work’, (...) yet seldom asked for forgiveness or admitted that it was a crime’* (Liebenberg, 1996: 129). A second dimension of the strategy of the NP is to encourage South Africans to turn their back to the past so as to focus on the reconciliation and reconstruction needed in the present. Thus, de Klerk commented that *‘the best way (to reconcile) would be to say: Let’s close the book of the past, let’s really forgive and let’s now start looking at the future’* (Braude, 1996: 56-57). Such amnesiac rhetoric however forgets that the past the NP wants to do away with is one encompassing traumas, sufferings, gross human right violations, and disruption of the social and economic fabric of the society (de Kok, 1998: 59). Finally, the last aspect of the strategy is to portray the NP as a renewed and transformed party. It thus emphasises its adaptation to the “new” South Africa and its genuine commitment to dominant values of democratisation, reconciliation, non-racialism, etc. De Klerk for instance indicated: *‘we have become a truly non-racial party by turning our backs to the past’* (Braude, 1996: 57). Further, the NP insists on its own role in the death of the apartheid regime, its active (and allegedly highly positive) role in the negotiation process and the setting up of the new South Africa. A key element in this narrative is to switch over the “birth” of the new South Africa back from 1994 to 1990, that is to President de Klerk’s historical opening address in Parliament, the beginning of public negotiations between the government and the

resistance movement and the relinquishing of power by the NP⁵⁷. This rewriting is summed up by F.W. de Klerk as follows: *'you can't (deny) that the NP killed apartheid (...) We didn't only say we were sorry, we did something about it'* (SI, May 24, 1998). This representation was also displayed in a *'nation-wide advertising campaign promoting the myth that the NP "brought you democracy"'* (Braude, 1996: 57). Therefore, the narrative of the past promoted by the NP aims at dissociating itself from apartheid, highlighting the scope and genuineness of its transformation and giving it the image of a reformed party committed to democracy, national unity, non-racialism and the transformation of South Africa.

In conclusion, in post-apartheid South Africa, the broader change of regime, vision for society and identity narrative has been accompanied –and supported– by a renewed perspective on the past and, in particular, by the emergence of a new dominant narrative of the past which reshape the representation of the past in a conciliatory fashion so as to tame painful and divisive memories of the past and reach consensus, thereby fostering reconciliation, national cohesion and acceptance of the new dispensation. This conciliatory narrative of the past –and the values and goals it supports– are further embodied and promoted by the new national symbolism.

8.2- Past representations in the new national symbolism

As analysed in Part One (Chapter 4, section 3), national symbolism is a decisive shaping factor and a major embodiment of collective representations of the past. Indeed, it objectifies the past in specific symbols and commemorative loci, thereby making it visible, spreading knowledge of it while portraying it in specific ways. At the same time, national symbolism, and therefore the public narrative of the past it promotes, is largely influenced by official leaders since the latter have a key role in establishing symbols and in making reference to them. In order to analyse the new national symbolism and the narrative of the past it conveys, I will focus on two main aspects: the national symbols and the public holidays cycle.

8.2.1- *The new national symbols*

Symbolism can play a major part in founding and sustaining a collective identity. As examined in the first part of this study, symbols are one of the main means to promote national identity: they

⁵⁷ Thus, on the signing of the Constitution, the NP secretary general Roelf Meyer underlined that his party *'was proud to have played a part in the constitutional process'* and *'looked forward to playing a leading role in building a society based on respect for human rights'*, in CA (December 16, 1996).

foster a sense of common belonging and materialise national identity. In the “new” South Africa, some commentators highlight that shared myths and common geographic and historical symbols have emerged and start to be perceived as features of a new (all-encompassing) South African community. Thus, *‘there are encouraging signs that most South Africans take pride in certain aspects of a shared cultural heritage, such as indigenous musical forms (jazz, Mbaqanga, Kwela), art and architectural styles (those of the Ndebele, the Cape Dutch style), the legacy of leaders and artists (Gandhi, Alan Paton, Sol Plaatje), geographic symbols (Table Mountain) and so forth. This points the way for a conscious cultivation of those symbols which can be seen to represent a “South African culture” and the country in general’* (Malan, 1994: 182). More specifically, official national symbols are of particular importance to embody national culture and identity and to portray the latter to both nationals and foreigners. They aim at recalling the country’s traditions and history and at reflecting its values, understandings and visions (id.: 182-183). Because they are thus central in defining national culture and identity, symbols are highly sensitive and debated matter. Thus, in the context of the regime change, many political and social actors took a stand on the choice of national symbols, and, at times, engaged in a heated controversy⁵⁸.

In post-1994 South Africa, the new national symbols have clearly been conceived to mark the creation of a new order and to embody its goals and values. Thus, president Mandela extols *‘the adoption of symbols which give expression, not only to the advent of a new order, but which also epitomise our national dignity, nation-building, reconciliation and reconstruction’* (in Brownell, 1995: 2). Several intertwined dynamics have informed the choice of these symbols. First, there is a strong commitment to portray and promote national cohesion and unity. Secondly, in accordance with the cultural policy examined above, there is a desire to complete and redress the former representation of the past and to incorporate in the public realm the formerly marginalised traditions and symbols. Thirdly, the President underlines *‘the desire to achieve national consensus’* (id.). Indeed, given the diversity and divisiveness of symbols and traditions, the greatest care has to be taken to provide national symbols which neither marginalise nor antagonise a section of the population. Balancing these three dynamics – which are in a state of potential tension – in the choice of new national symbols is achieved through a combination of means. Because of the search for consensus, symbols of formerly marginalised groups are integrated in the national symbolism in a conciliatory (rather than domineering) fashion while the formerly dominant lore is preserved and accommodated in the new symbolic register. At the same time, three middle-of-the-road mechanisms are at play to promote and represent national unity: an effort to juxtapose or combine formerly antagonistic traditions in a new whole; the creation of new symbols which intrinsically portray unity but are not controversial and can therefore be adopted by all; the promotion of (old or new) neutral symbols which do not actively seek consensus but constitute

⁵⁸ See CT (July 1, 1988); Weekly Mail (May 13, 1991); Pretoria News (November 15, 1991); Daily Dispatch (February 21, 1992); Star (March 28, 1992); South (May 23, 1992); New African (July 2, 1992); Sowetan (August 21, 1992).

a commonality by the mere fact of their acceptance or tolerance by all and sundry. This complex intertwining of multi-layered dynamics underlies the choices of both official symbols and more informal ones.

The new official national symbols have been recommended by a commission set up as part of the multiparty negotiations. They were adopted by the Transitional Executive Council and later confirmed in the 1996 Constitution (Commission on National Symbols, 1993; Brownell, 1995). They are the following:

- the national anthem: it is a juxtaposition of *Die Stem* –the former national anthem and emblem of Afrikaner nationalism– and *Nkosi Sikelel'iAfrika*, the anthem of the resistance movement. A shortened version combining these two anthems (and using 5 different languages) has been developed and is played on all state occasions (South African Communication Service, 1996: 381-382; Brownell, 1995: 13-19).
- the national flag (cf. Annex 1): it has been designed especially for the “new” South Africa.
- the national coat of arms (cf. Annex 1): it has been kept unchanged since 1910 when it was adopted for the first time as a symbol of the unification of the four provinces.

These official national symbols are clearly and self-consciously designed to foster national consensus and, beyond, national cohesion (Mandela in Brownell, 1995: 2). They fulfil this role in two ways: they establish a strong continuity with former symbols and traditions and they portray the convergence of diversity towards unity. Firstly, the new official symbols preserve major aspects of the former (official and alternative) lore and sanction their public use at the national level. Thus, both parts of the new anthem have been taken over from past traditions and are highly symbolic for and dear to different sections of the population. Moreover, for non-state occasions, any of the two parts can be played alone, which opens the opportunity to focus on either one of the two traditions (South African Communication Service, 1996: 381-382). Furthermore, the coat of arms has remained the same while the flag's design and colours ‘are a synopsis of the principal elements of South Africa's flag history from the earliest days to the present time’ (Brownell, 1995: 8). As for the flag which is the only totally new official symbol, the Department of Culture, Arts, Science and Technology considers that ‘the enthusiasm with which the new flag was greeted tells us that it is possible to find common ground’ (1996: 38). Secondly, the new official symbols further the goal of national consensus and cohesion by promoting and symbolising the combination and convergence of diverse elements in a new overarching whole. Thus, the two formerly antagonistic anthems are juxtaposed and even combined in a new one; further, the latter is sung in five 5 languages, thereby reckoning with previously marginalised languages and celebrating at once cultural diversity and oneness. Moreover, the central design of the flag –starting as a V and extending into a horizontal band (see Annex 1)– ‘can be seen as representing the convergence of diverse elements in South African society which then take the road ahead in unison’ (Brownell, 1995: 8).

Finally, the motto of the coat of arms '*Ex unitate vires*' (strength stems from unity) –originally the motto of the old South African Republic (Transvaal) and later kept to symbolise the unification of the four provinces in the Union– now applies to the new issue of national unity, namely maintaining the cohesion of a very diverse and polarised society.

Significantly, the desire to reach consensus and promote national unification also informs other more informal national symbols. Thus, recent designs of stamps and currency (coins and notes) feature neutral and common-to-all symbols representing the territory, flora, fauna, and industrial landscape, instead of the controversial political or historical figures –such as the state presidents or Jan Van Riebeeck– which were formerly represented⁵⁹ (Malan, 1994: 186). Such flora and fauna symbols are also commonly used by public institutions, sport federations, and so on and usually achieve a large degree of consensus⁶⁰. Concerning the statues, monuments, and sites, the situation is more diverse. Since the early 1990s, the ANC expresses its commitment not to hurl down the symbols of the previous regime⁶¹. Very few monuments or statutes have been totally dismantled; some have been moved to remote places and/or contextualised⁶²; most have been preserved. To modify the dominant symbolism, the new leaders have indeed preferred to emphasise or add up symbols of formerly marginalised groups and traditions rather than merely dismantling the former lore. These new symbols include for instance the adoption of a new coat of arms for Johannesburg⁶³, the national commemorations of Sontonga and Luthuli, the planned construction of a monument celebrating the 1956 women's anti-pass march to Pretoria, the restoration of the Thulamela stone-wall capital, and the planned commemoration of Nongqawuse (Mtshali, 1998; *M&G*, September 19, 1997; Davison, 1998: 150). Change has also been extended to the naming of sites, easier to achieve and less controversial. For names as for monuments, change has nevertheless been limited (Bellamy, 1996: 157-158). Most former names of towns, provinces, airports, streets or public buildings have been kept. Some, however, have been neutralised –thus, Smuts and Malan airports have become Johannesburg and Cape Town International airports– and some have been modified, usually by being africanised (Gauteng, Mpumalanga)⁶⁴.

⁵⁹ Interestingly, the choice of neutral symbols for the 1992 Olympics provoked an outcry in sections of the white population not only because it corresponded to the withdrawal of former symbols but also because the new ones were regarded as lacking "national character" (Friedman, 1994: 175; Adam, 1994: 46). On this controversy, see also *Pretoria News* (November 15, 1991); *Business Day*, (April 8, 1992).

⁶⁰ The controversy around the springbok emblem of the rugby team is more an exception than the rule and does not concern the nature of the symbol as such (except for those who wish to rename it '*amabokoboko*'). Those who oppose this symbol criticise it as an emblem of apartheid South Africa but often acknowledge that the figure of the springbok is typical of the country. A form of compromise is found by those who accept the emblem while renaming the team.

⁶¹ See *Weekly Mail* (May 13, 1991); *Star* (March 28, 1992); *South* (May 23, 1992); *New African* (July 2, 1992).

⁶² For instance, Vorster statue was removed from its site on Vorster Square in front of the infamous police station to be put in the museum of police (*CT*, September 27, 1997).

⁶³ The new coat of arms uses the colours of the new national flags and displays symbols of "African heraldry": it pictures an African shield and two young lions (*Star*, March, 1997).

⁶⁴ See for instance *CT* (May 20, 1998) on the case of a military base whose former African name was re-instituted.

It is however important to underline that this strategy of balancing between consensus and respect of diversity, incorporation of formerly marginalised traditions and promotion of unity encounters pitfalls. Firstly, the choice to combine formerly opposed symbols in a new whole runs the risk that the different lores and traditions do not merge and that each section of the population maintains allegiance and attachment to its former symbols, therefore entrenching divisions rather than overcoming them⁶⁵. Secondly, in spite of (and sometimes because of) the conciliatory approach adopted in the constitution of a new national symbolism, controversies are still recurrent. On the one hand, certain sections of the white population remain strongly and, at times, confrontationally attached to old symbols. On the other hand, the choice of new symbols sometimes appears clumsy or too partisan⁶⁶. In addition, some voices have underlined that, in the newly established symbolism, the focus is on political activism and heroes of the liberation struggle while more mundane aspects of apartheid (forced removals, pass laws, etc.), locally significant events (such as the Trojan horse in Cape Town), and older aspects of formerly disadvantaged traditions (Muslim culture, slavery) are relatively marginalised (Robins, 1997a).

To conclude, the current set of symbols of the “new” South Africa does not constitute a radical change or purge of the old ones but rather an addition and combination of the formerly official and resistance lores so as to redress the former marginalisation of one tradition and one section of the population as well as to favour reconciliation and nation-building on the basis of national consensus. These very same features can be found in the choice and organisation of the new public holidays.

8.2.2- Public holidays

Public holidays constitute a form of public commemorations and, more specifically, are temporal loci of memory (Zerubavel, 1995: 139). As commemorations, they make it possible to revive and objectify remembrance of the past but also to modify and contest its representation (see Part One, Chapter 3). As temporal loci of memory, they further allow a great flexibility and freedom in reshaping the representation of the past. Indeed, they constitute a decontextualised evocation of the past. They do not refer to a specific place which would constrain the form and content of the representation by bringing about specific recollections or calling for certain rituals. Moreover, they commemorate specific events by detaching them from their broader historical context and defining independently the boundaries and meaning of these events. Finally, they de-historicise and fragment

⁶⁵ Thus, an editorial of The Sunday Independent underlines that while it is often emphasised on such occasions as international rugby tests, the Die Stem part of the national anthem is usually ragged, curtailed or downplayed in many political and cultural events. It further asserts that its perpetuation in the “new” national anthem makes many South Africans, both blacks and whites, uneasy (SI, May 10, 1998).

the past insofar as the succession of public holidays throughout the year does not respect historical chronology (Zerubavel, 1995: 216-217). By thus promoting a decontextualised and de-historicised representation of the past, public holidays tend to favour ideological content over historical accuracy and to emphasise the symbolic significance of the event. Therefore, *'the holiday cycle can be seen as a semiotic system that offers a non-historical framework of representation of the past. The holiday cycle determines which aspect of the past become more central to collective memory and which are assigned to oblivion; which events are commemorated as highly significant and which are lumped together in a single commemoration, or ignored'* (id.: 216). The significance of the public holidays cycle in moulding the public representation of the past is all the more important as it strongly influences people's basic views of the past. Indeed, it constitutes a yearly cycle, thus featuring a strong ritual character through the repetition of symbolic events. Moreover, it affects the lives of all by providing one day of holiday for everyone in the country and by reaching out for children who are usually taught the meaning of these days and mobilised on their occasions.

As examined in the previous section, under apartheid, besides official public holidays, the resistance movement developed its own celebrations (see Annex 2)⁶⁷. The public holiday cycle was therefore particularly emotional, divisive and contested. Very soon after the regime change, the new government has undertaken to reform the old public holiday cycle in order to rectify its discriminatory features, to embody the new national identity and values and to represent and respect the country's cultural, historical and religious traditions (as well as to accommodate economic and industrial needs). As in the case of national symbols, the recasting of the public holidays cycle was informed by an attempt to incorporate elements of the resistance tradition in a conciliatory fashion while promoting the new values of democratisation, reconciliation and nation-building. Presenting the Public Holidays bill for a second reading by the Senate, the Deputy Minister of Home Affairs thus stated:

'Thirdly, public holidays should foster a spirit of accommodation, mutual acceptance, forbearance and reconciliation. Fourthly, public holidays should foster and promote both unity and diversity, the former by recognising a day which is dedicated to the national unity of South Africa, and the latter by a non-divisive date on which each and every group in South Africa can give expression to what is important to them. Fifthly, public holidays should be named prudently so as not to symbolise the divisive nature of the original events, but the accommodation and reconciliation of their deeper meaning' (emphasis added) (Debates of the Senate, 1994: 3069).

⁶⁶ For instance, the renaming of a road as Mandela drive in Cape Town was an issue of contest between the (NP) Provincial government and the Transport Department. As for the project of building a gigantic bronze cast of Mandela's fist, it was widely opposed and ridiculed and finally abandoned (Robins, 1997a; M&G, March 29, 1996).

⁶⁷ On the difference and opposition between apartheid public holidays and those (informal) of the resistance movement (at times commemorated by the majority of the population), see Rand Daily Mail (March 28, 1981).

As highlighted in this excerpt and as will be examined in more detail below, a major means to build consensus around the new public holidays will be to maintain former celebrations of the resistance movement and, in one case, of apartheid but to change their name and thereby also their meaning and symbolism. As a corollary, these public holidays are intrinsically meant to celebrate the “new” South Africa and its values (democracy, freedom, human rights) and to be acceptable to most people. The new public holidays cycle (see Annex 2) was established by the 1994 Public Holidays Act and came into force in 1995. It includes three religious celebrations (Good Friday, Easter Monday and Christmas) and three civil ones (New Year, Workers’ Day and Day of Goodwill⁶⁸). It also includes six commemorations which have been established or thoroughly modified by the new regime and which celebrate more or less directly specific events. The following analysis will focus on these commemorative public holidays.

Firstly, three of the new commemorations were part of the alternative commemorations of the resistance movement. However, they have been renamed and/or thoroughly redefined in post-apartheid South Africa. They include the Sharpeville demonstration and killings (21.03) recast as Human Rights Day, the Soweto uprising (16.06) renamed Youth Day and the women’s march to Pretoria (09.08) instituted as National Women’s Day. By thus being redefined these holidays have changed function and meaning: more than commemorating specific past events, they now have a wider symbolic function by celebrating broad values –human rights– or categories of population – youth and women. They can therefore constitute all-encompassing celebrations to which all South Africans can easily adhere. They can further appear as symbols embodying the “new” South Africa, its values and priorities⁶⁹. Strikingly, official addresses given on these days by the President (and occasionally the Deputy President) barely recall the historic origin of these events (evoked, when they are, in a brief and conciliatory fashion). Rather they either present specific aspects of the government policy and/or constitute broad calls upon South Africans to celebrate the new national and democratic dispensation, dedicate themselves to reconciliation and reconstruction, share in the new culture of human rights, commit themselves to the struggle against criminality, drugs, and so on⁷⁰ (Bengu, 1995y; Mandela, 1998hr, 1996w, 1996y, 1996hr, 1995w). Such redefinition constitutes a political softening of their former symbolism, for they are not any more the commemoration of a specific historical event or milestone of the resistance movement but a more abstract and atemporal celebration of values and

⁶⁸ While all three celebrations were part of the former public holidays cycle, Workers’ Day is quite recent: officially recognised in the late 1980s only, it was then celebrated on the first Monday of May (to disconnect it from the international celebration of Workers’ Day, hence to de-emphasise it). Only since 1990 has it been celebrated on May 1.

⁶⁹ President Mandela thus opened his address on Human Rights Day in 1996 with the following words: ‘21 March is South African Human Rights Day. It is a day which, more than many others, captures the essence of the struggle of the South African People and the soul of our non-racial democracy’ (emphasis added) (1996hr: 1).

⁷⁰ Thus, the main part of President Mandela’s address on Youth Day 1996 (the twentieth anniversary of the Soweto uprising) is dedicated to announce the creation of a National Youth Commission (1996y).

groups⁷¹. Thereby, the re-naming and redefinition of these three commemorations promote a certain forgetting of specific deeds and actors which were referred to by the resistance movement in order to extol the “struggle” and to denounce apartheid. Furthermore, they favour a de-emphasis and relative forgetting of the bloodshed that occurred at both Sharpeville and Soweto, thereby curtailing the dimensions of protest and mourning which used to be part of these commemorations. As a result, the new symbolism of these days de-emphasises the representation of the past as that of an opposition between apartheid and resistance. Rather it favours a celebration of the “new” South Africa itself, of the improvement of the situation it constitutes and of the new democratic and humanist values attached to it.

A second group of new commemorative public holidays is conceived to celebrate very directly the new South Africa itself and the changes it constitutes and underpins. Firstly, Freedom Day (27.04) is celebrated as the commemoration of the first non-racial and democratic elections on April 27, 1994. In this case as in the three cases already examined, the symbolism is broad and general enough for it to be commonly accepted by all South Africans. This is all the more the case since, while there could be an ambiguity as whose freedom is being celebrated –that of all South Africans or that of non-whites only– the official interpretation has clearly been one interpreting this freedom as that of all since *‘we have all in one way or another been victim to the system of apartheid’* (Mandela, 1996f: 3) and since, with the “new” South Africa, *‘we have been liberated from a system that held us all in its chains’* (Mandela, 1998f: 1). However, the focus is not so much on recalling the 1994 elections and the euphoria of that time as on constructing this event as the birth of the “new” South Africa. The “new” South Africa is thereby established as the actual object of celebration: it is portrayed as embodiment of democracy, harmony of the unity in diversity, “New Patriotism”, new nation and basis to build the *‘land of our dreams’* (Mandela, 1996f, 1997f, 1998f). A further dimension of the commemoration of April 27, 1994 is that it was also the day when the interim Constitution came into force. April 27 is therefore sometimes referred to as “Constitution Day” and official celebrations of this day always strongly emphasise significance of the constitution and portray it as the cornerstone of freedom and democracy, as mainspring and guarantee of the unity in diversity and as protection against the repetition of past abuses and domination (id.).

The other public holiday which legitimises and supports the vision and values of the new South Africa is Heritage Day (24.09). This day was not included in the initial 1994 Bill listing public holidays but was added during the parliamentary debate of the text as a result of pressures from the Inkhata Freedom Party (Lowry, 1995: 21). The origin of Heritage Day is Shaka Day which commemorates the

⁷¹ Arguably, private celebrations can continue to focus on the former meaning and form of commemorations of these days. However, the clear shift of symbolism in official celebrations is a strong social marker and has

death of the Zulu king Shaka and which has played a major part in the revival and reinvention of Zulu culture and traditions. By being extended to the whole of South Africa and recast as Heritage Day, this commemoration comes to symbolise the importance of cultures, languages, and traditions, in the individual and collective identities of South Africans; it further allows to reckon with and celebrate the diversity and richness of this heritage (Mandela, 1996h: 1; Lowry, 1995: 21-23). The origin of the day as Shaka Day is totally ignored in official celebrations⁷²: the focus is on how the new democratic dispensation has allowed the recovery, redress and free expression of cultures, traditions and memories of the past so as to foster mutual knowledge and liking between the various cultural groups and thereby favour and support human rights and nation-building (Mandela, 1996h and 1997h; Mtshali, 1998 l).

Finally, reconciliation and national unity as well as consensus on the new symbolism are promoted through the dedication of one day to reconciliation. Reconciliation Day (16.12) is actually the site of bitter and controversial memories and symbols. Indeed, under apartheid, December 16 officially commemorated the Battle of Blood River (1838) in which a small group of Voortrekkers won over and massacred Zulu soldiers led by Dingaan. To Afrikaners, this victory signified a national covenant with God and a legitimisation of their claims to occupy and control the land. In the early decades of this century, December 16 –referred to as the Day of the Vow– became a cornerstone of the emergence and growth of Afrikaner nationalism (Bellamy, 1996: 112-113; Delmont, 1992). With the formation of the apartheid regime and the institution of the Day of the Vow as national holiday in 1948, December 16 was entrenched as major symbol and commemoration of Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid. December 16 has an equally charged but opposite significance to other South Africans: it was remembered as ‘Dingaan’s Day’ by many Africans who regarded it as the symbol of the violence and land dispossession resulting from colonialism. Furthermore, precisely because of this highly symbolic and emotional nature, Umkhonto we Sizwe, the military wing of the Congress alliance, chose that day to announce its creation through a series of attacks and bombings in 1961 (Lowry, 1995: 24-27). In subsequent years, December 16 was counter-celebrated as “Heroes Day” by the resistance movement (ANC, 1989)⁷³. It is precisely because of this long history of bitter divisions and bloodshed that December 16 has been established as the Day of Reconciliation in post-apartheid South Africa. Its new meaning lies in the *‘acknowledgement of our interdependence as free and equal citizens of our common Motherland’* (Mandela, 1995r: 1). It is further conceived as a landmark to celebrate the progress made in overcoming past divisions, to reaffirm commitment to reconciliation in the present and to assess future challenges (id.). Finally, it aims at underlining that the coming together of all

occasionally sparked off protest or resistance (as seen above with the 1996 commemoration of June 16 opposing ANC and Azapo interpretations).

⁷² Conversely, many Zulu and the IFP continue to celebrate September 24 as Shaka Day (Hamilton, 1997:6).

⁷³ On the dual commemoration and symbolism of December 16, see for instance *Natal Mercury* (December 17, 1987); *Star* (December 18, 1988); *Weekly Mail* (December 13, 1991).

South Africans to redress past injustice and to work together towards reconciliation and reconstruction is a necessary and positive achievement (id.). Symbolically, the TRC held its first meeting on that day in 1995. Therefore, by emphasising the overcoming of past divisions and calling for reconciliation, December 16 constitutes a direct emphasis on reconciliation as a cornerstone of the new national (democratic and inclusive) identity.

Therefore, the new national symbolism –as embodied in symbols and public holidays– supports the conciliatory narrative of the past: it seeks to promote a shared and more balanced representation of the past which be at the same time a consensual and “tamed” representation; it further depicts the past as celebration of the present more than as remembrance of the past. It thereby strives to foster inclusiveness, democratisation, reconciliation, national cohesion and acceptance of the new order .

To conclude this last chapter of the macro level analysis, we can highlight the following dynamics. In the wake of the changeover, the prevalence of a new paradigm and vision for South Africa has brought about a renewed perspective on the past which has entailed the emergence of a new dominant narrative and the formation of alternative narratives. But, the new dominant narrative –and its corollary symbolism– does not simply overturn the pre-existing narrative of the resistance movement. Rather, it incorporates it while modifying it: it thereby takes root in a quite reliable and inclusive representation which is further popular, legitimate and meaningful in view of the recent past as the story of a changeover from apartheid to post-apartheid South Africa; at the same time, it tames the divisiveness, suffering, and bitterness conveyed by the former representation. The new dominant symbolic and narrative representation is therefore a conciliatory representation in that it seeks to be: consensual by taming divisiveness and contest about the past and its legacy; inclusive by re-integrating the stories and traditions of the majority while relatively preserving the formerly dominant lore; unifying by emphasising, nay, constructing commonalities and factors of reconciliation; and positive by focusing on the positive aspects of the past and turning the representation of the past towards the celebration of the present. The conciliatory representation thus promotes and entrenches democratisation, reconciliation, national unity and the advent of the “new” South Africa, thereby supporting and reflecting the new identity narrative and the broader vision for the future.

Conclusion of Part Two

Throughout Part Two, I highlighted and analysed a web of dynamics and interplays. As stated in the Interim Constitution, the “new” South Africa is based upon the vision of a democratic, peaceful, prosperous and inclusive community. To achieve it, the new regime deems it necessary to foster reconciliation and national unity and has engaged in building a democratic and inclusive civic nation and has undertaken to deal with the legacy of the past so as to transcend past divisions. We saw in Part One that the subjective dimension of nation-building is important; it is even more significant in South Africa insofar as social and political divisions partly rest on collective representations of oneself and others and insofar as levelling socio-economic conditions will be a lengthy process, which can be made up for in the short-term by political redress and a feeling of belonging to an overarching community. Public discourse on democratisation, reconciliation and national cohesion has thus been promoted as part of the project of nation-building and of the corollary reshaping of the representation of the past; the narratives of national identity and of the past have thus been key elements in shaping the “new” South Africa. Breaking with the past, promoting democracy, fostering reconciliation and national cohesion are the goals and values which have underlain the vision of the “new” South Africa, informed its urge to deal with the past, shaped the remoulding of the public representation of the past, underpinned the national identity narrative and moulded the new dominant narrative of the past. As a result, the narratives of national identity and of the past closely intertwine: the former embodies and entrenches democratisation, reconciliation, national cohesion and break with the past through a set of symbols, narratives and other discursive practices, thereby including a reference to the representation of the past; the latter has undergone reshaping so as to fit and support the new national identity. This reshaping of the representation of the past seeks to foster a shared and more balanced representation of the past so as to address former biases and silences, entrench a particular reading of the traumatic apartheid past and provide a common “memory” as a basis for a common identity. This reshaping is however ambivalent: it fosters democratisation and national cohesion while modelling an authoritative and presentist representation. Indeed, the new representation of the past appears reliable and legitimate while being embedded in current social values and objectives. Further, the new representation of the past reflects and supports national identity by providing a conciliatory narrative of the past striving to foster democratisation, reconciliation and national cohesion in its content. It smoothes the divisiveness of memories, seeks consensus, integrates formerly marginalised voices and cultures while preserving formerly dominant ones, highlights commonalities, portrays reconciliation as possible and desirable, recasts pre-existing identities, emphasises positive aspects of the past while making them appropriable by all, and displaces the representation of the past from the mourning of the past to the celebration of the present. In the next part, I will examine the commemoration of Robben Island –in particular, its institutionalisation in the Robben Island Museum– in the light of the interplay between the formation of the “new” South Africa and the reshaping of its past which has been analysed in this second part.

❧ PART THREE ❧

THE COMMEMORATION OF ROBBEN ISLAND

Introduction of Part Three

In this final part, I draw on the theoretical framework developed in Part One and on the macro-level analysis of the South African reshaping of the representation of the past and of national identity conducted in Part Two to examine the specific case of the public commemoration of Robben Island in the “new” South Africa. The thrust of this part is to examine in which ways the public commemoration of Robben Island has been part and parcel of the process of reconstructing the representation of the past, in particular through the new conciliatory narrative of the past, in congruence with the new national identity narrative. Examining the public commemoration of Robben Island against the backdrop of the macro-level analysis developed in Part Two is relevant and significant in two ways. First, the public commemoration of Robben Island is a good illustration, at a micro-level, of the trends and mechanisms at play in the reshaping of the narratives of the past and of national identity. Further, it constitutes a cornerstone of these phenomena because of the vital national symbolic significance of Robben Island and because of the central part this commemoration has been given in these processes of reshaping. Even before the advent of the “new” South Africa, Robben Island was a key symbolic site and a spontaneous site of memory. Since the early 1990s, and in particular with the constitution of the “new” South Africa, Robben Island has been a core issue in public discourse; in particular, it has been a major reference in the discourse of the liberation movement and, later, of the leaders of the new regime. Therefore, its public representation has been reshaped under the influence of self-conscious and unself-conscious processes. In January 1997, the public commemoration of Robben Island was entrenched and institutionalised through the creation of the Robben Island Museum (hereafter RIM).

To examine the commemoration of Robben Island, I have resorted to a variety of materials: academic sources, press articles, video and archive materials. I also made use of the Robben Island Museum publications (information brochures, booklets, monthly newsletter, etc.). Further I rely on my personal observations and notes on Robben Island: I took part in seven different tourist visits and in 1998 Youth Day commemoration; I also participated in a consultative symposium on the organisation and development of the museum and I interviewed the director of the RIM.

In chapter 9, I will examine how the public commemoration of Robben Island has progressively emerged and been moulded in the early 1990s: I will analyse how, in the wake of the changeover, Robben Island has been established as a key site of memory and a core issue of public discourse, and how its representation has been reshaped in the process. In chapter 10, I will look at the public commemoration of Robben Island as it has been institutionalised in the form of the Robben Island Museum. I will show that this commemoration is part of the undertaking to reconstruct the representation of the South African past, and that it has been conceived as a showcase for the new heritage policy. Finally, I will show that the commemoration of Robben Island in the “new” South Africa –both in the institutional form of the RIM and in public (mainly official) discourse– is deeply embedded in the new conciliatory narrative of the past and in the new national identity narrative. The new narrative of Robben Island is thus a consensual, inclusive and positive representation, turned towards the present and towards legitimising, entrenching and celebrating the “new” South Africa.

Chapter Nine:

Towards the public commemoration of Robben Island

In this chapter, I will analyse public discourse on Robben Island in the early 1990s to examine why and how Robben Island has emerged as a key commemoration for the “new” South Africa. At that time, Robben Island was entrenched as a major site of memory for contemporary South Africa. Its significance stemmed from its diverse and rich history and, above all, from its potent symbolism. The symbolic significance of Robben Island –rooted in the apartheid period– has been thoroughly recast since the early 1990s in the wake of the changeover. Indeed, at that time, Robben Island came to the forefront of public remembrance and debate, thanks to an avalanche of materials publicising its history and to an intense (largely partisan) public debate about its use and re-development. In the process, Robben Island was entrenched as a key site of memory and its dominant public image has been recast as a positive and universal representation.

9.1- The significance of Robben Island in the South African representation of the past

Robben Island has been a major site of public remembrance in contemporary South Africa thanks to its very rich and diverse history and to its potent and multi-layered symbolic significance. Under apartheid, the island was a vital symbol for both apartheid’s narrative of the past and the narrative of the liberation movement. Since the early 1990s, the relevance of certain historic and symbolic aspects of Robben Island to current developments has further entrenched the island as a key element in shaping the new South Africa. Parallely, its representation has undergone a presentist reshaping so as to fit present conditions and values.

9.1.1- A rich and diverse history

Robben Island has a very rich and diverse past¹. Its recorded history dates back as far as the 15th century when the first European sailors stopped on the island on their way to and from Asia and used it as a refuge, refreshment station (first by killing penguins, seals, etc. and later by breeding sheep) and “post office”². In the 17th century, after the Dutch settlement at the Cape, Robben Island served to provide food, limestone and stone, and to signal the arrival of new ships in the bay. It was also used to imprison slaves, convicts and those who displeased the authorities of the VOC on the mainland. Some Khoikhoi were amongst the early prisoners or exiles on the island: Autshumoa –Khoi leader and long-time middleman for the British and later the Dutch– was banished by Van Riebeeck to Robben Island in 1659; his niece Krotoa (Eva), brought up in the Dutch society of the Cape, was also later banished to Robben Island where she died. Robben Island was also home to political prisoners from the East Indies –many of whom were Muslim leaders and holy men³–

¹ On the history of Robben Island: for a general introduction, see Deacon, 1996; Hutton 1994. See also Robben Island: History Summary, proposed by the Robben Island Museum (Robben Island on the Move, 1997).

² The sailors used to leave messages under rocks on the island hoping that they would be passed on by passing ships.

³ A kramat was erected on the grave of one of the most notorious of these holy men in the 1960s.

who were brought as slaves to the Cape from the 1680s onwards. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, slaves, convicts and political prisoners were thus kept on Robben Island under very harsh conditions. In the 19th century, the British maintained the function of Robben Island as prison and stone quarry but also used it as a whaling station and to quarantine the insane and those with infectious diseases. The most famous prisoner of this early 19th century is Nxele (or Makana), a Xhosa warrior-prophet who led an attack against the British in the fifth "frontier war"; he was sent to Robben Island in 1819 and drowned a year later in an escape attempt. In 1846, the prison was closed and a general infirmary established for "lunatics", the chronically ill and later for lepers. From the late 1850s onwards, some Xhosa, Hlubi and Koranna chiefs captured by the British in the wars resulting from the colonial expansion were also sent to Robben Island. In the late 19th century-early 20th century, "lunatics" and chronically sick were progressively removed while the number of lepers increased. Before the hospital eventually closed down in 1931, Robben Island had become a well-established village with about 2000 inhabitants (including patients and hospital staff). Thereafter, from 1936 to 1959, the Defence Department took over the island to position guns and to train artillery recruits (including, quite unusually, a large proportion of female and "Coloured" soldiers).

From 1961, the island was again used as a prison for common law prisoners and more notoriously for political prisoners opposing the apartheid regime. During the 1960s, common law prisoners and political prisoners were held together; in 1971, common-law prisoners were removed to another prison, also located on the island. The Robben Island high security prison became the main prison for anti-apartheid activists and accommodated in particular those considered the most threatening to the apartheid regime. Only black male prisoners were sent there. Political prisoners held on Robben Island have often been referred to as the Robben Islanders. They included activists from all South African groups (African National Congress, Black Consciousness Movement, New Unity Movement, Liberal Party, Pan-African Congress, South African Students Organisation, etc.) but also from the South West Africa People's Organisation, the main Namibian liberation movement. Those considered by the apartheid regime as the leaders were held in the isolation section; these included the ANC Rivonia trialists (Mandela, Sisulu, Mbeki, etc.), PAC members (Masemola, Mkalipi), New Unity Movement members (Alexander) and so on. Robert Sobukwe, leader of the PAC, was kept on Robben Island for nine years, in a house outside the main prison, where he was left completely on his own. After the 1976 Soweto uprising, many activists were arrested and sent to Robben Island, dramatically increasing the number of inmates. In 1982, some prisoners, including such leaders as Mandela, were removed from Robben Island to Pollsmoor prison on the mainland. The last political prisoners were released in 1991 but the prison continued to house common law prisoners until December 1996.

To conclude, the various aspects of Robben Island's past cover many different periods of the South African past and encompass many traditions and histories. In the past decades, this historical richness has endowed great significance and relevance to contemporary actors and issues, thereby establishing Robben Island as a major symbolic site for South Africa.

9.1.2- Robben Island: a core symbol in apartheid South Africa

Like its past, the symbolism of Robben Island has been very diverse, multi-layered and ambivalent. Under apartheid, Robben Island became a key symbol in both apartheid's narrative of the past and the opposed narrative of the liberation movement. At that time, the symbolism of Robben Island was all the more important as the actual history was little known. Indeed, the island was isolated and access to it strictly limited; information about the island and its prisoners was restricted⁴; many aspects of the long-term history of the island were neither documented nor researched. As a result, popular representations of Robben Island and its past rested more on symbolic images than on actual data. Further, *'for the State and for its opponents the Island's (...) value as (political symbol) has at times outstripped its, practical value as a place where the leaders of oppositional forces have been separated from their followers'* (Deacon, 1996: 5). While Robben Island was thus highly significant for both apartheid and the liberation movement, its symbolism diverged between both sides.

In apartheid's narrative of the past, Robben Island featured as a place of exile and imprisonment: it was the place where social outcasts and misfits were banished, away from the mainland and its civilised and progressive society. This representation rested on the past of the island as a place of banishment and isolation for convicts and slaves, lepers and impoverished sick, political prisoners and all kind of social outcasts (Hutton, 1994: 10; Deacon, 1996: 5-6). In this broad representation of the long-term history of Robben Island, *'banishment to the island invokes the idea of a symbolic cleansing of the Southern African subcontinent for the dominant classes'* (id: 6). More specifically, in apartheid's narrative, Robben Island was the site where black terrorists destabilising the apartheid regime were held in secrecy so that they were separated from and, eventually forgotten by, their supporters. Therefore, although the island was regarded as a place of safety for early sailors and as one of good health by the proponents of the hospital in the nineteenth century, the pre-eminent image of the island in the official representation of the past was a dominantly negative one (Deacon, 1998: 161-163).

In the narrative of the liberation movement, Robben Island had a dual symbolism: it symbolised on the one hand the oppression and destructiveness of apartheid and, on the other hand, the resistance and dignity of the Robben Islanders (Odendaal, 1993, MCOH 14.45; Jacobs, 1992: 74; Deacon, 1996: 5). As in apartheid's narrative, the prevailing image of Robben Island was a negative one. Focusing on the recent past of the island, that of the high security prison, the dominant symbolism highlighted apartheid's repression, racism and violence and the corollary suffering, uprooting and isolation of the prisoners and their families (Jacobs, 1992: 78-81). The longer-term narrative was an inversion of apartheid's narrative: the banishment of social outcasts was not a sign of cleansing but the mark of the violence and injustice of apartheid and colonialism. In this view, *'topologically and symbolically, Robben Island has always represented the ultimate margin to which the Pretoria government banished its opposition'* (id.: 74). This representation of Robben Island as key symbol of the oppression of apartheid (and colonialism) was progressively constructed and spread in public discourse, mainly under the

⁴ Thus, no press visit of the prison was allowed from 1977 to 1991; access to the island for humanitarian purposes (visits by H. Suzman, Red Cross) was strictly limited; Alexander's Robben Island dossier 1964-1974 was banned.

⁵ MCOH refers to the Mayibuye Centre Oral History Collection, see bibliography: archives materials.

influence of anti-apartheid activists. Thus, Robben Island and its prisoners featured prominently in the lore of the resistance movement (songs, posters, addresses in public meetings). They were also a frequent rhetorical reference used by Oliver Tambo, leader of the ANC-in-exile (Jacobs, 1991: 195) and by the international anti-apartheid movement. Further, since the 1960s, Robben Island had been highlighted and depicted as symbol of apartheid's oppression through the "Release Mandela" and "Million Signatures" campaigns. Literary works also referred to the island and portrayed it as a symbol of apartheid's violence and of the penal universe that was South Africa. Thus, Athol Fugard's 1973 workshop play *The Island* was performed in South Africa and internationally and contributed to the infamous notoriety of Robben Island (Jacobs, 1992: 75-76).

Progressively, an opposed symbolism of Robben Island emerged and asserted itself in the narrative of the liberation movement. Increasingly, Robben Island indeed became the symbol of '*the indestructibility of the spirit of resistance against colonialism, injustice and oppression*' (Lubbe, 1987: 49). In this sense, Robben Island symbolised the resistance, righteousness, moral strength and humanity of those imprisoned there. This alternative representation of the past was rooted in actual developments occurring on the island. Indeed, the Robben Islanders managed not only to survive and adapt to harsh conditions imposed on them (brutality, hard labour, psychological torture, isolation, racism, etc.) but also to resist and oppose prison authorities more or less actively and directly; in parallel, prison conditions improved progressively, although not regularly, from the 1960s to the 1990s. A unique achievement of the political prisoners on Robben Island was that they succeeded in creating a community with great moral strength and solidarity, which preserved, expanded and strengthened their ideals, efficiently organised academic and political education, resisted the prison authorities (openly through petitions, hunger strike, etc. and secretly by smuggling objects and information, establishing communication between sections, and so on) (Coetzee and al., 1998: 63-65; Buntman, 1996a and 1996b; Deacon, 1998: 163; Hutton, 1994: 51-79; Jacobs, 1992: 81-83; Odendaal, 1993, MCOH 14.4; Patché, 1994). This emergence of Robben Island as a symbolic site of struggle in the narrative of the liberation movement is thus expressed by Albie Sachs: '*Robben Island was intended to be the place for the destruction of anti-apartheid militants, but instead has become a centre of resistance and the symbol of the indestructibility of the movement for the creation of a non-racial democratic South Africa*' (in Naidoo, 1982: 277). The representation of Robben Island as a site of resistance and struggle was spread and appropriated in public representations of the island in the metaphor of Robben Island as "the university". This image rests on the actual role of the island as a place of academic and political education. Indeed, on Robben Island, prisoners gave literacy and English classes to other prisoners and were encouraged to study and pass degrees; moreover, teaching, discussion and debate about politics (and political history) were organised and many Robben Islanders came out of prison with better skills and knowledge and/or higher responsibilities and status in the liberation movement (Buntman, 1996a: 112- 114, 126-136; Coetzee and al., 1998: 64; Hutton, 1994: 66-69; Zuma in Schadeberg, 1994: 57; Wilson, 1988). A corollary of this renewed representation of Robben Island as symbol of the resistance was to recast the long-term history of the island as the story of the resistance and struggle of generations of outcasts and oppressed people against the violence and injustice of established (colonial and apartheid) authorities. Thus, many Robben Islanders emphasised their sense of historical continuity: they developed knowledge and awareness of the imprisonment of slaves, Xhosa leaders, Khoikhoi and prisoners from the Far East in previous centuries (thus one of the inmates' football club was named after Makana). Further, they often regarded these early prisoners

as their forebears in the resistance to oppression (Lekota, 1991; Mbeki, 1994: MCOH 2.2.6; Mbeki, Mlangeni and Sisulu in Schadeberg, 1994: 30-33, 23, 27; Odendaal, 1993: MCOH 14.4). Therefore, both in its long-term and in its short-term narrative, Robben Island came to symbolise a key site of resistance and struggle. This new image spread and was adopted in popular and political discourse alongside its symbolism as a place of oppression and violence. Although it progressively asserted itself, the latter symbolism remained the prevalent one under apartheid (Buntman, 1996a: 118-119; Buntman, 1996b: 181, footnote 27; Deacon, 1998: 63; Jacobs, 1992: 77-82). Thus, literary accounts of the life on Robben Island, especially during the early time of the prison, are dominated by the image of structural violence, racism, oppression and destructiveness of apartheid (Dlamini, undated; Naidoo, 1982; Zwelonkwe, 1973). Similarly, in the video *Robben Island: our university* (1988), although the approach is deliberately on the prison as a learning experience, the dominant image –and Neville Alexander's final words– refer to Robben Island as a microcosm of apartheid's violence and injustice.

To sum up, in the narrative of the liberation movement, Robben Island symbolised at once the violence, injustice and racism of apartheid (and colonialism) and the moral strength, humanity and righteousness of the resistance movement. It thus constituted a key symbol of the liberation movement insofar as it epitomised its portrayal of the South African past as the contest between white domination and resistance and as the historical continuity of the resistance, whose spirit was deemed unbreakable and victory ineluctable.

Underlying and reinforcing the symbolic significance of Robben Island is the view that it constitutes a microcosm of South Africa. As Odendaal commented, *'Robben Island is a unique place in South African history (...) it reflected in a microcosm the violence of apartheid on the one hand, and on the other, the courage, the vision and the humanity of those opposing it, and of the oppressed generally'* (1994: MCOH 2.2.6). In the discourse of the liberation movement, Robben Island did not merely symbolise broader South African trends; rather it constituted the epitome of South Africa⁶: the island was the acme of both apartheid's repression and the resistance movement and epitomised oppression and resistance in both ancient and recent times. The main focus lay in the recent past and a parallel was drawn between the high security prison and South Africa as "imprisoned society" (Deacon, 1998: 178; Dlamini, undated: 197; Jacobs, 1992: 78; Mandela, 1994a: 376). In 1980, Oliver Tambo thus commented that *'the tragedy of Africa, in racial and political terms (has been) concentrated in the southern tip of the continent -in South Africa, Namibia, and in a special sense, Robben Island'* (1987: 199). Therefore, the symbolic significance of Robben Island is supported by the view that the island is the image in miniature of South Africa

To conclude, under apartheid, the symbolism of Robben Island reflected and supported both partisan representations of the past, that of the apartheid regime and, above all, that of the resistance movement. The latter featured Robben Island as a symbol of apartheid's violence and the strength and humanity of the resistance movement, further portraying the island as a microcosm of South Africa. Since the early 1990s, a renewed representation of Robben Island has emerged in public discourse; it has been established as the dominant public representation in the "new" South Africa. In the next sub-section, I will give a brief introduction and overview of this new public representation of Robben Island.

⁶ Alexander pushed this image as far as considering South Africa as a macrocosm of the island: *'South Africa is really a larger version of Robben Island and we are in a sense going through the same process on a much larger scale, both in space and in time'* (in Wilson, 1988).

9.1.3- The renewed image of Robben Island emerging in the 1990s

To sketch the emerging features and trends of the new public representation of Robben Island, I will draw President Mandela's 1997 address for the opening of the Robben Island Museum on Heritage Day in 1997. This address indeed reviews symbolic and narrative registers which frame and underlie the new public representation of Robben Island and highlights how this representation is embedded in the process of reconstruction of the representation of the past and in the broader narratives of the South African past and identity analysed in Part Two. This discourse analysis will provide me a sketch of the analysis of the reshaping of the representation of Robben Island, which I will achieve throughout the remainder of Part Three.

President Mandela's evocation of Robben Island in his opening address of the Robben Island Museum epitomises many themes, symbols, story-lines and approaches related to the renewed representation and commemoration of Robben Island in public discourse (1997h: 3-4). In annex 3, I reproduce *in extenso* that part of his address dedicated to evoking Robben Island. Drawing on specific symbols and story-lines from this address, one can highlight the following main features of the new public representation of the island:

1) Robben Island is a cornerstone of the reshaping of the representation of the South African past. Indeed, the reconstruction of its public representation epitomises and supports the macro-level reshaping of the public representation of the past and the island is established as key national commemoration:

✓ like the new public representation of the apartheid past, the commemoration of Robben Island is meant to be a guarantee against the recurrence of apartheid's evil and to legitimise and entrench the new dispensation: it is expected to '*strengthen our resolve that never again shall this land see the oppression of one by another*' and '*to strengthen the ethos of heritage as a binding force*'.

✓ Robben Island is a privileged site for the "project of recovery of the hidden past" applied to '*the histories of different people who lived here through various ages: lepers, prisoners, jailers, all together; leaders of resistance not only from South Africa but from as far afield as Namibia and the Indonesian Archipelago*'. Its commemoration thus helps retrieve and publicly display the long-term history of those marginalised by the former official representation of the as well as to re-incorporate in the public spheres the stories and experiences of the anti-apartheid activists repressed and silenced under apartheid.

✓ Robben Island is regarded as a key heritage site: '*Siqithini*' - *the Island* - whose self-evidence (intrinsic in the capital letter and the omission of "Robben") underlines the pre-eminence of Robben Island in public memory- is established as '*the first major heritage institutions of democratic South Africa*'. It was one of the main symbols of the majority of the population which used to be marginalised and can now be publicly and officially acknowledged and celebrated '*as a culture and conservation showcase for South Africa's democracy*'. Further, Robben Island is expected to '*give expression to (the diverse aspects of its past) as a collective heritage*', hence to be a national symbol, shared by all South Africans, thanks to its historical richness (relevant to various South Africans communities) and thanks to its universal symbolic significance.

⁷ "Island" in Xhosa and Zulu.

2) The new representation of Robben Island is part of the new conciliatory narrative of the past:

✓ it rests on the older narrative of the liberation movement:

- it portrays the past as the story of oppression, violence, injustice and racism: *'a place of pain and banishment for centuries'* and of resistance to such oppression (*'leaders of resistance', 'a tradition of intense political and academic education'*); in particular, it focuses on the island's past as apartheid's high security prison and on the continuity between the resistance to apartheid and the "new" South Africa (*'ideals (inscribed in our constitution), ideals which were shaped in the struggles here on Robben Island'*).

- further, it portrays Robben Island as a microcosm of South Africa by comparing the *'struggles here on Robben Island and in the greater prison that was Apartheid South Africa'* and evoking a parallel between the social and cultural pluralism of the island's past and that of society at large.

✓ at the same time, it smoothes the partisan representation of the narrative of the liberation movement and provides a conciliatory narrative:

- it emphasises the positive and universal symbolism of the island: *'a place of pain (...) and now of triumph'*, Robben Island is *'one of the world's most notorious symbols of racist oppression (turned into) a world-wide icon of the universality of human rights; of hope, peace and reconciliation'*;

- it seeks consensus by adding up recovered histories to older ones rather than replacing the former exclusive official narrative by a new one: retrieving *'the histories of different people who lived here through various ages: lepers, prisoners, jailers, all together'*;

- it is turned towards the present and the celebration of the "new" South Africa: it is to be commemorated *'in a manner that recognises above all its pre-eminent character as a symbol of the victory of the human spirit over political oppression, and of reconciliation over enforced division'* and that supports *'the struggle for human dignity and freedom'*.

Therefore, the recent reshaping of the representation of Robben Island has constructed it as a major heritage project and has shifted its symbolism from a largely negative one to a dominantly positive one, depicting Robben Island as symbol of morality, victory and hope (Deacon, 1998: 162, 173). Further, the linkage between Robben Island and the broader South African situation has been maintained and even enhanced so that the new representation of Robben Island is expected to both foster and epitomise trends and processes at work in the whole of South Africa (reconciliation, democratisation, peace and national unity). The focus of this third part is precisely to examine the forms this new public representation of Robben Island takes, how it has been moulded, what meanings it yields and what vision it supports. Thus, I will show that, in the "new" South Africa, the representation of Robben Island is conceived as a cornerstone of the reshaping of the representation of the past, that it supports and reflects the new conciliatory narrative and the new national identity narrative and that, as a corollary, Robben Island is established as epitome of the "new" South Africa.

However, the new representation of Robben Island did not appear overnight in the wake of the changeover; rather, it has progressively emerged since the 1990s. In the next two sections, I will show that, in the context of the transition period and with the prospect of the prison closing down, Robben Island found itself at the core of public remembrance and debate and that the representation and symbolic significance of the island have been reshaped in the process.

9.2- Robben Island at the core of public remembrance and debate

In the early 1990s, two separate trends combined to put Robben Island in the spotlight: an avalanche of information and materials documenting and publicising the history of the island and a (largely partisan) debate on the future use and development of Robben Island.

9.2.1- *The renewed publicity over Robben Island*

The growing publicity over Robben Island and its past in the early and mid-1990s stemmed from two main factors. Firstly, thanks to the political transition, the island and its story became more accessible to the public (McBlain, 1996: 20). Thus, the prison authorities opened up access to the island: while no visit of the prison by the media had been allowed since 1977, a media visit was organised in June 1991 (CT, June 7, 1991; Sunday Times, June 9, 1991; CA, June 15, 1991). Further, tourist visits to the island –which were started in the late 1980s and focused on the Victorian village, World War Two buildings and environmental resources– were very much developed in the early 1990s (Deacon, 1998: 169; CT, July 6, 1988; CA, November 28, 1992). At the same time, Robben Island became a “spontaneous” site of commemoration for those who wanted to remember the sacrifices, suffering and achievements of the Robben Islanders or more broadly of the resistance movement, to celebrate and promote peace and human rights, to find inspiration and consider the way forward. The island was thus the place of political and symbolic returns by the Robben Islanders, the ANC and the resistance movement, for instance on the occasion of the anniversary of Nelson Mandela’s release in 1994, 1995 and 1996 (CA, February, 12-13, 1994; CA, February 10, 1995; M&G, February 17, 1995; CT, November 6, 1996). It was also visited by government officials, students, foreign officials and dignitaries. Finally, specific groups and communities progressively tried to benefit from the opening up of the island. For instance, the Muslim community has sought to obtain easier access to the shrine for pilgrimages (Kathrada, 1996c: 2; CA, December 9, 1996).

The second factor which fostered public attention on Robben Island was its significance and relevance to the contemporary situation of political transition and negotiation. Indeed, the interest of the public was captured by the symbolism and controversial status of the island in the narratives of apartheid and of the liberation movement. Further, many major actors of the new opposition and of the negotiation process were ex-Robben Islanders. Indeed, while the unbanned ANC’s leadership included three components: the ex-political prisoners, the returned exiles and the internal leadership (in particular that of the United Democratic Front), ex-Robben Islanders managed to have a hegemony on leadership positions (within the ANC and, in the new regime) relative to exiles and especially internal leadership, partly thanks to their legitimacy and popularity as graduates of Robben Island (Mandela, 1996a: 4; Patché, 1994: 87-88; Schadeberg, 1994: 15)⁸. In particular, the focus on Mandela and the shaping of a “Mandela story” –which emphasised the greatness of

⁸ An article published after the 1995 reunion of ex-political prisoners on Robben Island thus commented: ‘it is believed that more than half of the ANC MP’s are “graduates” of the island’ (CA, February 10, 1995). Further, 11 out of the 18 ANC Ministers of the 1994 government were ex-Robben Islanders.

Mandela and its role in the transition process and depicted his personal fate (from that of apartheid's most notorious political prisoner to that of main actor of the changeover, winner of the Peace Nobel Prize, and State President of the "new" South Africa) as symbolic of the changeover and renewal of the country—contributed to put Robben Island in the spotlight and to arise public interest for its history and future use.

As a result, a large number of publications by ex-Robben Islanders⁹ or about their prison experiences¹⁰ were released. They cover a wide range of media: books (including the re-printing of older and banned ones), press articles, academic papers, radio programs and television documentaries. They focus on the stories of those whose voices were previously silenced and largely rely on personal memories of ex-political prisoners. This renewed attention for Robben Island is however not limited solely to the role of Robben Island as apartheid prison but also allows the (re)discovery of the rich past of the island¹¹. Indeed, as examined in Part Two and in the previous section, the new approach to the past –continuing the narrative of the liberation movement– includes an undertaking to recover traditions, histories and cultures marginalised by the dominant colonial or apartheid representation and tends to recast these marginalised stories as part of a long-term story of resistance to white domination. In the case of Robben Island, "recovering" the ancient past supports the image of the island as a site epitomising the racism and destructiveness of colonialism and apartheid and the indestructibility of resistance. It thus fits and supports the public representation of Robben Island promoted by ex-Robben Islanders and the broader resistance movement. At the same time, the "recovery" of the long-term history of the island is also part and parcel of the democratisation of society and of the attempt to reconstruct a more accurate, representative and inclusive representation of the past.

Epitomising this renewed interest for Robben Island, the *Esiqithini* exhibition –initiated by the Mayibuye Centre and set up in collaboration with the South African Museum (SAM)– opened in May 1993. The main part of the exhibition concerned the high security prison and the (positive and negative) experiences of the political prisoners. Nevertheless, it also dealt with other aspects of Robben Island, starting with its geological nature and environmental richness and covering its history since the coming of European sailors. Interestingly, this long-term and broad approach on the island's past –still to be found today in the approach of the RIM– took root in the working dynamic and compromise reached by the South African Museum and the Mayibuye Centre. The SAM, devoted primarily to natural history and anthropology, did not want to exhibit political material only and therefore made use of its specialised skills to document the natural history and early social history of Robben Island which were then included in the *Esiqithini* exhibition (Davison, 1998: 155-156; Davison, 1994: 25; Davison, 1993: MCOH 14.5). Thus, displaying both apartheid's recent past and diverse histories of older times provided a compromise whereby the narrative of the liberation movement was re-used but modified and smoothed. Indeed, the exhibition focused on apartheid time, showed how prisoners resisted oppression, and highlighted the historical continuity of the island as a place of banishment and resistance (Deacon, 1998: 171). At the same time, the narrative of the past as a story of partisan contest

⁹ See for instance Alexander, 1994; Lekota, 1991; Mandela, 1994a; Mbeki, 1991; see also series of articles by the ex-Robben Islander Thami Mkhwanazi in *The Weekly Mail*, February 1990.

¹⁰ Berens and Hutton, 1995; Buntman, 1994; Hutton, 1994; Roberts, 1994; Schadeberg, 1994; Wilson, 1988.

was partially displaced insofar as the exhibition constituted a comprehensive and long-term representation of the island: it thereby relatively downplayed the contest between apartheid and the resistance movement in the narrative of the past, diversified and “neutralised” the representation of the past –including neutral aspects such as geological aspects, the past of the island as pantry and post office for early sailors, etc.– and promoted an inclusive representation encompassing as many periods stories and voices as possible in a conciliatory fashion. In terms of the analysis conducted in Part Two, this exhibition thus sketched a recasting of the liberation movement narrative into a new conciliatory narrative of the past. In the words of its promoters, the exhibition thus at once aimed at re-possessing Robben Island so as to ‘*bring back in the centre (its) history, in the centre of knowledge and consciousness*’ (Gerwell, 1993: MCOH 14.3) as well as of recovering forgotten and marginalised aspects of its past (id.; Odendaal, 1993: MCOH 14.4). *Esiqithini* also sought to inform and foster the debate on the re-development of Robben Island which had been intense since the early 1990s (Davison, 1998: 155-156; Odendaal, 1993: MCOH 14.4; Odendaal, MCOH 1993: 14.1; Davison, 1993: MCOH 14.5).

9.2.2- *The future of Robben Island at the core of memory stakes*

In the wake of the release of all ex-political prisoners from Robben Island, the debate on the use of the island re-emerged. It had sporadically reoccurred: in the early 1930s and early 1960s when the dominant function of the island changed and in the late 1970s and 1980s when the infamous role and notoriety of the island brought about calls to close down the prison and to transform the island into a nature reserve and/or holiday resort¹² (Deacon, 1998: 165-166, 168). The main issue at stake in the 1990s was again that of the future use and development of the island. Very diverse suggestions were made: maintaining the prison; turning the island into a restored Victorian holiday resort, a modern resort or a casino haven; setting up a peace institute, a youth centre, a (political) museum and shrine; preserving the island as a nature reserve.

This local and functional contest over the future use of the island got caught up in symbolic contests relating to public representations at the national level. Indeed, because Robben Island had a vital symbolic role at the macro South African level and because its symbolism was largely partisan and controversial, the contest around the status and future of the island took on a largely political character and became a stake in public discourse at the national level. Thus, ‘*this debate was part of a contest over the public memory of the island which because of its symbolic importance had important consequences for national identity*’ (Deacon, 1998: 165). In this sense, the contest over the future of Robben Island was to a large extent the continuation of the opposition between two main projects and revolved around political issues in terms of representation of the past and of national identity. In 1990-1991, it gave way to a heated controversy, echoed in the media. On the one hand, there were broadly right-wing proposals to turn the island into a holiday resort or nature reserve, with the hope thereby to de-emphasise the symbolism of Robben Island as apartheid prison, hence to downplay its rhetorical use as

¹¹ See Deacon, 1996; Hutton, 1994; Schadeberg, 1994 (video); in the press, see *CT*, July 6, 1988; *CA*, May 1991.

¹² These calls led to reintroduce wildlife in the early 1980s and to open up to visitors in 1986. To reduce the political significance of the island for anti-apartheid activists, the apartheid regime also move some leaders to the mainland (Deacon, 1998: 168-169).

a symbol of apartheid's evil and of the strength and righteousness of the resistance movement. On the other hand, anti-apartheid groups planned to establish a museum and/or an educational institute on the island, hence to entrench public remembrance of the prison so as to preserve a highly symbolic site for criticising apartheid and celebrating the resistance movement (Deacon, 1998: 165-166). Thereby, another contest emerged on the issue of who has the legitimacy to decide on the future use of the island (Deacon, 1998: 170). Thus, in 1990-1991, the apartheid government made early moves to develop the tourist dimension of Robben Island (CA, October 27, 1990; SI, May 4, 1991; CA, May 11, 1991; CA, May 22, 1991). This undertaking was strongly criticised by anti-apartheid activists who denounced unilateral decisions taken by the government and called for a broadly consultative process. Ex-Robben Islanders, and more broadly activists of the resistance movement, insisted that the decision about the future of the island should be a democratic and representative one, thus denying the legitimacy of the apartheid government to decide (Deacon, 1998: 170; CT, May 16, 1991; CA, December 6, 1991; CT December 2 1991; CT, November 17, 1990). They further claimed that their views and projects for the re-development of Robben Island should be foremost in the formulation of the plans on the future of the island (Hani in CA, December 6, 1991; Kathrada, 1996b; Mandela, 1996a: 8;).

Progressively, however, both sides evolved and mitigated their positions, making a broad compromise possible in 1993-early 1994. On the one hand, the NP government acknowledged the political significance of the island for the resistance movement and the majority of the population as well as the legitimacy and popularity of a plan aiming at preserving the memory of Robben Island as apartheid's main political prison. The Cabinet thus decided that Robben Island would not be commercially exploited and that a museum would be established (CT, March 4, 1993). On the other hand, in the context of negotiation and reconciliation, the resistance movement came to accept that the highly partisan symbolism of Robben Island be curtailed by developing environmental aspects of the island and by including in its public representation many diverse histories and communities. At the same time, it re-asserted that the role of Robben Island as apartheid's prison should have a central place in the public representation and commemoration of the past and that the commemoration should be sober and dignified, hence that tourism and commercialisation should be limited and strictly organised (Kathrada, 1996b; Mandela, 1996a). This compromise on the specific policy issue of the future use of Robben Island was thus related to the broader shift from the narrative of the liberation struggle to a more conciliatory narrative of the past. This compromise was also eased by the impact of the public image stemming from the avalanche of materials produced and publicised about the island over the same period. As noted in the previous sub-section, these materials tended to focus on the image of Robben Island as apartheid's prison and on the victorious resistance of the Robben Islanders, while highlighting the significance of other dimensions, eras and stories of Robben Island. Thus, in 1993-early 1994, the NP government and the resistance movement came to agree on the following: establishing some kind of political museum, protecting the environmental resources of the island and preserving buildings and past remains dating back to other eras in the history of the island (Odendaal, MCOH 14.4, 1993). These points of compromise were further entrenched and specified in a symposium about the future use of Robben Island

organised by Peace Visions¹³ in May 1994. Apart from lobbying for the creation of a peace institute on the island, its aim was to facilitate agreement amongst political and religious leaders, administration officials, business persons, ex-Robben Islanders and youth. A political feasibility study done for the symposium brought out the following points of minimum “consensus”: the island should have some educational purpose; the social, political and cultural history should be preserved and a museum should be set up linked to the prison; no crass commercialisation should be allowed but a limited and controlled tourism; and the planning of the future of Robben Island should result from collective decision-making (Peace Visions, 1994).

Therefore, at the time of its coming to power, the new government could move forward on the basis of a broad agreement: Robben Island was to be commemorated and this commemoration would encompass both natural and cultural history, with a certain emphasis on the past apartheid prison. But this commemoration was also to be moulded by the fact that a dominantly positive representation took shape over the years, partly as a result of the political change and partly as a result of public attention and debate on Robben Island.

9.3- The commemoration of Robben Island: a positive and universal representation

As noted in the first section of this chapter, under apartheid, the dominant image of Robben Island combined two streams: the representation of apartheid and that of the resistance movement, which both emphasised mainly the negative symbolism of Robben Island. In the early 1990s, the public image of the island was progressively reshaped in an inclusive and positive fashion so that Robben Island is now regarded as a universal symbol of the victory of the human spirit¹⁴. This shift in the dominant public representation of Robben Island has resulted from both self-conscious and unself-conscious processes of reshaping under the influence of the current situation, objective and values. The main source of this presentist reshaping lies in the representations provided by ex-Robben Islanders and, in particular, in specific accounts and images deliberately promoted by a handful of famous ex-Robben Islanders.

Since the early 1990s, Robben Island has mainly been portrayed as a site of resistance to –and victory over– apartheid's oppression and racism and further as a symbol of the victory of human spirit, dignity and freedom. Thus, Buntman highlighted that *‘in recent years, there has been an increasing tendency to portray Robben Island as a site of resistance, where prisoners were able to overcome the state's attempt to marginalise and destroy them as individuals and political beings and to transcend the conditions that would make the prison a place of perpetual struggle for survival’* (1996b: 143; see also Deacon, 1998: 161-165, 171-172). Further, the resistance and victory of the Robben Islanders

¹³ *Peace Visions*, a coalition of non-governmental organisations headed by Archbishop Tutu, included: the African Community Theatre Service, the Centre for Conflict Resolution, IDASA, Leadership South, Peace Secretariat, the Arts Foundation and the Quaker Peace Centre (Peace Visions, 1994; *CT*, May 26, 1993; Deacon, 1998: 172).

¹⁴ This reshaping is however not absolute or decontextualised. It has to respect, at least to a certain extent, the representations offered by (recent and numerous) personal memories and written documents. It is also in interplay with other subtexts (focusing on Robben Island as sacred place of suffering or on the contest apartheid/resistance).

has been universalised by being recast in inclusive and/or abstract terms as '*the victory of the human spirit over political oppression*' (Mandela, 1997h: 3). The new positive and inclusive public representation of Robben Island thus constitutes a shift away from the former negative image of the island which rests on two corollary transformations. Firstly, in the representation of the prison experience, there is a shift from a focus on apartheid's oppression and prisoners' suffering to a focus on the positive things prisoners achieved individually and collectively at both human and political levels. Secondly, the prison experience of the Robben Islanders is recast in an inclusive fashion so as to symbolise universal values and behaviours. Thus, in broad terms, the dominant public image of Robben Island shifts from Robben Island as the "hell-hole of apartheid" to Robben Island as site of "resistance and victory of the liberation movement" and beyond to Robben Island as symbol of the "victory of the human spirit". This twofold shift in the representation has occurred progressively since the early 1990 but not at the same time. The image of Robben Island as site of resistance rests on the older narrative of the liberation movement which, alongside its dominantly negative representation of Robben Island, started to highlight the positive symbolism of the island in the 1980s. This positive representation became prevalent as early as 1990-1991. The second dimension of the reshaping was achieved only more slowly: the universal symbolism of the island was really well-established only in the wake of the advent of the "new" South Africa and was entrenched in the creation of the Robben Island Museum in 1997. This second aspect of the reshaping has also required more deliberate actions by influential memory-makers while the first part of the shift occurred largely unself-consciously as part of a presentist reshaping of the public representation of the past. This twofold reshaping is well illustrated in the evolution of the liberation movement's conception of the type of museum which should be set up on the island. The early vision was that of a museum which should remind mankind '*of the cruelty of apartheid and the misery it caused*' (ex-Robben Islander, in *CA*, June 15, 1991; see also *Sunday Times*, June 9, 1991). Then, the project aimed at setting up a '*Freedom Fight*' museum (Mandela, in *CT*, February 12, 1994). Finally, the conception that has prevailed is that of '*a cultural and conservation showcase for South Africa's democracy*' (Mtshali, 1996: 1). Thus, while the original plan was informed by the liberation movement narrative emphasising negative aspects of the prison experience and perpetuating a very partisan representation of the past, the intermediary conception focused on the celebration of the resistance movement and its achievements and the final project silences the divisiveness of the past, emphasises universal values and turns the remembrance of the past towards the celebration of the present. In this sense, the reshaping of the public representation of Robben Island which has occurred since the early 1990s is indeed part of the emergence of a new conciliatory narrative of the past.

The new public representation of Robben Island as a positive and universal symbol mainly stems from prisoners' accounts of prison time. Indeed, Robben Islanders have had a decisive role in reshaping the public image of Robben Island and they have self-consciously or unself-consciously emphasised positive aspects. Firstly, they have decisively contributed to remould the public image of the island. Indeed, under apartheid, very little was known about the prison and the island whose representation mainly rested on symbolic images. In this context, the accounts given by ex-Robben Islanders after 1990 and especially after the prison closing down in 1991 were first and foremost elements of information about prison life and the island. These accounts were all the more influential as they appeared legitimate: Robben Islanders were first hand witnesses

of what they narrated and they were endowed with great credibility as victorious freedom fighters who used to be silenced and oppressed. Further, ex-Robben Islanders' accounts had great influence since, as noted in section 1, they were the main source of materials which, in the early 1990s, put the island in the spotlight.

At the same time, in their narratives of prison, *'Robben Islanders (...) are often insistent about the positive things they were able to achieve in prison, for themselves, their organisations and the struggle'* (Buntman, 1996b: 143). The emphasis thus put by ex-prisoners on the positive aspects and achievements of their prison experience results from both unself-conscious and self-conscious processes. Firstly, with time gone by since the harshest period of the prison experience –the 1960s-early 1970s– a certain soothing of painful memories has become easier, such memories being possibly de-emphasised relatively to more positive experiences which have occurred later¹⁵. Above all, Robben Islanders tend to recall their past experiences in the light of their current personal conditions and of the broader contemporary context. Thus, the political transition and, later, the advent of the new regime gave a sense of victory to ex-Robben Islanders who can feel proud of the sacrifices they made and of the hardships they bore. Thus, *'the former Robben Islanders (...) experienced the outcome of their struggle as a victory. Political empowerment became the fulfilment of what they had always striven for. The emotional and physical trauma became meaningful and gave dignity to their experiences'* (Coetzee and al., 1998: 68). The influence of the political changeover in reshaping ex-Robben Islanders' representation of their past experiences is twofold: it recasts the overarching meaning of their lives as a story of victory and positive achievement; it also acts upon the diverse and dual memories of prison to integrate them in a structured fashion so that hardships become meaningful and positive achievements are emphasised and highlighted as presaging the final victory. Thus, ex-Robben Islanders' individual and collective memories of prison time are (largely unself-consciously) recast as part of successful and meaningful life stories and their prison experience can be redefined as a positive one (Coetzee and al., 1998: 67-68). Secondly, the timing of the political transition also impacts on the way anti-apartheid activists instrumentalise the symbolism of Robben Island. In this regard, a new emphasis on the positive and universal dimension of the prison experience can serve three purposes. Firstly, certain aspects of the prison experience of the Robben Islanders are posed as heralding the project of "new" South Africa: solidarity, humanity, non-racialism, commitment to better life, dedication to a moral cause, activism and a set of political ideals. These aspects are precisely those highlighted by emphasising the positive achievements of the political prisoners. Moreover, such emphasis underlines the moral and political value of the Robben Islanders and especially of their leaders, thus their fitness to be the leaders of the new regime (Deacon, 1998: 174). Finally, in congruence with the commitment to promote reconciliation, the focus on the achievements and positive experiences of the prisoners favours a relative silencing of the dual symbolism of the island (evil of apartheid/ suffering and strength of the resistance) and the highlighting of human values and behaviours (solidarity, non-racialism, personal and collective development, resistance to oppression, commitment to one's ideals, etc.) which everyone can support and respect and which are further expected to constitute the core of the new South African identity. Thus, as already analysed in Part Two, combining an emphasis on positive experiences with one on the symbolic and universal dimension of these experiences makes it possible to downplay the divisive character of the representation of the past, hence fostering reconciliation.

¹⁵ In interviews, Buntman further notes that interviewees tend to emphasise positive aspects of their past experiences which constitute pleasant memories and tend to give them a good image in the eyes of the interviewer (1996b: 181).

This reshaping of the public representation of Robben Island as a positive and universal symbol –which mainly rests on ex-Robben Islanders’ accounts– is decisively affected by the action of certain memory-makers. The two main entrepreneurs of this new public representation of Robben Island are the Mayibuye Centre and, above all, a handful of famous ex-Robben Islanders whose role and status in the public sphere contribute to establish the new public image as an authoritative –and somewhat official– representation.

The Mayibuye Centre¹⁶ has played a major part in the renewal of attention for and publicity around Robben Island as well as in the shift of the public representation of the island towards a more positive and universal symbolism. Its contribution consists of: the publication of a range of books by ex-Robben Islanders or about Robben Island (at least 9 from 1991 to 1997); research on Robben Island (especially around the “apple box archives” it inherited from some ex-Robben Islanders released in 1990-1991 (Mayibuye Centre, 1992)); the organisation –in conjunction with the South African Museum– of the *Esiqithini* exhibition (re-opened in a more modest fashion in June 1996 at the Waterfront and renamed ‘*the Robben Island Gateway project*’¹⁷); and the organisation of lectures, panels and symposiums about the past and future of Robben Island¹⁸. While these interventions of the Mayibuye Centre have contributed to raise the interest of the public for Robben Island and to inform the debate about the use and status of the island, they have also resulted in a specific shaping of the representation of the island’s past. Indeed, the main focus in the representation of the prison’s history is on the resistance (and success) of ex-Robben Islanders. First, this is displayed in some publications which focus explicitly on resistance (for instance, Hutton, *Robben Island: symbol of Resistance*, 1994) or which express the views of ex-Robben Islanders. This focus on Robben Islanders’ resistance and victory also prevails in the *Esiqithini* exhibition/ *Gateway project* which –especially through the artefacts displayed– showed ‘*how prisoners who were incarcerated on Robben Island struggled for freedom, attempted to escape, how they kept themselves going by organising sporting activities, how they received messages of sympathy and admiration from abroad and maintained the nation*’ (Minkley and al., 1996: 27). One of the main subtexts of the exhibition therefore consisted in highlighting the moral strength, humanity, organisation, and victory of the Robben Islanders¹⁹ (id.; see also Odendaal, 1993: MCOH 14.4). The Mayibuye Centre has also shaped the public representation of Robben Island along specific lines by establishing a strong connection between Robben Island and the democratisation process. On the one hand, Robben Island and ex-Robben Islanders are portrayed as presaging and symbolising the “new” South Africa²⁰ (Metz in Minkley and al., 1996: 27; Odendaal, 1993: MCOH 14.1). On the other hand, democratisation is regarded as the condition which makes it possible to

¹⁶ *The Mayibuye Centre for history and culture in South Africa* was set up in 1991 at the University of the Western Cape. ‘It focuses on all aspects of apartheid, resistance, social life and culture in South Africa’ (Mayibuye Centre, information booklet, undated). Multidimensional project including a resource centre, an oral history project, exhibitions, conferences and workshops, and a publishing unit (id.; Odendaal, 1994), the centre has been influential to create a new culture of research and representation of the past.

¹⁷ For developments on the content of this modified display, see Davison, 1998: 156-157; Minkley and al., 1996: 27; in the press, see *CT*, June 6, 1996; *CT*, June 13, 1996.

¹⁸ See for instance, the May 1993 Robben Island Project organised in the wake of the opening of the *Esiqithini* exhibition (MCOH 14.1 and 14.5), the July 1994 “Celebrating Democracy Festival” focusing on Robben Island (MCOH 14.2; *CA*, July 25, 1994), a lecture given by Odendaal on the basis of the Apple Box Archives (*CA*, July 16-17, 1994).

¹⁹ A very different view is held by Patricia Davison, one of the curators of the exhibition (from the SAM), who describes the exhibition as a complex and multi-vocal display (Davison, 1998: 155).

²⁰ The “Celebrating Democracy” Festival organised by the Mayibuye Centre in July 1994 highlighted the island through the *première* of *Voices from Robben Island* (*CA*, July 25, 1994) and a discussion panel of ex-Robben Islanders (MCOH 14.2, 1994).

(re)discover the past of the island and to bring it back to the centre of public knowledge and commemoration (Gerwel, in MCOH 14.3, 1993; Odendaal, 1993: MCOH 14.4; Odendaal, 1994, MCOH 14.1). Today, the Mayibuye Centre still influences the shaping of the public representation of the island through its (direct or indirect) input in the Robben Island Museum. Firstly, some staff members of the RIM (including André Odendaal, the RIM interim administrator and now director) come from the Mayibuye Centre. Secondly, the RIM does not start its work from scratch but inherits the foundations laid by the Mayibuye Centre in terms of research and display on Robben Island (apple box archives, *Esiqithini* exhibition, publications, etc.). Finally, the Mayibuye Centre is meant to be eventually incorporated in the RIM (Mtshali, 1996: 1).

Even more than that of the Mayibuye Centre, the role of ex-Robben Islanders has been essential in shaping the new positive and inclusive public representation of the island. As noted above, a large part of the accounts on Robben Island released in the early 1990s were produced by them or relied on their memories (autobiographies, interviews with the media and academic researchers, public addresses). Further, in interviews and public speeches, some ex-Robben Islanders have expressed strong views on the meanings they attach to their prison experience and on the symbolism that should dominate its commemoration. As a result, *'some of the Robben Islanders have been important cultural brokers in the process of redefining public images of the island'* (Deacon, 1998: 163). Amongst them, one can note the decisive agency of few famous ex-Robben Islanders, close to the State President, in initiating such accounts. The influence of these positive accounts is thus further enhanced by the legitimacy of those who initiated them, Nelson Mandela and Ahmed Kathrada especially. Indeed, they have great personal and official authority as well as easy and pre-eminent access to public channels of discourse. They are at once "leaders" of the Robben Islanders, pre-eminent figures of the resistance movement and of the ANC –hence are usually regarded as spokespersons of the other ex-Robben Islanders– and top officials of the new regime. They have repeatedly voiced their positive representation of Robben Island on major occasions over the years of progressive shaping of the public image and commemoration of the island. The foremost expression of this new representation of Robben Island is the following concluding paragraph from Kathrada's opening address at the *Esiqithini* exhibition in 1993:

'If I were to sum up in a sentence our years in prison, I would say: While we will not forget the brutality of apartheid we will not want Robben Island to be a monument of our hardship and suffering. We would want it to be a monument reflecting the triumph of the human spirit against the forces of evil; a triumph of freedom and human dignity over repression and humiliation; a triumph of wisdom and largeness of spirit against small minds and pettiness; a triumph of courage and determination over human frailty and weakness; a triumph of non-racialism over bigotry and intolerance; a triumph of the new South Africa over the old' (emphasis added) (1996b: 10-11).

This representation, which firmly marginalises the remembrance of the negative aspects of prison times, has proven very influential. Indeed, the propagation of Kathrada's vision is likely to have benefited from his official status and functions. Besides being the personal adviser of the State President, Ahmed Kathrada is the chairperson of the Future of Robben Island Committee, a task group created in August 1995 by President Mandela to consult the various interest groups and the general public and to make recommendations on the future use of the island (Mandela, 1996a: 8; Kathrada, 1996c: 1-3). Further, he is the chairperson of the Committee Representing ex-Political Prisoners, a structure elected in February 1995 to investigate the plight

of ex-political prisoners and to represent their interests²¹ (Kathrada, 1996c: 3). In addition, since the official opening of the RIM in September 1997, Kathrada has headed the RIM Council. Kathrada's representation of the prison is all the more influential as his words are often repeated, quoted or referred to in press articles, books, and interviews²². Further, as I will elaborate below, it is at the core of both the message and corporate identity of the RIM, hence moulding the representation of the island's past institutionalised in the museum.

Kathrada's formulation of the new public image of Robben Island has been echoed and endowed upon on important occasions by Mandela and has been taken up by other more or less famous Robben Islanders on various public occasions. Over time, the image of the island as universal and positive symbol –so strikingly and avowedly formulated by Kathrada in May 1993– recurred in public discourse, thereby being progressively diffused to and appropriated by a larger audience. We can trace the recurrence and progressive entrenchment of this image in public discourse from May 1993 to the official opening of the RIM in September 1997:

- May 1993: Kathrada strikingly asserts a new image of Robben Island as positive and inclusive symbol. This representation is taken up by the curators of the exhibition (Davison, 1993: MCOH 14.5; Odendaal, 1993: MCOH 14.1), some Robben Islanders (Yengeni, 1993: MCOH 14.1) and the press (CA, May 27, 1993).

- February 1994: on his return to Robben Island for the fourth anniversary of his release, Mandela echoes the emphasis on positive aspects of prison time and a conciliatory representation of that experience (CA, February 12-13, 1994; CT, February 12, 1994; CA, July 25, 1994).

- May 1994: Peace Visions organises a symposium to debate the future of the island. A feasibility study realised for the symposium clearly indicates that *'among the ex-political prisoners interviewed for this study, a clear feeling exists that no shrine to the past should be erected but rather something that will reflect the triumph of the human spirit over injustice'* (Peace Visions, 1994). This quote is reprinted in the press (CA, July 6, 1994; CT, May 16, 1994).

- July 1994: the Mayibuye Centre shows the film Voices from Robben Island (Schadeberg, 1994) and gathers a Robben Island panel, as part of the Celebrating Democracy Festival. The guest speaker, Minister Maharaj, comments: *'I hope that the story of Robben Island will not be the sad story which comes out of this film but a story of humanity, (...), of pride in being alive, and pride in knowing that whatever we did had the support of the entire world'* (CA, July 25, 1994); some ex-prisoners express similar views in the panel discussion that follows (MCOH 14.2).

- February 1995: on the fifth anniversary of his release, President Mandela addresses a historic reunion of ex- political prisoners (more than a thousand people) gathered on Robben Island and re-asserts the positive and universal symbolism of Robben Island (Mandela, 1996a: 4-5).

- September 1997: opening the RIM, President Mandela says: *'I am confident that we will together find a way to combine the many dimensions of the island, and that we will do so in a manner that recognises above all its pre-eminent character as a symbol of the victory of human spirit over political oppression; and of reconciliation over enforced division'* (1997h: 3).

²¹ Significantly, Kathrada acknowledged that the views of ex-political prisoners were under-represented in public submissions to the Future of Robben Island Committee because the Committee representing them did not encourage enough their participation (1996c: 3). This situation might result partly from his accumulation and conflation of roles as chairperson of both committees.

²² See for instance, Hutton, 1994; Kathrada 1996c: 3; McBlain, 1996: 21. See also in the press CA, May 27, 1993; CT, January 2, 1997; CA, February 12, 1998; Star, March 28, 1998.

Interestingly, this largely deliberate and top-down reshaping of the public image of Robben Island has influenced a number of individual memories of ex-Robben Islanders²³, which have thus in turn supported and spread the new public image of the island. Thus, apart from the quite spontaneous and unself-conscious tendency (examined above) to recast one's memories as part of a meaningful life story against the backdrop of current conditions, individual and collective memories of ex-Robben Islanders are reshaped under the influence of the new positive representation promoted from above. Thus, the positive aspects of ex-Robben Islanders' personal experiences become the pre-eminent dimension of the remembrance²⁴. As a corollary, the hitherto piecemeal positive memories are reorganised in a coherent and meaningful narrative structure, thereby becoming more meaningful and significant. Prison experiences of the ex-prisoners are now reshaped to constitute a story of human solidarity and moral strength; of resistance to –and victory over– violence, racism, and pettiness; and of establishing the foundation of the “new” South Africa. Such homogenisation of individual memories corresponds to the process (analysed in Part One) through which individual memories are framed by the social context. Under the influence of social frameworks of memory and of the dominant representation of the past, individual memories are indeed homogenised and made congruent with the dominant public representation (Halbwachs, 1992: 51, 81-82; Nuttall, 1998: 87). In the case of ex-Robben Islanders, the rhetorical use of universal and positive phrases, themes and symbols, as well as the underlying subtexts of reconciliation, non-racism and democratisation, recast individual memories in a positive and inclusive fashion. Such influence of the political context and of the prevailing public representation is all the more significant in South Africa as representations of the past have always had considerable political significance so that it is more collective memory that shapes individual ones than *vice versa* (Nuttall, 1998: 88). Further, the relative homogenisation of individual memories in congruence with the newly dominant public representation of the island is made possible by a certain “communalisation” of certain individual memories which come to be regarded as the past of all ex-Robben Islanders²⁵. This is achieved through the repetition and common “appropriation” by ex-prisoners of sayings, anecdotes, and images which concern or were told by famous ex-Robben Islanders and/or which perfectly and strikingly epitomise particular aspects of prison life²⁶. Such “communalisation” of the prison experience is made easier by the fact that, in the past, Robben Islanders conceived of themselves as a community and developed a generic sense of the self. This is revealed firstly in their insistence to deal with the prison authorities not as atomised individuals but as groups or group members (Mandela, 1994a; Alexander, 1994; Jacobs, 1992: 82). This is also featured in literary accounts of prison times which often claim to present the general experience of Robben Islanders or the life story of a community rather than specific individual narratives (Jacobs, 1991: 95; Jacobs, 1992: 77-78; Nuttall, 1998: 77).

²³ This assertion is more my broad assessment of a probable trend (on the basis of the materials reviewed) than an established fact. To establish this indisputably would require an extensive survey and comparison at several points in time of the representations of prison times by a representative sample of ex-Robben Islanders.

²⁴ Importantly, this does not mean that the new collective memory of Robben Island is univocal but that the emerging positive image focusing on moral strength and victory in universal terms becomes the pre-eminent view. It however remains contested by alternative individual or collective memories and by contradictory aspects of the prison experience.

²⁵ Robben Islanders can either view such representations as an image of the experiences of the “average Robben Islander” or believe that they actually experienced such things themselves (whether this is true or not). The latter case should not be regarded as a sign of manipulation but as the mark of the influence of the public representation on individual memories.

²⁶ This is reinforced by the fact that with the creation of the committee representing the ex-political prisoners less voices –and the same ones (especially that of the chairperson, Ahmed Kathrada)– are heard.

To conclude, Robben Island has emerged as a key site of memory for the “new” South Africa in the early 1990s. This prevalence of the public commemoration of Robben island stems from a combination of national evolutions and more local and specific processes. Under apartheid, Robben Island was a key symbol of both the apartheid regime and the resistance movement. In the context of the changeover, Robben Island thus became a stake at the national level for the representation of the past and of collective identity, all the more since Robben Island was symbolically regarded as the microcosm of South Africa. At the same time, Robben Island was put in the spotlight and was at the core of a partisan debate about its future use and development. Thereby, the history and symbolic significance were further publicised and acknowledged. In this context, the public representation of Robben Island has been reshaped in a positive and inclusive fashion, in congruence with the new conciliatory narrative of the past. As a result, Robben Island has been established as a key commemoration at the national level, as part of the reshaping of the new national identity and of the South African representation of the past. This early positioning of Robben Island at the core of public remembrance and discourse about the representation of the past has strongly informed the creation, form and content of the RIM which opened on January 1, 1997. The commemoration of Robben Island as institutionalised in the RIM is conceived to deepen and entrench these trends and mechanisms of reshaping. It is conceived as a model heritage project and supports the mutually reinforcing interplay between the representation of Robben Island and the “new” South Africa.

Chapter Ten:

The Robben Island Museum: a heritage showcase for the “new” South Africa

In 1997, the public commemoration of Robben Island was institutionalised with the creation of the Robben Island Museum (RIM): opened to the public in January 1997, it was officially opened in September 1997. The RIM is meant to entrench the significance of Robben Island as site of memory in the “new” South Africa and illustrates the interplay, analysed in Part Two (Chapter 6), between the “new” South Africa and its approach to the past. Indeed, the RIM reflects the new national concerns for democratisation, reconciliation and national unity in its organisation and content and, in turn, supports democratisation and the emergence of a collective heritage. Thus, the RIM is a cornerstone of the by the new regime’s undertaking of reshaping the past: it constitutes a model heritage project, in congruence with the transformation process at play in the cultural sector; further, it is at the core of the project of “recovering” the South African past.

10.1- The RIM: a key commemoration for the “new” South Africa

Robben Island is a key symbolic site for the “new” South Africa. The commemoration of the island is thus crucial to the configuration of the meaning of the “new” South Africa. As a result, the organisation of this commemoration –and its institutionalisation in the form of the RIM– aims at preserving the significance of the island, while recasting its symbolism.

A major symbol for apartheid and the resistance movement in the past, Robben Island is in the process of being established as the most significant national symbol, a process reinforced by the representation of the island as epitome of the “new” South Africa. This new image of Robben Island as microcosm of South Africa is twofold. Firstly, Robben Island has a very diverse past, covering many periods and aspects of the broader South African past and encompassing many communities. Thereby, it is expected to convey the sense that ‘*all South Africans, every community has had some historical links with Robben Island, has been part of Robben Island history*’ (Davison, 1993: MCOH 14.5). Robben Island is thus regarded as a multi-cultural place where many different pasts, groups and symbols coexist, are respected, and publicly celebrated. In this sense, the island constitutes a microcosm of the “rainbow nation” which the “new” South Africa strives to be. Secondly, Robben Island is a symbol of the victory of the resistance movement over apartheid, and more broadly, a symbol of the victory of humanism and moral strength. Thus, ‘*the imprisonment (of the Robben Islanders) has come to represent the crimes of apartheid, their release the victory over apartheid*’ (Deacon, 1998: 165). In this sense, the island is a microcosm of the dramatic shift from apartheid to the post-apartheid era. Because the island has been a vital symbol and because it is depicted as South Africa in miniature, ‘*South Africans’ understanding of the island as symbol is thus of vital importance in mediating an understanding of South Africa’s past and hopes for its future*’ (id.: 164). Thus, the public commemoration of Robben Island is highly significant since the island’s symbolism decisively shapes the representation of the broader South African past and the narrative of national identity.

Clearly, the new leaders are concerned that the commemoration of Robben Island should not only relate to its specific and local past but should also have national significance. Further, the potent symbolism of the island should be preserved and extended so that it will not only epitomise the past of South Africa but will also have relevance to the present and future issues and challenges of the “new” South Africa. As Sisulu commented in his opening address of the Robben Island Gateway project in June 1996: *‘just as Robben Island helped shape our past and present, it should be reactivated in a way that contributes to future debates and developments in our society’* (in CT, June 13, 1996; see also Mtshali, 1996: 2). In this way, leaders of the “new” South Africa seek to promote the commemoration of Robben Island as a basis and guarantee for the new dispensation and the new national identity. Firstly, to commemorate Robben Island makes it possible to preserve the memories of apartheid and of the resistance movement. Indeed, the island provides a spatial locus of memory where the past of apartheid and resistance is materialised, hence made durable and visible, hence entrenching remembrance and contributing to prevent the forgetting of the past. The commemoration of Robben Island –through the museum and the organisation of public ceremonies– can further provide a site and event to transmit the collective memory of apartheid Robben Island/ South Africa to new groups and new generations. The story of Robben Island can indeed be told to groups (and especially the white minority) who were cut off from it, or ignored it, and can be passed along to children who are regarded as the main audience who has to learn, remember and bear witness to this history (Mandela, 1996a: 7; Mbeki 1994: MCOH 2.2.6). The commemoration of Robben Island can thereby support the *‘resolve that never again shall this land see the oppression of one by another’* (Mandela, 1997h: 4), therefore providing a ritual of beginnings whereby the apartheid past is recalled, denounced and rejected and the “new” South Africa legitimated and celebrated. Secondly, the commemoration of Robben Island contributes to redress the unbalanced representation of the past and the unequal celebration of heritage. Indeed, it publicly acknowledges and celebrates one of the key symbols of the majority of the population which was marginalised under apartheid, thus contributing to the undertaking of highlighting and celebrating new monuments and heritage sites *‘that live in our people’s hearts’* (Mandela, 1997h: 2). Finally, because it has a very rich history and because its public representation has been recast in a positive and universal fashion, Robben Island is the key heritage project expected to symbolise the existence and richness of a collective heritage shared by all South Africans (id.; Davison, 1993: MCOH 14.5).

To thus ensure that Robben Island preserves its significance in the “new” South Africa, the Presidency and the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology have established it as the first and foremost heritage site of the “new” South Africa. In official discourse, the significance and pre-eminence of Robben Island in the collective heritage of South Africa is repeatedly underlined. In the words of the Culture Minister, *‘Robben Island is unique in that it represents our political, historical and environmental heritage’* (Ngubane, 1995; see also Ngubane, 1996h; Mtshali, 1996; Mandela, 1997h). As a result, the island is given full official recognition as an environmental and cultural site of importance. Established as a nature reserve by the previous regime in the early 1990s, the island has been further declared national monument and national museum in 1996. Robben Island was also the first South African site to apply for recognition as a World Heritage Site in 1997. The RIM further receives a substantial part of the Department of Arts, Culture Science and Technology’s museum

budget, namely 28.8 million rands or 35% of the budget for 1997²⁷. In this way, it is established as '*a cultural and conservation showcase for the new South African democracy*' (Mtshali, 1996: 1; Mandela, 1997h: 3) and as '*the first major new heritage institution of the new South African democracy*' (Mandela, 1997h: 4).

To conclude, Robben Island is a vital symbol for South Africans and its commemoration is deemed to have a decisive part in the reshaping of the representation of the South African past and in the emergence of a new national identity. As a result, the commemoration of Robben Island –and its institutionalisation through the RIM– is established as key heritage project of the “new” South Africa. In the next section, I will show that the RIM is also conceived to epitomise the principles and methods of the new heritage policy.

10.2- The RIM: a showcase for the new heritage policy

In Part Two, we saw that the “new” South Africa has undertaken to reshape its public representation of the past in congruence with the objectives of breaking with the past, democratisation, reconciliation and national cohesion. Such reshaping aims at redressing the biases in the former representation of the past and at favouring the emergence of a shared representation. A major channel to thus remould the representation of the past is the culture and heritage sector which the new government has undertaken to reform (see Part Two, Chapter 6, section 2). In this section, I will analyse the Robben Island Museum as a case study of these broader processes of past reconstruction so as to highlight its congruence with the values and objectives of the new cultural policy and, beyond, of the new dispensation and so as to examine how it takes part in the reshaping of the representation of the past. I will thus show that the RIM is characterised by four main features: the organisation of the museum is informed by the new democratic and public culture; the RIM aims at being readily accessible to a large public; it constitutes a multi-dimensional and innovative institution; and it strives to promote more respectful and tolerant forms of representation of history and culture.

Firstly, the organisation and management of the RIM is informed by the transformation at play in the cultural sector and reflects the broad principles of the new cultural management policy. The museum is committed to affirmative action and to have a staff broadly representative of South African demographics; it is accountable to the RIM Council; and it strives towards economic self-sustainability²⁸. Further, its planning and decision-making are largely consultative of interest groups and the general public. Thus, even before the creation of the RIM, the planning of the form and content of the commemoration included a call to public submissions on the future of the island, which obtained more than 200 replies (Kathrada, 1996c: 2-3). These public submissions contributed to determine four key aspects which have become the four “core essences” of

²⁷ It is however important to note: firstly, that this amount is largely used for the upkeep of the infrastructures on the island (the Department of Correctional Services used to spend 22 million rands per year when it was in charge, including 5 million rands for infrastructures (McBlain, 1996: 18)) (interview with André Odendaal, director of the RIM, June 23, 1998); secondly, that the financial support of the Culture Department is due to stop after the first few years of operation (M&G, Sept. 19, 1997).

²⁸ Though conceived as a model of new democratic and responsible cultural management, the RIM has experienced some tensions and criticisms from staff members (CT, January 14, 1998; CT, January 22, 1998; SI, May 24, 1998).

the RIM (Mtshali, 1996: 2). They consist of: maintaining the universal significance of the island; insuring the conservation of its natural and cultural heritage; maintaining the island as a platform for life-long learning and critical debate; and striving for economic development and self-sustainability (id.)²⁹. Moreover, since its opening, the RIM has constantly sought to consult the general public, visitors and its partners and “reference groups”. It has, for instance, organised two symposiums on the content, development and management of the museum: the first one gathered ex-political prisoners, the second one gathered all other reference groups. The museum also conducted a satisfaction survey of its visitors and staff members are generally aware of and attentive to comments and criticisms as these surface in the media and are expressed by visitors and partners.

A second objective of the RIM in congruence with the new heritage policy is to promote wider accessibility to the public by targeting a large audience –in particular previously disadvantaged groups– and by “taking the culture to the people”. In this regard, the RIM is limited because of strong structural constraints: as a nature reserve, it has to limit the number of visitors at a time; as an island, it requires its own transport system, hence lesser flexibility/ autonomy for visitors, a limited capacity and a more expensive fare. The result of these constraints is that the RIM has fixed a maximum number of 1200 visitors a day³⁰ and an adult fee of a hundred rands. These characteristics have been major targets in the criticisms of the RIM since its opening³¹. However, the director of the RIM underlines that they are largely unavoidable insofar as one wants the RIM to be a nature reserve and to reach economic self-sustainability³². Nevertheless, the RIM is committed to developing wider public accessibility, firstly by facilitating access for certain target groups and secondly by taking Robben Island to the public. Thus, the RIM currently accommodates 8 to 10 groups of schoolchildren per week at a subsidised rate. Other possibilities considered include proposals to establish one open day per month and/or a special fee for South African visitors. Apart from increasing accessibility quantitatively, the RIM also aims at extending access to specific groups, in particular disadvantaged ones. Thus, it strives for visiting schools to be broadly representative of South African demographics³³. The RIM also plans to “export” itself through the production of travelling exhibitions, multimedia products and services and the development of a visitors centre at the V&A Waterfront³⁴.

The third feature of the RIM which reflects the new cultural policy lies in its striving to be a multi-dimensional and innovative institution. Firstly, the RIM is established as a site museum. This entails a modern integrated approach to environment and to (social and political) history so that both be regarded as major heritage resources, be preserved and displayed (Mtshali, 1996: 1; Kathrada, 1996c: 2) and so that, in the preservation and display of each one of them, the other be taken into account (thus, all island tours should

²⁹ Odendaal’s opening address, RIM development symposium, personal notes, April 1998.

³⁰ Increased from the 265 visitors per day for the first few months of operation of the RIM. The limited numbers during the first few months of the museum were largely due to the urgency with which the RIM was opened and to the limited resources (in transport, staff members, time and money) available to accommodate more tourists.

³¹ For occurrences of these criticisms in the press, see: on the tensions around transports: CT, January 17, 1997; CA, April 8, 1997; CA, April 21, 1997; on the fare, see CA, June 6-7, 1998.

³² Odendaal, interview, June 23, 1998.

³³ id.

³⁴ A project of the RIM is to set up a visitors centre in the Waterfront which would comprise a broader historical display (RIM development Symposium, April 1998; Odendaal, interview, June 23, 1998).

include both aspects in an integrated fashion)³⁵. Secondly, the RIM is a very diversified institution: apart from its activities as historical museum and nature reserve, it carries out and supports research on the various aspects of the island's past; it promotes artistic activities (exhibitions, accommodation and facilitation of the work of artists, etc.); it organises or supports conferences and workshops on social and historical issues; it is at the core of a new post-graduate program in heritage studies; and it plans the creation of a peace institute³⁶. Thirdly, and as a corollary, the RIM's approach is characteristic of "new museums" and is often summed up in its definition as a "living museum" (Mtshali, 1996: 1)³⁷. To start with, it links up with broader social debates, hence maintaining its relevance to the present and achieving its role as platform for critical debate and life-long learning³⁸. Moreover, it sets out to challenge its visitors and to prompt them to react and reflect on their experiences. Thus, it tries to avoid conventional forms of display: for example, the B section of the prison –where "leaders" were held in isolation– is kept with very few artefacts so that the space and bareness shock and sensitise visitors³⁹. The RIM also tries to provide multi-vocal narratives, for instance by relating the prison experience through several media which have different foci and belong to different registers: prison guides' narratives, art exhibitions in the visitors centre (*30 minutes*) and in one cell of the D section (*Engaging the shadows*), video on the ferry Makana, or the "cell stories" exhibition in A section (an information centre is also planned to open in the Waterfront). The RIM further plans to offer a wide diversity of activities: historical visits, arts, sports, and meditation (through overnight stays, the erection of a memorial, and possibly through the use of isolation cells)⁴⁰. Through these various means, the RIM seeks to display and provoke a diversity of perspectives, issues and voices and to produce fruitful juxtapositions, combinations and tensions.

It is however important to note that, in practice, the visits to Robben Island are still short of this model. Several constraints limit the opportunity to personally experience and appropriate the space and atmosphere of the place. Firstly, visitors are continuously part of a group (whether it be from and to the harbour, in the prison or on the bus tour around the island). Moreover the form of the visit is rigid: its duration –limited to two and a half hours–, sequence (harbour/ prison/ bus/ back to the harbour/ shop/ boat) and content are fixed. Further, the tour is mainly a didactic exercise aiming at providing a survey as comprehensive as possible of the prison experience and of the island's past. In this context, there is little room for a diversity of voices, feelings and narratives to express themselves and be perceived by the visitors. Thus, several sites and activities providing different perspectives (art exhibitions in the visitors' centre) or foci (kramat, penguin walks) already exist. However they are little advertised and are not scheduled in the standard tour so that visitors almost never get to see them⁴¹. These criticisms must nevertheless receive two qualifications. Firstly, the current state of the visits (form, content, quality of services, etc.) results from the limited time and resources available to

³⁵ Odendaal, interview, June 23, 1998; personal observations during tourist visits.

³⁶ On these aspects, RIM development symposium, personal notes, April 1998 and various issues of *Ilifa Labantu*. On the research project, Odendaal interview, June 1998; on artistic activities, RIM, 1997a and 1997b; *CT*, October 25, 1997; on heritage studies, RIM brochure "Post-graduate diploma in Museum and Heritage Studies"; *CA*, December 16, 1997.

³⁷ RIM development Symposium, April 1998.

³⁸ In March 1998, the RIM for instance took part in/organised: a workshop on child labour; an international conference on young female entrepreneurs; the International Adult Learners' Week programme (RIM, *Ilifa Labantu*, March 1998).

³⁹ RIM Symposium, April 1998; Odendaal, interview, June 1998. However, this effort is often misunderstood by visitors and the lack of display is a recurrent criticism of the RIM (*CA*, June 6-7, 1998; RIM Symposium, April 1998).

⁴⁰ RIM Symposium, April 1998; Odendaal, interview, June 1998.

⁴¹ These activities are mainly available in some specialised tours: the eco-tour, the art tour, the evening tour, etc.

the RIM since its opening⁴². Secondly, it is very striking to see how much the RIM staff is aware of the limits and pitfalls of the present formula and of the necessary selectivity and prioritisation encompassed in any commemoration of the past⁴³.

Finally, the fourth feature of the RIM epitomising the new heritage policy is to strive for less biased and more accurate forms of representations of cultures and histories than those formerly predominant⁴⁴. This entails firstly doing away with any remnant of racism, paternalism and contempt in the representations of the pasts, traditions, artefacts, and symbols, and especially those of non-white groups. As already noted in Part Two, this issue is at the core of President Mandela's opening address of the RIM on Heritage Day 1997 in which the President denounced the prejudiced and demeaning nature of colonialism' and apartheid' representation of non-white cultures and expressed the wish that *'this monument and the museum [the RIM] strengthen our resolve that never again shall this land see (...) the suppression of any community's heritage'* and that they *'strengthen the ethos of heritage as a binding force'* (1997h:3-4)⁴⁵. Striving for more accurate and less biased forms of representations further lies in an attempt to promote a broader and less eurocentric notion of culture and heritage. The RIM is part of this effort through its application as a World Heritage Site. Until now, very few African places have been given the status of World Heritage Sites, a situation largely due to the fact that, as indicated by a top official of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, *'until very recently the focus on these sites has been western. It has been a eurocentric approach to culture. The categories and criteria for selection weren't suited to the African situation'* (M&G, September 19, 1997). South Africa in collaboration with other African countries seeks to redefine the criteria and categories of the World Heritage Council. Specifically, in its submission as World Heritage Site, the RIM attempts to develop a Southern African concept of authenticity in conservation⁴⁶.

To conclude, the RIM has been conceived as a showcase for the new culture and heritage policy: it is established as the spearhead and model of the new cultural institutions (innovative forms of display, multiplicity of activity, submission as World Heritage Site) and it reflects the broader concerns for democratisation and the emergence of a collective heritage (in management methods, public accessibility, respectful integration of the environment, etc.). It is therefore part and parcel of the process of reconstructing the representation of the South African past in congruence with the new national objectives of democratisation, reconciliation and national unity. As analysed in Part Two (Chapter 6, section 3), another essential aspect of this process of past reconstruction is the undertaking to "recover the past".

⁴² Odendaal, interview, June 1998.

⁴³ RIM development Symposium, April 1998. Deacon also notes that the museum staff is aware that any representation and commemoration of the past *'will necessarily be selective in its remembering and forgetting'* (1998: 178).

⁴⁴ In the previous paragraph, I noted that the representation of the past is necessarily selective. Indeed, as we saw in Part One, any representation of the past is shaped by self-conscious and unself-conscious distortions. This is however compatible with an attempt to limit deliberate distortions so as to redress apartheid's highly partisan, racist and eurocentric forms of distortion.

⁴⁵ See report of this address in the press, *CT*, September 25, 1997; *CA*, September 25, 1997; *CA*, October 1, 1997.

⁴⁶ Intervention by L. Robinson, member of the National Monument Council and RIM Council, RIM Symposium, April 1998.

10.3- The RIM and the recovery of the past

As part of the reshaping of the representation of the South African past, the RIM contributes to the undertaking of “recovering” those aspects of the past which were formerly marginalised. This undertaking however gives rise to tensions and unveils memory stakes insofar as it is shaped by the conciliatory narrative of the past and by the broader vision of a new reconciled, inclusive and unified South Africa.

10.3.1- *The recovery of the past*

The RIM mainly seeks to recover past experiences of apartheid’s political prisoners; beyond the apartheid past, it aims at extending the “recovery project” to other layers, eras and communities of the island’s past.

The commemoration of Robben Island institutionalised in the RIM is organised so that the island’s past as apartheid’s political prison is foremost in the representation. The recovery of the prison’s past focuses on the voices and experiences of the Robben Islanders more than on the “official side” of the past; indeed, as noted in Part Two, the legitimacy and pre-eminence of one’s account as part of the “real” or accurate past lies in belonging to the majority and having been silenced. In the RIM, the prison is the main element of the visits and the narrative of prison time largely rests on personal memories, anecdotes and artefacts of ex-Robben Islanders: all prison guides are ex-Robben Islanders and the main exhibition consists in a display of personal artefacts and accounts of individual life stories of ex-prisoners⁴⁷. Such activities as the research undertaken on Sobukwe’s imprisonment on the island or the systematic perusal and exploitation of the apple box archives also contribute to the discovery/recovery and re-centring of the story of the island’s political prisoners⁴⁸.

In addition to the recovery of the island’s past as prison, the RIM also seeks to publicly document and represent other voices and pasts of the island. This undertaking –which originates mainly in the *Esiqithini* exhibition– consists of archaeological searches, academic research, collection of life stories and artefacts of people who stayed on Robben Island in the 20th century (mainly from the World War II period but also from the earlier time of the lepers hospital). Further, various aspects of Robben Island are documented, protected and promoted by specific communities who thereby (re)discover their own past and experience dignity, pride and a sense of historical continuity⁴⁹. These diverse pasts and voices are combined in the narrative of the island’s past proposed by the RIM. Thus, the bus tour on the island complementing the visit of the prison seeks to cover and bring together many different histories and voices. It constitutes a survey of various periods and communities: (almost) all the material remains from the past which are in sight are pointed out

⁴⁷ The RIM appealed for Robben Islanders to provide stories and artefacts for its project “*Call Stories- Your Stories and Our History*” through a public campaign in the media (CA, November 20, 1997; CA, December 4, 1997; Star, November 13, 1997). The feedback was however very limited (RIM development Symposium, personal notes, April 1998).

⁴⁸ Official recognition of the pre-eminence of the island’s past as prison also occurs at the organisational level: ex- Islanders are represented in the RIM Council and are regularly consulted on the museum development. The RIM is also meant to contribute to their socio-economic upliftment via jobs, subcontracting, etc. Some ex-prisoners nevertheless expressed their disappointment or anger at being relatively sidelined in the setting up and functioning of the RIM (M&G, December 13, 1996; SI, May 24, 1998).

⁴⁹ On Muslim past, see *Muslim Views*, Feb. 1992; CA, Jan. 18, 1994; on Khoi past, see CA, Jan. 25-26, 1997; CA, March 20, 1997.

and briefly referred to while the tour guide also quickly evokes other aspects of the island's past which have left no remains. Interestingly, the RIM also seeks to promote the recovery of these marginalised pasts in a metaphoric way by representing them and re-inventing them through art exhibitions⁵⁰. In the narrative of the island's past, the various historical aspects are recast and brought together in encompassing stories of resistance, sufferings, and social exclusion (Davison, MCOH 14.5, 1993; Deacon, 1998)⁵¹. They are celebrated as symbols and traditions of the "new" South Africa. The aim is to '*give expression to these diverse histories as a collective heritage*' that constitute '*a binding force*' for the "new" South Africa. (Mandela, 1997h: 3; see also Davison, 1993: MCOH 14.5). Through the physical juxtaposition of material remains of various "recovered" histories combined with their public commemoration, the RIM shapes the image of the island as rainbow nation in miniature, allowing for many different pasts and symbols to coexist, be respected and celebrated.

10.3.2- *Tensions and memory stakes*

In Part Two, we saw that the project of recovering the past is an aspect of the broader undertaking of reconstructing a shared and more balanced representation of the South African past. The recovery of the island's past is thus part of broader trends and some tensions stakes have arisen as the past of the island has been recovered and thereby shaped under the influence of the new conciliatory narrative. As noted in the first section of this chapter, the new national identity narrative and the congruent conciliatory narrative of the past emphasise the national significance of Robben Island as microcosm of South Africa. This new public image of the island emphasising national symbolism is in tension with a more local and specific representation – moulded by the "updated" narrative of the liberation movement–focusing on the experiences of apartheid political prisoners. Two sets of tensions and issues have arisen: to what extent should the representation of the island's prison be representative of the broader apartheid and resistance past of South Africa? To what extent should other aspects of the island's past be depicted in the overall representation of Robben Island?⁵²

The first set of tensions lies in the issue of the representativity of the island's past as apartheid prison and rests on the image of Robben Island as microcosm of the victory of the "Freedom Struggle" and more broadly of the victory of human spirit, dignity and freedom. Such approach entails that the significance of the commemoration and the representation of the past it offers are larger than those of the island's past solely. The issue is then to determine to what extent and in which terms the representation of the past on Robben Island/by the RIM should be representative and/or inclusive of the broader South African history. The RIM being established Museum of the Freedom Struggle and being planned to incorporate the Mayibuye Centre, and in the absence of other major projects⁵³, the RIM is indeed meant to become the main site for the

⁵⁰ Thus, the RIM proposed two art exhibitions: one on the visits received by ex-political prisoners (RIM, *Thirty Minutes*, 1997b) and one on the many past aspects of the island (RIM, *Engaging the Shadows*, 1997a).

⁵¹ RIM symposium, personal notes, April 1998; personal observation of tourist visits; video screened on the ferry Makana.

⁵² This analysis partly originates in a discussion with Professor Minkley (History Department, UWC) in May 1998.

⁵³ Few South African museums (such as the Natal Museum) have undertaken to collect and display memorabilia of apartheid time (Dominy, 1992: 8-10). To my knowledge, however, none provides a general survey of apartheid and resistance.

memorialisation of the apartheid system, the resistance movement and daily life aspects under that period. This broad scope and representativity of the RIM is what has been projected by the Culture Department and the RIM Council as well as expected by some commentators and partners. For them, the challenge is to transcend the specific features of the prison to allow for the representation of female and white prisoners, but also of activists who were never arrested or imprisoned, of exiles, of the relatives who visited and supported the Robben Islanders, and all those involved in the struggle against apartheid. This undertaking is epitomised in the call by some ex-Robben Islanders to promote a broad symbolism of the prison encompassing all activists⁵⁴. It is also illustrated in some aspects of the RIM's representation of the past: the visitors' block is open for visits and an art exhibition is set up there; some prison guides mention white and female activists and prisoners; all insist on the role and support of relatives, etc. This broadening of the representation of Robben Island is part of the shift from the narrative of the liberation movement to a conciliatory narrative as dominant representation of the South African past. Indeed, it allows to provide a less partisan and more inclusive representation of the apartheid past and to depict Robben Island as "the nation's island".

This shift and broadening of the representation of the prison to symbolise all resisters/activists (and supposedly apartheid's system of repression on the other hand) is however not inconsequential: it brings out tensions and discrepancies. Firstly, unless comparable exhibitions and displays are developed to document extensively exile and underground politics, experiences in other prisons, the mass democratic movement of the 1980s, etc., the Robben Island prison –thanks to its visibility and notoriety– will continue to eclipse other aspects of the "Freedom Struggle". Secondly, the call to reintegrate all activists in the representation of the RIM is in tension with the prominent role acknowledged to ex-Robben Islanders in the planning and functioning of the RIM. Indeed, if the RIM is to be a museum of the "Freedom Struggle" and not a museum of Robben Island's apartheid prison, then the rights and claims of ex-Robben Islanders cannot be regarded as possessing unique legitimacy. Therefore, their legitimacy and privileged status –to have a say in the management and activities of the RIM and to benefit from it for their socio-economic upliftment as well as to mould decisively the representation of the apartheid past– would be undermined. Another sensitive issue and difficult task is to represent the daily life aspects of apartheid and resistance (pass laws, forced removals, petty apartheid, etc.; and on the other hand, songs, lore, mutual assistance and other forms of daily survival and resistance) on the island. These latter aspects are more difficult to represent on Robben Island because they are remote from both the symbolic and actual past of the island. Thus, while certain aspects of the island's apartheid past could reflect broader phenomena and events⁵⁵, to a large extent an attempt to link up and intertwine Robben Island's past and the daily aspects of apartheid/ resistance could entail two distortions. On the one hand, it could produce a relative distortion of the South African past, since by being set on Robben Island, the exhibition is likely to display an emphasis on the island and on activist politics. Such distortion could appear either as a mere result of the location on the island or as part of the influence of the "updated" narrative of the liberation movement which would put Robben Island/activist politics at the core of the last

⁵⁴ See Robben Island panel (MCOH 14.2, 1994); Daniels thus stated: *'there are a lot of people who believe Robben Island belongs to them. It doesn't, it belongs to the struggle. The people on Robben Island were only the black men who were caught'* (M&G, December 13, 1996).

⁵⁵ For instance: the racial discrimination in food and clothing between African, "Indian" and "Coloured" prisoners; the

50 years of South African history⁵⁶. On the other hand, intertwining the island's and the nation's pasts could result in a certain departicularisation of the specificities of the Robben Island experiences by broadening the representation of its past so as to increase its symbolism and representativity. Thus, while there is certainly a need to develop displays of the resistance and apartheid pasts (more broadly than a "Museum of the Freedom Struggle") and while both the RIM and the Mayibuye Centre would be major pillars in this undertaking, there is a need not to conflate the history of Robben Island and that of South Africa. Possible options would be to set up the representation of resistance and apartheid on the mainland rather than on the island and to try not to associate too closely the two commemorations.

The second issue stemming from the reshaping of Robben Island's past as inclusive and symbolic of the unity of the new South Africa arises from the recovery and public display not only of the apartheid past but also of the many other layers, voices and communities of the island's history. There is indeed an open contest between the claims of various groups concerning what should be commemorated and given priority. Since the early years of debate about the future use of the island, ex-political prisoners have insisted on the pre-eminence of the prison in the past and the commemoration of Robben Island. Thus, at the opening of the *Esiqithini* exhibition, Kathrada clearly stated: *'while we would welcome efforts of environmentalists and conservationists in the direction of the fauna and flora, and historic buildings and shipwrecks, I can foresee uneasiness about activities that might adversely distract from the main focus of the Island as a monument to ex-political prisoners and the struggle for democracy in South Africa'* (1996b: 9)⁵⁷. Ex-political prisoners have constantly insisted on the centrality of the prison and of the broader apartheid past within the RIM. This was sanctioned by the cabinet decision which created the RIM (Mtshali, 1996: 1). However, a relative de-centring of the representation of Robben Island's past from the emphasis on the apartheid past has occurred through the diversification of the representations and activities of the RIM. Firstly, claims by different groups to enhance alternative aspects of the island have attracted public and media attention on the environmental dimension and on the earlier history of Robben Island, such as the fauna and flora, the Khoikhoi and Muslim pasts or the lepers' and prisoners' graveyards⁵⁸. These new claims and emphases are all the more publicised as the RIM is committed to recover and display the whole of the island's past and consults these groups in its planning and decision-making. Thus, the museum has started developing activities (art exhibitions, seminars, etc.) and tours (eco-tours, walking and cycling tours) which relatively de-emphasise the representation of the apartheid past (M&G, 1997). Therefore, even though early steps by the RIM to diversify its tours and activities have been resisted and have given rise to tensions with ex-political prisoners (hence the relative lack of publicity and accessibility for the new tours and art exhibitions), it will eventually be possible for visitors to go to Robben Island without visiting the prison and other aspects of the apartheid past if they do not wish to⁵⁹.

residential segregation between "White" and "Coloured" warders in the early 1960s.

⁵⁶ For an illustration of this, see the video on the Makana; Schadeberg, 1994.

⁵⁷ Mandela, 1996a; Mbeki, 1994: MCOH2.2.6; Mkalipi (representing ex-Islanders at the RIM Council), RIM Symposium, April 1998.

⁵⁸ On claims by Khoisan representatives to bury Saartje Baartman on Robben Island, see *CA*, March 20, 1997; *Star*, March 21, 1997; on views of members of the Muslim community, see *Muslim views*, February 1992; *CA*, January 18, 1994; on the interest of the newly formed Robben Island Historical Society, see *CA*, January, 25-26, 1997.

Therefore, by being established as vital national symbol for the “new” South Africa and by thus becoming the “nation’s island”, Robben Island is deeply embedded in public representations and discourse prevailing at the national level. As a result, its representation is largely influenced by the narrative of the new national identity and the conciliatory narrative of the past. Reshaping the representation of the island in a conciliatory and inclusive form gives way to tensions with the representation of the island promoted by the “updated” narrative of the liberation movement which emphasises the political significance of the island as apartheid prison and represents it in a more partisan and specific fashion.

To conclude, through its very existence, form and organisation, the RIM contributes to shaping the commemoration of Robben Island and to entrenching it as key commemoration of the “new” South Africa. The RIM illustrates the interplay between the objectives of the “new” South Africa and the reshaping of the South African representation of past and takes part in the latter process. Indeed, it is a model heritage institution and project of the cultural sector and it contributes to the recovery of the past. It thereby participates in the democratisation of the heritage sector and fosters the emergence of a collective heritage. At the same time, the RIM –because it consists in the commemoration of Robben Island and, further, in the institutionalisation of this commemoration– tends to freeze the public representation of Robben Island, hence shaping it along specific lines and coming in tension with alternative views and memories. In particular, it shapes the representation of Robben Island in congruence with the national objectives of breaking with the past, democratisation, reconciliation and national unity and with the new conciliatory narrative of the past. In the next chapter, I will examine how the public commemoration –through the RIM and public discourse– participates in, supports and reflects the emergence of the new conciliatory narrative of the past by turning the remembrance of the past towards the celebration of the “new” South Africa.

⁵⁹ Odendaal, interview, June 23, 1998.

Chapter Eleven:
The commemoration of Robben Island:
from remembering the past to celebrating the “new” South Africa

In this final chapter, I will examine the commemoration of Robben Island as part of the emergence of the new conciliatory narrative of the past and its congruence with the emerging national identity narrative. To that end, I will look at the commemoration of Robben Island as it is institutionalised in the RIM but also as it exists at the level of official discourse. The commemoration of the island reflects the tendency in South African public discourse to commemorate the past not so much as actual remembrance of past events but as celebration of the “new” South Africa. A presentist and conciliatory remoulding reshapes the story of Robben Island towards portraying the advent of the new dispensation as a positive and inclusive event, legitimising the current dispensation and its leaders, and promoting national reconciliation and unity. Thus, on the basis of a shift in the representation of the past from the story of the contest between apartheid and the resistance movement to the story of the founding of the new dispensation, the public commemoration of Robben Island is posed as a celebratory and performative ceremony for the “new” South Africa.

11.1- From the past as contest between apartheid and the resistance movement to the past as founding of the “new” South Africa

In the commemoration of Robben Island, the representation of the past is in the process of shifting from a narrative of the contest between the apartheid system and the resistance movement to that of the founding of the new country. This shift is promoted firstly by “taming” painful and divisive memories and, secondly, by representing the past with hindsight as the founding of the “new” South Africa.

11.1.1- The “taming” of memories

As analysed in Part Two, taming the memories of the apartheid past consists in providing a more conciliatory version of the past, at least partly doing away with the suffering and divisiveness of past events. This conciliatory reshaping is part of the absorption and modification of the narrative of the liberation movement by the new conciliatory narrative which is progressively asserting itself as prevailing representation of the past in the “new” South Africa. It entails focusing on positive aspects of the past and recasting past experiences in universal terms so as to obtain an inclusive representation of the past. In this way, the representation of the island’s past is reshaped to emphasise positive aspects and to account for the experiences of the Robben Islanders as a universal epic rather than as a partisan drama. Thus, the RIM supports and complements the approach promoted by famous ex-Robben Islanders, and expressed by Ahmed Kathrada to tell the story of Robben Island as that of the ‘*victory of the human spirit against the forces of evil*’ (Kathrada, 1996b: 10-11; see Mandela, 1997h: 3). This remodelling along positive and inclusive lines consists

firstly in focusing on the positive aspects of prison time. Thus, while the prison guides tell of both the violence and repression of the prison authorities and the suffering and resistance of the Robben Islanders, they tend to downplay the former and to emphasise the latter⁶⁰. They describe at length the survival and resistance mechanisms set up by the Robben Islanders: they resisted prison conditions by creating ties of solidarity and mutual assistance, by promoting their personal and collective development through education, political and recreational activities, and by establishing systems of information and communication; they also actively opposed the prison authorities through hunger strikes, petitions, go-slow strikes, escape plans, and various other means. On the other hand, the account of the repression by the prison authorities –beatings, hard labour, psychological torture, etc.– and of the other hardships the prisoners bore (isolation, cold, uprooting, etc.) does not appear as vivid and elaborate. Further, these hardships and sufferings do not so much feature negatively to represent the island as a “hell-hole” but rather contribute to underscoring the strength of spirit and human greatness of the prisoners who managed to overcome them. Thus, the narrative of the Robben Island prison is posed as a universal human epic of great friendships and solidarity, outstanding moral strength, terrible hardships and challenges, fantastic achievements and victory at the end.

Apart from this selective emphasis on certain aspects and interpretations, the positive and inclusive rendering of the prison experience is completed by a set of (mostly unself-conscious) distortions which –in congruence with the dominantly positive and universal genre of the island’s narrative and of the broader conciliatory narrative of the past– idealise the achievements of the Robben Islanders⁶¹. Thus, the overall story of the high security prison highlights positive achievements of the prisoners and universalise them, thereby marginalising other aspects: it focuses on solidarity and discipline and, consequently, erases the dissensions between and within organisations⁶²; it extols moral strength, hence sidelining the moments of despondency and weakness⁶³; it tells of informal political leadership and organisation and thereby silences their rejection or challenging, by Black Consciousness or New Unity Movement prisoners for instance (Buntman, 1996a: 129); it describes Robben Island as the “university” but sidelines the use of education as means of enrolment and propaganda for partisan purposes, especially after 1976 (Buntman, 1996b: 144-146); it emphasises the importance and centrality of the leaders, and especially of Mandela, thereby over-emphasising their agency⁶⁴.

The narrative of the prison thus provides a positive and inclusive representation of the experiences of the Robben Islanders, de-emphasising the divisions within the resistance movement, downplaying weaknesses and sufferings, and emphasising the universal qualities of their leaders and of their achievements.

⁶⁰ On the organisation of the prison visits, I rely on my personal observations. See also, in the press, *CA*, September 25, 1997; *CA*, October 11, 1997; *Trade and Travel*, December 1997; *Natal Witness*, March 12, 1998; *CA*, June 6-7, 1998.

⁶¹ As noted in Chapter 2, “distortions” do not necessarily refer to wilful modifications of the past. In this sense, my analysis of the distortions of the prison narrative is not informed by the normative concern of “denouncing” manipulations of the past but constitutes an attempt to uncover the processes whereby the prison experience is reshaped in a positive fashion. I thus seek to highlight some of the narrative mechanisms analysed in Part One (Alonso, 1988: 44-45; Bruner, 1991: 7, 11, 14-15).

⁶² Major instances of these tensions are the following: the internal dissensions within the PAC (and with the Poqos) in the 1960s and 1970s (Buntman, 1996a: 94, 124-125, 132); the confrontations between prisoners of the PAC, ANC and the BCM in the wake of the arrival of the 1976 generation (Buntman, 1996b: 143-149); the serious and lengthy crisis between Mandela and Mbeki in the early 1970s (Buntman, 1996a: 125; Odendaal in *CT*, March 14, 1997).

⁶³ Nuttall noted that the moments of weakness of Mandela as well as the suicide attempt by Mac Maharaj are absent from *The Long Walk to Freedom* (1998: 78-79). Similarly, such moments are largely absent from interviews of the Robben Islanders (Buntman, 1996a: 181, footnote 26) and from the prison guides’ narratives.

The Robben Island narrative also constitutes a consensual representation of the past which avoids antagonising the (former) upholders of the apartheid regime and strives for the rallying of all around the new representation. This conciliatory representation rests firstly on downplaying the image of Robben Island as symbol of apartheid's evil. Thus, the focus on other activities (sports, game-watching, art exhibitions, sight-seeing) and other periods of the island's past (World War II, hospital, etc.) makes possible a relative de-centring of apartheid as the major aspect determining the image of Robben Island (Deacon, 1998: 166). Moreover, in the commemoration of the prison itself, the representation of apartheid is relatively mitigated or marginalised. Firstly, the apartheid background of the prison is largely absent from the commemoration: a brief account is given in the video screened on the ferry to the island⁶⁵, the only historical context provided along with the few elements sometimes given by prison guides. The apartheid system on the island (in the form mainly of the prison authorities) also remains largely unevoked: the narrative of the island's apartheid past barely alludes to the prison staff –except for the warders of the censor office– especially in its repressive role (while some warders are sometimes described as smuggling food to prisoners, taking lessons from them, etc.). Further, the decision to establish the RIM as '*Museum of the Freedom Struggle*' –as opposed to a museum of both apartheid and resistance– makes it possible to focus on the resistance movement which is recast in positive and inclusive terms, hence to de-emphasise the divisiveness of a partisan representation of the past as apartheid versus resistance. This is further achieved by the fact that in some of the few occurrences when it is evoked, apartheid is represented as systemic: its agents (mainly the warders) are absent and faceless or are even posed as victims of apartheid as well. This latter theme consists in representing warders as victims of a system which makes them the brutal and foolish tool of its repression and violence and the victims of prejudice and hatred. This representation, although little developed on the island (it can be found in the discourse of some ex-Robben Islanders⁶⁶ and is briefly evoked in the video screened on the ferry Makana), makes it possible to avoid alienating the (former) supporters of apartheid as well as to illustrate the notion that all South Africans were victims of apartheid and are now linked by the common improvement of their situation and by their common identity as survivors of the evil apartheid system. Additionally, the rallying of all South Africans around this representation of the prison is made easier by a certain departicularisation of the ideals and achievements of the Robben Islanders so as to make them universal values and symbols which everyone can respect and adhere to. This is epitomised in Kathrada's statement describing the prison experience as the victory of human qualities and moral principles (1996b: 10-11). This universal symbolism is also the first core essence of the RIM and is illustrated in its logo, designed precisely to illustrate Kathrada's statement, which depicts prison bars transforming into an androgynous figure, its arms raised in a celebration of freedom (CA December 6, 1997; *Star*, December 20, 1997; CA, February 12, 1998; *CT*, April 20, 1998).

⁶⁴ Mandela is sometimes described as the creator of the "university" and the lime quarry as "Mandela's quarry".

⁶⁵ However, tourists often seem to prefer looking at the landscape and not all visitors travel on the Makana, the only ferry to present the video. A plan to correct this lack of historical background lies in the creation of a visitors centre in the Waterfront.

⁶⁶ Mandela thus wrote: '*ultimately Badenhorst was not evil; his inhumanity had been foisted upon him by an inhuman system. He behaved like a brute because he was rewarded for brutish behaviour.*' (1994a: 448) and '*a man who takes away another man's freedom is a prisoner of hatred, he is a prisoner behind the bars of prejudice and narrow-mindedness*' (id.: 617). See also Alexander in Wilson, 1988; contrast with Alexander, 1994.

This positive and inclusive representation of the prison which makes possible a relative “soothing” of divisive, controversial and painful memories is however not the only one. Albeit usually downplayed, other subtexts continue to exist and come to the fore (and are, at times, quite deliberately promoted) in certain circumstances and for certain groups. Firstly, on certain occasions, some sections of the resistance movement, and especially the ANC, promote a partisan representation of the past which maintains the dichotomy apartheid versus resistance, and the condemnation of apartheid/ the National Party (NP) inherent in it. This occurred in a non-confrontational fashion when the ANC organised “pilgrimages” to the island so as to underscore its status as heir of the Struggle, for instance in 1994 (during the electoral campaign) on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of Mandela’s release (CT, February, 12-13, 1994). A similar attempt to refresh the link with the “university of the Struggle” –as well as a concern to avoid an ANC-dominated representation of the Robben Island prison experience– probably informs the PAC’s insistence to have Sobukwe’s house preserved and highlighted in the tourist visits (CA, May 6, 1997; CA, May 7, 1997; Star, May 10, 1997). Further, a more confrontational stand is sometimes adopted by the ANC against the NP. It aims at recalling that the NP’s lineage dates directly back from the apartheid regime and at stigmatising the relative forgetting the NP promotes, thereby undermining its credibility as “reformed” party and its political appeal in the “new” South Africa. Thus, Justice Minister Dullah Omar rejected a suggestion that Robben Island be managed by the NP-dominated Western Cape provincial administration on the basis that the island could not be run by the very people who had oppressed and incarcerated so many South Africans and that it would amount to nazis managing concentration camps and Holocaust museums (CA, February, 1997). In another case, an ANC member of parliament proposed a motion to prevent the NP leader van Schalkwyk from ‘*try(ing) to rewrite history*’. After a visit to Robben Island, van Schalkwyk had commented that the country would have been very different today if de Klerk and Mandela had reached an agreement 20 years before. For the ANC member of Parliament, this statement was a blatant example of the NP’s (wilful) forgetfulness of the divided past of South Africa and of the past role of the NP government (CA, March 9, 1998; CA, March 10, 1998; CA, March 11, 1998; Star, March 10, 1998; Star, March 11, 1998). A second subtext is also in tension with the new positive and conciliatory reshaping of the memories and symbolic representations of the island. It consists in focusing on the need to preserve the integrity and solemnity of Robben Island as a mark of respect for those who suffered and sacrificed there or in South Africa at large. This sub-text underlaid the reactions following the publication of a picture on which participants in a celebrity golf day crammed into Mandela’s cell and stood on the furniture to be part of the picture (Star, November 29, 1996). Above all, the main tension arising between this subtext of dignity and the new conciliatory narrative stems from the commercialisation developed around the island. Commercialisation has been undertaken by a short-lived private venture (CT, June, 6, 1997; Davison, 1998: 157) and, above all, by the RIM itself. In the latter case, both the organisation of a fund-raising party (CA, March 22, 1997; CT, March 24, 1997) and the balance between heritage and commercialisation (CT, January 14, 1998; SI, May 24, 1998) have raised criticisms.

To conclude, the dominant representation of the past provided in the public commemoration of Robben Island is one which –in spite of the persistence of and interplay with other subtexts– emphasises a positive, inclusive and conciliatory image of the prison experience. On this basis, the latter is further re-framed with hindsight as a tale of the founding of the “new” South Africa, as a myth of origin.

11.1.2- *A tale of origin: Robben Island and the founding of the "new" South Africa*

Through the public commemoration of Robben Island, the past of the apartheid prison is represented and celebrated as the cradle of the "new" South Africa. In Part Two, we saw that a new conciliatory narrative of the past has emerged in the new South Africa. This conciliatory narrative rests on the narrative of the liberation struggle prevailing in the 1980s (which has subsisted in an updated version alongside the new dominant conciliatory narrative) but modifies it. Along these lines, the representation of the island's apartheid past is reshaped in a presentist and conciliatory fashion which depicts Robben Island as the cradle of the "new" South Africa. This presentist and conciliatory reshaping rests on three mechanisms. Firstly, the new conciliatory representation makes use of the highly symbolic significance of Robben Island as epitome of the struggle against apartheid which prevailed in the older narrative of the liberation struggle: insofar as the "new" South Africa is regarded as resulting from the resistance to and victory over oppression, Robben Island is posed as a cradle of the "new" South Africa; at the same time the symbolism of the resistance movement and of Robben Island is recast in universal terms so that they come to symbolise the victory of human spirit, dignity and freedom. Secondly, the representation of the prison tells the story of the Robben Islanders as that of the founding fathers and leaders of the "new" South Africa. Finally, the values and behaviours of the Robben Islanders are universalised and presented as underpinning the new regime and/ or as exemplary of those the "new" South Africa should strive for.

To start with, the new narrative of the Robben Island prison tells the story of the founding of post-apartheid South Africa since Robben Island has been regarded as symbolic and representative of the broader "Struggle" and since the "Struggle" has been posed as the midwife of the "new" South Africa. As apartheid's most notorious political prison and the site of an active resistance, Robben Island was symbolically regarded as the image of both apartheid's evil and resistance's suffering and strength and embodied the reduction – typical of the narrative of the liberation movement – of the past to the sole "Struggle", that is to political activism. In the new dominant conciliatory narrative, the experiences of the Robben Islanders are posed as heralding and reflecting the broader situation of the resistance movement and its victory over apartheid, entrenched in the advent of the "new" South Africa (Deacon, 1998: 165, 178). This reshaping of the story of Robben Island as representative of the liberation movement rests firstly on the fact that the island is not only a core site and symbol of the "Struggle" but is also constructed as subsuming it. Indeed, the RIM is not merely a museum commemorating the Robben Island prison but a "museum of the Freedom Struggle" and thereby is meant to integrate other threads of the resistance movement, e.g. White and female political prisoners, exiles, underground activists, etc. Further, the apartheid past of the island is universalised and teleologically recast as founding the "new" South Africa. Thus, the commemoration of the Robben Island experience is relatively departicularised so that the struggles and achievements of the Robben Islanders are posed as universal principles which can be shared and accepted by all. One illustration of the way in which the commemoration of Robben Island materialises and intertwines, without differentiating them, the past of the prison and that of the South African "Struggle" – posed as founding event of the "new" South Africa – can be found in the ceremony for the official opening of the RIM. On this occasion, President Mandela

interwove in his address the past and present role and symbolism of Robben Island with those of South Africa (1997h) while speaking against the backdrop of five giant portraits, those of Mbeki, Mandela, Biko, Sobukwe and Sisulu. This commemoration was thereby inclusive since the representation encompassed Steve Biko who never was imprisoned on Robben Island. Such representation therefore highlighted the role of the “struggle” in bringing about the new South Africa and the significance of the island for both the struggle and the “new” South Africa. Further, it portrayed the unity of the leadership of “the struggle” and its historical continuity in the “new” South Africa (Legassick and Minkley, 1997:28-29). This visual representation also features the second device whereby the commemoration of Robben Island is posed as the foundation of the “new” South Africa, namely the emphasis on the leaders of the resistance movement/ the new government.

Secondly, the public commemoration of Robben Island is posed as a tale of origin in that ‘*the story of Robben Island is also the story of the founders of democratic South Africa*’ (Odendaal, 1994: MCOH 2.2.6). This representation stems from the role of Robben Island as “university of the Struggle” and “government in prison”: most Black male leaders who were convicted were sent to Robben Island; most Robben Islanders had been active members of the resistance movement before their arrest; and many were pre-eminent or became pre-eminent after their release (Buntman, 1996a: 130-136). In addition, many Robben Islanders, and especially the leaders, were/are key players in the negotiation process and the new government. Thus, since their release, political prisoners –and above all Robben Islanders– have often been regarded, with a certain exaggeration, as ‘*a cross section of the leadership of our nation*’ (Mandela, 1996a: 4). Tourist visits contribute to conflate the representation of Robben Islanders with that of the leaders of the “new” South Africa and to spread this image to the public. Indeed, they emphasise the leaders of the Robben Islanders and the other ex-Robben Islanders who are now famous. Firstly, the visit of the prison and the island focuses on the role of the leaders of the resistance movement who were on Robben Island⁶⁷, many of whom are now top officials or major political figures (Mandela, Kathrada, Mbeki, Alexander, etc.). The places where the leaders stayed and worked (section B, lime quarry⁶⁸, Sobukwe’s house) are highlighted in the guides’ narrative and in the timing of the visits⁶⁹. Further, the narrative mostly tells of the experiences of the leaders (some accounts of the lives of the communal cells’ prisoners being added on as complement or qualification) and of their time in prison (the chronology usually starts in 1964 with the arrival of the Rivonia trialists and fades out in the early to mid-1980s, at a time when major leaders were transferred to other prisons). The guides also draw visitors’ attention to the leaders of the Robben Islanders (especially Mandela) and to other now famous ex-Robben Islanders (Lekota, Sexwale.) by making them the protagonists of exemplary anecdotes. In these anecdotes, the conflation Robben Islanders/ leaders of the “new” South Africa is reinforced by the fact that the protagonists are often referred to by their current official status (President Mandela, Transport Minister Maharaj, etc.).

⁶⁷ This emphasis on the leaders –especially on Mandela– has raised criticisms from ex-Robben Islanders (Robben Island Panel, 1994: MCOH 14.2) and from academics (Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 28-29) rather than from the press or the public. The RIM director considers that both the interest of the public –who mainly comes to see Mandela’s cell– and the agency of these men in the resistance movement, transition and new regime justify this focus (Odendaal, interview, June 1998).

⁶⁸ The lime quarry –where only those held in B section did hard labour– is often the only quarry evoked and dubbed “the university” while the bulk of prisoners worked in another quarry, where they also developed political and recreational activities.

⁶⁹ Thus, along with the village, the main sites included in all standard tours are the prison (where most time is spent in B section), the lime quarry and Robert Sobukwe’s house (RIM, *Visitors Information*, 1997).

On the basis of this representation conflating the Robben Islanders with the new elite of South Africa, the commemoration specifically poses the values and behaviours of the Robben Islanders/their leaders as those who heralded and brought about the new dispensation. Examining the new dominant representation of the apartheid past of the island, Legassick and Minkley thus commented: *'the leaders are/do represent the people/the majority, their experience those of the majority, their prison that of apartheid, their sense of forgiven past and reconciled present encapsulating the "new democracy" and are the markers of citizenship and the new nation'* (1997: 29). The representation of the island's past highlights the visions and values of the Robben Islanders and shows how these are now enshrined in the "new" South Africa. Symptomatic of this approach is an advertisement designed in 1997 for Heritage Day, whose theme was *'Democracy, Tolerance and Human Rights'*. It shows Mandela looking through his prison window and states *'the view of the prison yard is not the vision that sustained him for 27 years'*⁷⁰ (M&G, September 19, 1997; see annex 4). This linkage between the Robben Islanders, their values and the advent of the "new" South Africa also informs the narratives of prison guides and seemingly motivates some visitors to go to the island⁷¹. This representation is also conveyed by some Robben Islanders in autobiographies⁷², interviews and on public occasions. Thus, during the visit of US President Clinton to the island, Kathrada stated: *'they tried to crush us but we did not fall into the emotion of hatred. The seeds of negotiation and reconciliation were sown here'* (Star, March 23, 1998). As a result, the leaders of the Robben Islanders/the new government are portrayed as the founders of the "new" South Africa and of the values it embodies and strives for.

Thirdly, by combining the representation of Robben Island as story of the "Struggle" and as narrative of the "founders" of the "new" South Africa, the commemoration encourages South Africans to follow the model provided in the past and in the present by their leaders. In this sense, the public commemoration of the island constitutes a founding story of the new dispensation in that it displays positive values and behaviours which are either posed as the core ideals that are/should be actualised in the "new" South Africa or openly promoted for all South Africans to rally around them. Thus, the lessons that prominent Robben Islanders have drawn from their prison experiences *'are not just their memories, but a model of what South Africa should learn from its past and a sign towards the path to true liberation'* (Deacon, 1998: 171; see also id.: 173-174; Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 28-29). The experiences and ideals which are represented as both precursors of and models for the "new" South Africa encompass general values and principles which underpin the new regime (democracy and national unity) as well as certain specific values, such as non-racialism, reconciliation and political mobilisation. Thus, in his address for the opening of the RIM, President Mandela called on all South Africans in these words: *'let us recommit ourselves to the ideals in our Constitution, ideals which were shaped in the struggles here on Robben Island and in the greater prison that was Apartheid South Africa'* (1997h: 4). This parallel drawn between the struggles and ideals of the Robben Islanders and those of the "new" South Africa is reinforced

⁷⁰ The subtitle reads: *'Today South Africans embrace democracy, tolerance and human rights. Heritage Day celebrates the strength of the human spirit and all it's achieved. When we open the Robben Island Museum this Wednesday that's the message we'll send to the world'.*

⁷¹ Thus, one of the first visitors to Robben Island indicated: *'This is historic (...) This is where our freedom began, where (Mandela) took the first step on his long walk to freedom'* (in CT, January 2, 1997).

⁷² Mandela for instance writes: *'It was during those long and lonely years (in prison) that my hunger for the freedom of my people became a hunger for the freedom of all people, white and black'* (1994a: 617).

by the general image of the RIM⁷³ and by prison guides' narratives. More specifically, the commemoration of the island promotes non-racialism and reconciliation. The non-racialism of the Robben Islanders is strongly highlighted: it is featured in their relation with one another (in contrast with discriminations imposed by prison authorities in food and clothing) and with the warders (as illustrated in friendships between warders and prisoners or in classes given by prisoners to some warders). It is openly or covertly depicted as a positive value and as the premise of contemporary commitment to non-racialism. Further, reconciliation is promoted in the discourse and actions of ex-Robben Islanders who constantly -in public addresses, interviews, etc.- underscore their lack of bitterness and absence of any desire for revenge as well as their commitment to forgiveness and reconciliation⁷⁴. Further, by establishing Robben Island as '*a symbol of reconciliation over enforced oppression*' (Mandela, 1997h: 3; see also Kathrada, 1996b: 11) and especially through the emphasis put on reconciliation by prison guides, the commemoration prompts visitors to follow the example of the Robben Islanders/their leaders (Kathrada in CT, April 28, 1997). The commemoration of Robben Island epitomises and promotes a second set of values and behaviour: individual and collective development as well as political mobilisation in order to face challenges and to better life conditions for oneself and for all. South Africans are encouraged to find inspiration in the story of, or visit to, the island. Indeed, the commemorative narrative of the island emphasises the political mobilisation of the Robben Islanders and their readiness to struggle and sacrifice to improve their situation. Thereby, it encourages South Africans to continue the struggles for human rights, freedom, etc. as well as for the betterment of material conditions (Mandela, 1996a: 5, 7, 8; Mandela, 1997h: 1, 4; Ndungane in CT, March 3, 1997). Specifically, young people are called upon to follow the example of the Islanders in studying hard, in seizing all opportunities made available by the advent of the new regime and in actively facing challenges. The island has thus been the site of important youth gatherings on public holidays. The 1997 Youth Day celebration gathered 500 youth around the theme '*our rights, our responsibilities*'; in 1998, the focus of the commemoration was on '*remembering sacrifices, celebrating victories and facing challenges*'. On these occasions, the representation of Robben Island's past was relatively decontextualised and the emphasis was put on the present attitudes and values of the youth, aiming at fostering a culture of rights and responsibilities and at mobilising the youth around current issues and challenges⁷⁵.

To conclude, the commemorative narrative of Robben Island provides a representation of the past which highlights its positive and universal symbolism and its links with the present. The divisive representation of the past as apartheid versus resistance is recast in an inclusive, conciliatory and presentist fashion so that the focus is put on the resistance movement, recast with hindsight as the premise of and model for the "new" South Africa. This representation of the past thus establishes the public commemoration of Robben Island as a celebration and legitimisation of the present dispensation rather than as remembrance of the past.

⁷³ One advertisement for instance reads: '*In 1964 believers in democracy, human dignity and equality went to Robben Island. Nothing's changed*' (Market place, April 6, 1998; see annex 4). See also Kathrada, 1996b: 8.

⁷⁴ See interviews in Coetzee and al. (1998: 68), Schadeberg (1994) and Wilson (1988); prison guides' narratives (personal notes; see also CA, March 10, 1998). Symbolically, President Mandela visited Prinsloo, the prison's commanding officer in 1964 (CT, Dec. 5, 1997).

⁷⁵ Youth Day 1998, Robben Island, personal notes; RIM, Ilifa Labantu, June 1997 and June 1998. See also, CA, April, 28, 1997; CA, June 17, 1997.

11.2- The commemoration of Robben Island as celebration of the “new” South Africa

The commemoration of Robben Island is turned towards the present and future of the “new” South Africa just as much as –if not more than– towards its past. It thereby allows for the celebration of the new dispensation by constituting firstly a public ritual legitimising and entrenching the regime change and secondly a monument directly celebrating the “new” South Africa.

11.2.1- The commemoration of Robben Island: a public ritual supporting the “new” South Africa

In Part One (Chapter 3), we saw that commemorations are a form of public ritual: they embody memory and thereby the narrative of collective identity; they also allow individuals and groups to materially experience remembrance and to transmit remembrance to new groups and, particularly, new generations. Further, in Part Two (Chapters 6 and 7), I analysed the TRC as a public ritual of beginnings marking the birth of the “new” South Africa and entrenching its legitimacy, collective identity and values. Similarly, the commemoration of Robben Island can be analysed as a public ritual of beginnings firstly in that it displays and entrenches the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid and secondly in that it promotes the “new” South Africa.

To start with, the public commemoration of Robben Island is rooted in and informed by the need to remember the apartheid past so as to avoid repeating it and so as to display the “never again” commitment of the “new” South Africa (Mandela, 1996a: 5; Mandela, 1997h: 4). In this sense, the commemoration of Robben Island is one of the public ceremonials –like the TRC– through which apartheid’s evil and abuses are publicly and extensively displayed and denounced, thereby rejecting the old order and reinforcing the new one (Osiel, 1987: 3-4, 15-18; Legassick and Minkley, 1997: 28). The narrative of Robben Island’s past is thus a normative narrative which stigmatises and rejects apartheid and colonialism, metaphorically referred to by Kathrada as ‘forces of evil’, ‘repression and humiliation’, ‘small minds and pettiness’, ‘bigotry and intolerance’ (1996b: 11). On the other hand, the public commemoration of Robben Island asserts the improvement constituted by the advent of the “new” South Africa and the legitimacy of the new dispensation posed as featuring the triumph of ‘human spirit’, ‘freedom and human dignity’, ‘wisdom and largeness of spirit’, ‘courage and determination’ and ‘non-racialism’ (id.). The temporal discontinuity apartheid/ post-apartheid is thus a major overt –and covert– subtext in the public commemoration of Robben Island. This is epitomised by Kathrada’s description of the island as ‘a monument reflecting (...) a triumph of the new South Africa over the old’⁷⁶ (1996c: 11; see also Mandela, 1997h: 1). Importantly, the “never again” pledge displayed and entrenched through the public commemoration of Robben Island is a matter of moral imperative and universal message. In his article ‘Suffering and the Politics of memory’, Johan Snyman distinguishes two kinds of war memorials: those informed by an ethnic imperative and pledging that ‘this may never happen to us and ours again’ and those promoting a more inclusive and extended commitment that ‘this may never happen to us and ours again, and we ourselves may never be party to anything similar

⁷⁶ This temporal discontinuity is put in parallel with the spatial discontinuity of mainland/ island in an ad of the RIM which reads: ‘Travel 7.1 nautic miles to see just how far we’ve come’ (see annex 3; see also M&G, March 13, 1998).

happening to others' (1996: 1). The public commemoration of Robben Island clearly belongs to the second type. Indeed, as noted throughout this part, in the "new" south Africa, the symbolism of the island has been recast in an inclusive and non-partisan fashion so as to replace its divisive and partisan symbolism as victory of the resistance movement over apartheid by the universal symbolism of the victory of human spirit and freedom. The shift from the apartheid regime to the "new" South Africa is also displayed visually in the very existence and forms of the commemoration of Robben Island. Indeed, the shift from the Robben Island *prison* –one of the most secret and closed sites of repression of the apartheid regime– to the Robben Island *museum* –a public space of learning, of culture and leisure– is a very strong marker of the political transformation and of the improvement it constitutes (Deacon, 1998: 178). The visibility of this shift is further spread by the visual displays of the RIM whose surprising and interactive advertisements and very colourful and visible logo attract tourists' and passers-by' attention, especially at the Waterfront. A similar marker of the shift is that of the return of Mandela and other Robben Islanders –who were destined to fall into oblivion during their imprisonment on the island– not merely as free men but as top officials and figures of the "new" South Africa (Mandela, 1996a: 4; Kathrada in CA, September 25, 1997; Odendaal, 1994: MCOH 2.2.6).

Apart from displaying and thereby entrenching the regime change, the commemoration of Robben Island also constitutes a public ritual in which the "new" South Africa –its features, achievements and challenges– are displayed, legitimated and promoted. Firstly, as aforementioned, in the commemoration of Robben Island, the island's past is told as the founding narrative of the "new" South Africa. It follows that *'the prisoners' liberation within the prison and from the island has become a symbol of national liberation, moral modernity and ethical maturity'* (Deacon, 1998: 173-174). Indeed, Robben Island has become the symbol of the struggles and victories that made possible the advent of the new dispensation as well as of the values and ideals it means to promote and entrench. In this sense, Robben Island *'comes to stand for South Africa's transformation to modernity after apartheid'* (id.: 177). It further displays South Africa's new values: peace, hope, human rights, non-racialism, democratic management, respectful and integrated approaches to environment, and comprehensive and respectful displays of the cultures and traditions (id.; Mandela, 1997h: 3)⁷⁷.

Robben Island thus offers a major symbol of the "new" South Africa through which South Africans display to themselves and to the world their new identity. For South Africans, the visit to Robben Island constitutes a performative ritual whereby they are invited to remember/discover the evil of apartheid and above all the strength, humanity and morality of the Robben Islanders –posed as markers of the new values– as displayed in the public setting of the museum. Thereby, they can experience and are encouraged to adhere to these values. The commemoration of Robben Island therefore makes it possible to display and, to some extent, perform reconciliation and nation-building. Firstly, reconciliation is facilitated by the conciliatory representation of the past and the universalising account of the struggles and values of the Robben Islanders. It is further favoured by the non-racialism, lack of bitterness and commitment to forgiveness displayed by the ex-Robben Islanders. Implicit is the notion that if *they* were able to forgive, all South Africans can. Thus,

⁷⁷ Thus, a special leaflet associating The Cape Argus, the DACST and the RIM for Heritage Day 1997 stated: *'though (the island's) past has often been painful and difficult, it now stands as a symbol of triumph and victory over oppression, and just as our nation has chosen a different future –one marked by democracy, tolerance and human rights– so we have chosen a different future for Robben Island. It's fitting, then, that Robben*

welcoming 400 children on Robben Island on Youth Day 1997, Ahmed Kathrada described the hardships the prisoners went through and then added: *'I tell you this because you should know when the President says he has forgiven his former enemies what exactly it is that he has forgiven'* (CA, June 17, 1997). Reconciliation and national unity are also promoted in that by visiting Robben Island, South Africans come closer to sharing a common understanding of what the past –of the island and of the broader South Africa– was like. Secondly, the commemoration of Robben Island seeks to promote nation-building both through its very existence and performance and in its content. To start with, the recovery and visual display of the various pasts of the island aims at re-appropriating them as a joint heritage and *'a binding force'* for the nation (Mandela, 1997h: 1, 3). Indeed, the RIM strives to recover, give public recognition and celebrate diverse histories, voices and communities of the island's past so that the pasts of marginalised groups can be re-integrated in the public sphere and become the basis of a representative, respectful and comprehensive representation of the past. In this view, promoting a more inclusive and respectful display of these various pasts would also make it possible for South Africans to discover and learn to know, appreciate and respect the past of other communities and further to consider them as a common heritage. Another dimension of this undertaking to constitute a national past is to re-appropriate past events and actors as forerunners and forebears of the "new" South Africa. This attempt concerns mainly the lineage established between early resisters and the anti-apartheid freedom fighters (Lekota, 1991; Mandela, 1996a: 5; Mbeki, MCOH 2.2.6, 1994). But it also encompasses the effort to develop archaeological searches and academic research to document the story of all those who resisted and/or suffered and sacrificed on Robben Island. Such effort is materialised in the recovery of all physical and material remains of the island's past (graveyards, shrine, buildings, etc.) as markers of the national past. Finally, the public commemoration of Robben Island also aims at facilitating the nation-building process by establishing Robben Island as a major symbol of the positive and inclusive approach, peace, and the human rights culture of the "new" South Africa, which *'has thus become an important element in the construction of a new national identity around the observance of "human rights"'* (Deacon, 1998: 178).

Foremost amongst those who can learn from and experience through the ritual visit to Robben Island are the youth. Thus, the main memory-makers of the public commemoration of Robben Island have deliberately posed the youth as the main group who should know what the past was like, bear witness to it and swear not to let it happen again (Mandela, 1996a:7; Mbeki 1994: MCOH 2.2.6; Kathrada in CA, June 17, 1997)⁷⁸. They are therefore one of the main groups encouraged to visit Robben Island (thanks to special tours and fares). They have also been the sole audience for Youth Day (1997 and 1998) and Freedom Day (1997) celebrations on Robben Island. On these occasions, they were called upon (often very directly) to know the past and bear remembrance, follow the example of the Robben Islanders/their leaders, adhere to reconciliation, peace, human rights, etc. and be mobilised to face challenges and issues.

The commemoration of Robben Island also allows the display of the "new" South Africa –of its qualities, achievements and challenges– to foreign tourists and dignitaries. For foreign tourists like for South African ones, the underlying sub-text of the visit to Robben Island is to show the transformation of South Africa

Island is at the heart of this year's Heritage Day celebrations, and at the heart of South Africa's striving to become a nation?

⁷⁸ Odendaal, interview, June 1998.

from apartheid to post-apartheid and to illustrate its modernity in terms of human rights, democratisation, etc. Foreign dignitaries almost invariably visit Robben Island when coming to Cape Town. Thus, since the early 1990s, Robben Island has been a major locus of memory visited by foreign officials (McBlain, 1996: 20). From the opening of the RIM in January 1997 to May 1998, 20 Heads of State and Royalties and 30 groups of members and representatives of foreign governments visited the island. These visits focus on the island as “Mandela’s home” (section B and lime quarry) since the officials are usually meeting the President during their South African stay and are mainly interested in seeing where he lived and what he went through⁷⁹. In the case of foreign dignitaries, the sub-text to the commemoration of Robben Island is not only to illustrate the modernity of the “new” South Africa but also to highlight the greatness and fitness of the new elite (Deacon, 1998: 174). Indeed, the moral strength, humanity and morality of the new leaders/ ex-Robben Islanders are highlighted in the narrative of the prison. Further, their commitment to peace and reconciliation is enhanced when put against the backdrop of the hardships and suffering they went through. Thus, a press report of the German President’s visit to Robben Island indicated: *‘Mr Hertzog said anyone who had seen the conditions at the prison could not but be deeply moved and feel a sense of outrage. It was therefore all the more admirable to see the policy of reconciliation now pursued by Mr Mandela and those who have been jailed with him for many years’* (CA, March 12, 1998)⁸⁰.

To conclude, the public commemoration of Robben Island makes it possible both to highlight and legitimate the change of regime as well as to display and promote the “new” South Africa. Further, the RIM is directly conceived as a celebration of the “new” South Africa.

11.2.2- The RIM: a monument celebrating the “new” South Africa

As analysed throughout this third part, the commemoration of Robben Island –and its institutionalisation in the RIM– has been moulded as a celebration by a set of more or less self-conscious processes. These shaping processes are reflected in both the public discourse focusing on Robben Island and in that concerning the core issue of transformation policy in South Africa. They include the following: the priority given to the positive and inclusive symbolism of the island; the choice to represent it as a symbol meaningful for the present and future of South Africa rather than as a shrine celebrating its past; the decision to enhance its symbolic dimension as opposed to its actual history and further to thereby preserve and reinforce its status as a national symbol; the pre-eminence it is given in the heritage field and, as a corollary, in the construction and display of the new national identity; the commitment to reconciliation and national unity; and the transition to democratic rule and its impact on the forms of management of the museum and the forms and content of the representations of the past. All these factors combine and intertwine so that the commemoration of the Robben Island prison *‘is not constructed primarily as a place to commemorate martyrs, those who sacrificed their life and liberty for the struggle against apartheid; instead it is to be a place to celebrate victory, where South Africans mark the attainment of mass democratic rule and the demise of apartheid. It has become a symbol of the future of the*

⁷⁹ Source: Rabia Pandi, Service of Protocol, RIM, June 1998.

⁸⁰ See also on the visit of the US President *‘Showing the tough road to reconciliation’* (Star, March 28, 1998).

"new" South Africa rather than its past (Deacon, 1998: 164). This all-encompassing commemoration indeed confirms a democratic concern to represent and allow for all South Africans; it highlights South African historical richness and supports the representation of South Africa as a society including and interconnecting multi-cultural diversity; it increases the symbolic significance of the island and its relevance to present and future issues; it extends the scope of those aspects of the past which have been recovered; and it displays democratic, modern and respectful forms of cultural management. Therefore, the commemoration of Robben Island –in its representation of both the apartheid past and the other dimensions of the island's past– displays and performs a celebration of the new dispensation, the democratic rule and the national identity.

In this sense, the RIM constitutes a monument to the "new" South Africa as defined by Arthur Danto⁸¹ who established the existence of tacit rules distinguishing two forms of commemoration: monuments and memorials. *'We erect monuments so that we shall always remember, and build memorials so that we shall never forget. (...) Monuments commemorate the memorable and embody the myths of beginnings. Memorials ritualise remembrance and mark the reality of ends (...) Monuments make heroes and triumphs, victories and conquests, perpetually present and part of life. The memorial is a special precinct, extruded from life, a separated enclave where we commemorate the dead. With monuments we honour ourselves'* (quoted in Snyman, 1996: 4). Thus, monuments and memorials are very contrasted forms of public commemorations. The former are forward-looking; they focus on positive aspects of the past which are used to legitimate and honour the group in the present; they are public rituals of beginnings and are part of a celebratory mood. By contrast, memorials are backward-looking; they ask *'for sobriety and humility on the part of the survivors and the living'* (Snyman, 1996: 4); they focus on painful and problematic aspects of the past and honour the dead; they are part of the mourning process.

On the basis of this distinction we can better understand what has been left out of the commemoration of Robben Island as a monument to the "new" South Africa and what are the potential pitfalls of this approach. Establishing the commemoration of Robben Island as a monument to the "new" South Africa has the corollary effect of sidelining its memorial dimension. The RIM has plans to develop a memorial as part of the commemoration of the island⁸² and the dominantly positive and inclusive representation is carefully phrased so as to avoid bluntly silencing the memorial function (Kathrada, 1996b: 10; Mandela, 1997h: 3). Nevertheless, in actual practice, the memorial dimension has not yet been developed and, above all, it has not been conceived and set up as part of the original plans of the RIM. As a result, even if and when this memorial function is developed, the collective representation of the island will already be formed and will have been moulded as a celebration, hence leaving only a limited and determined space for a memorial function. Further, in the present, the voices of those who are marked by loss and suffering and who are concerned primarily with mourning rather than with celebration are marginalised and cannot find an echo on the island. This means that the commemoration of Robben Island little allows for voices of mourning and suffering to be integrated in the representation, to increase its complexity and relevance and to introduce their questioning and challenging, hence creating fault-lines and de-centring the master narrative. Moreover, the

⁸¹ Arthur Danto, *The State of the Art*, New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1987.

⁸² It would be a comprehensive one honouring not only the anti-apartheid freedom fighters but also the early resisters and social outcasts (Odendaal, interview, June 1998).

marginalisation of the subtexts of mourning and suffering in the commemoration of Robben Island means that these voices are sidelined on Robben Island as they are in the public sphere where the dominant “mood” is a celebratory and conciliatory one. In this regard, the marginalisation of the memorial function on Robben Island reflects the broader marginalisation of mourning in the “new” South Africa. Such marginalisation entails silencing certain voices and criticisms but also constitutes a relative (wilful albeit generally unself-conscious) forgetting of the divisive and painful aspects of the past.

The main pitfall of the monumentalisation of Robben Island lies in the need for any society in post-traumatic situation to have a comprehensive knowledge and remembrance of the past, including painful and problematic memories. This complex remembrance of the past is necessary for two purposes. Firstly, collectively remembering the past is needed to mourn and thereby overcome past events. Analysing West German society after World War Two, Alexandre and Margaret Mitscherlich underlined that the past can be considered as indeed bygone and the change of the group’s attitude and identity as indeed achieved only when the past is fundamentally overcome. For them, to have fundamentally overcome the past means to have thorough knowledge and awareness of the past including painful and negative memories. Indeed, the past is fundamentally overcome only when the group has undertaken to know, come to terms with and understand its past and thus when it has undertaken a lengthy and painful process of remembrance and mourning (Mitscherlich and Mitscherlich, 1972: 73). In the “new” South Africa, the TRC has been endowed with the task of retrieving and publicly displaying past abuses of the apartheid regime, and thereby to facilitate individual and collective mourning and overcoming of the past. However, the approach of the TRC is limited insofar as it deals with gross human rights violations only, hence leaving aside more mundane aspects of apartheid which also need to be dealt with and overcome (Robins, 1997b). Moreover, the mourning process cannot be the task of the TRC solely; rather, it needs to be a collective and all-encompassing process and to be inscribed at the root of the transformation process towards the “new” South Africa.

Secondly, collectively remembering the past including painful and problematic memories is necessary to address and redress the legacy of the past in the present. Thus, identifying past roots of current issues –and further identifying current issues as rooted in the past– requires in-depth and complex remembrance of the past and “historical awareness”. In this sense, the commemoration of Robben Island, and more broadly the celebration of the death of apartheid in the “new” South Africa tends to signify that the past is “dead” and done away with and that the transformation to the “new” South Africa and its modernity have been achieved. However, many tensions and issues bequeathed by apartheid (and colonialism) are still unresolved and have considerable impact on present-day South Africa. In this sense, displaying Robben Island as the acme of South Africa’s modernity and the transformation it has undergone *‘should not absolve us of the duty to make this transformation happen’* (Deacon, 1998: 177) nor to make us believe that it is completed. In particular, it seems necessary to preserve fuller account of the past so as to remember that *‘poverty (is) a direct product of apartheid laws such as influx control, the bantustan system and the Group Areas Act’* rather than *‘turning these political legacies into technical planning problems’* (Robins, 1997b). Indeed, representing poverty as the legacy of the past appears necessary to found and legitimise a new social contract and broadly-based socio-economic redistribution, which are necessary for long-term reconciliation and social and political stability. Moreover, thorough and

complex remembrance of the past is necessary not only for the present but also for the future. Indeed, most problems bequeathed by colonialism and apartheid will take decades to be solved so that entrenching knowledge and awareness of their historical origin will be necessary for future generations to understand and address them properly and to preserve the meaning and the understanding of the need for societal solidarity and socio-economic redistribution. There is therefore a need to remember both positive and painful memories but also to represent the past not only as the universal battle of good with evil and the victory of human spirit over racism but also with enough specific references to the actual South African situation so that the past be known and remembered in its richness, complexity and specificity. This seems all the more necessary as the new generations now coming up are those who have not (or not “really”) experienced apartheid (Robins, 1997a; CT, June 17, 1998).

To conclude, the public commemoration of Robben Island at once reflects and supports the conciliatory narrative of the South African past emerging in the “new” South Africa. The story and commemoration of Robben Island is indeed a cornerstone of the reshaping of the past as a conciliatory, inclusive and positive representation. Indeed, by turning the representation of the past from the story of the contest between apartheid and the resistance movement to the story of the founding of the “new” South Africa, the public commemoration of Robben Island contributes to entrench, legitimate and celebrate the “new” South Africa. It thereby also leaves out other aspects of the representation of the past, namely painful, negative and problematic memories, hence avoiding the mourning process.

Conclusion of Part Three

To conclude, the public commemoration of Robben Island illustrates and supports the reshaping of the new South African national identity and the congruent reshaping of the representation of the past as well as the interplay between the latter. Indeed, the commemoration of Robben Island –especially in the form of the RIM– is a cornerstone of the new public approach to the past and epitomises the democratisation of culture and heritage institutions. Further, it supports the undertaking of promoting a more balanced and shared representation of the past: it strives for a more accurate, representative and inclusive representation of the past and for the emergence of a national past, that is, both a shared representation in the present of the diverse past and the collective recognition of a national heritage. In this sense, the commemoration of Robben Island also concretises the project of “recovering” the past and the constitution of a new authoritative public representation of the past. Moreover, it is a cornerstone of the new conciliatory narrative of the past. It constitutes a positive, consensual and inclusive representation, thereby reflecting and sustaining the broader conciliatory narrative of the South African past: painful and divisive memories are “tamed”; the focus is put on positive aspects of the past; past ideals, events and behaviours are recast in universal terms; and all histories are integrated and combined; further, the representation of the past is turned towards the present and towards the legitimisation and celebration of the “new” South Africa. At the same time, Robben Island is portrayed as a microcosm of South Africa: it is posed as South Africa in miniature and is therefore endowed with vital symbolic significance. The public commemoration of Robben Island is thus expected to foster and illustrate broader trends and mechanisms at play in the whole of South Africa in terms of identity – democratisation, peace, reconciliation and national unity– and of representation of the past –activist approach to the past, more balanced and shared representation, and conciliatory narrative. In this sense, the public commemoration of Robben Island illustrates well the interplay between South African collective identity and representation of the past. On the one hand, Robben Island is commemorated because it is a vital symbol at the national level and its commemoration is part of the process of reshaping the representation of the South African past and of the emergence of a new national identity narrative, in particular since the commemoration of Robben Island constitutes a public ritual of beginnings and of celebration of the new dispensation. On the other hand, Robben Island is commemorated in a way which reflects and supports the new collective identity: through both unself-conscious and deliberate processes –namely, the presentist reshaping of the representation of the past and the decisive action of certain memory-makers– its public commemoration is made to foster and entrench the break with the past, democratisation, reconciliation and national unity.

❧ CONCLUSION ❧

*'All societies have founding myths, explaining where we come from, defining what we stand for (...)
Some societies also have myths of refounding, marking a period of decisive break from their own pasts (...)'*
(Osiel, 1987: 4).

12.1. A new past for a “new” South Africa

Throughout this study, I have examined trends and developments of the remoulding from above of the public representations of the South African past in congruence with the shaping of a new national identity. In post-apartheid South Africa, reshaping the representations of the past is meant to support the emergence of a new “imagined community” and to give it content in the form of a new democratic, reconciled and united South Africa. The South African context indeed illustrates the close interplay between the formation of national identity (through the development of a national identity narrative) and the public representation of a national past. It further shows that the representation of the past is at once “spontaneously” reconstructed as part of the broader social processes of transformation and deliberately modelled by certain actors for specific purposes. The project underpinning the vision of a “new” South Africa rests on the objectives of breaking with the apartheid past, promoting democratisation and fostering reconciliation and national unity. This project informs the new narrative of national identity and the public representation of the South African past and is magnified in the commemoration of Robben Island. The new regime and the new “social mood” prevailing in post-apartheid South Africa have supported these values and fostered these goals by telling the story of post-apartheid South Africa as a new, democratic, reconciled and united country and by representing the national past accordingly. This latter aspect has required an active and deliberate undertaking of the reconstruction of the representations of the past through public discourse and institutions in order to promote a more balanced, complete, inclusive, representative and accurate representation of the past. It has also required constructing a conciliatory narrative of the past, taming painful and divisive memories, emphasising positive aspects, commonalities and inclusive symbols, recasting past identities, integrating diverse histories, traditions and voices, and depicting the past as premise and foundation for a better present. In the “new” South Africa, a cornerstone of this transformation has been the public commemoration of Robben Island. The island is regarded as a core national symbol and microcosm of South Africa; its commemoration is made to reflect and support the voluntarist approach to the past, the spontaneous and deliberate reshaping of its representation in congruence with the new vision of society and the formation of a conciliatory narrative of the past.

12.2. A founding inversion: remembering the past to celebrate the present

A major feature of this reconstruction of the public representation of the past – which is intrinsic to the motives, modalities and content of this reshaping – is that the public displaying and re-presenting of the past is not turned towards actually remembering the past but towards celebrating the present. This does not only imply that the representation of the past is informed by present concerns, values and power configurations but mainly that the new public representation of the past is part of the narrative of a “new” country, breaking with the past, overturning its legacy and establishing the present as an improvement. In this sense, the new public representation of the South African past does not aim at recalling past events and spreading knowledge of the past as much as legitimating the rejection of apartheid, the advent of a new dispensation and the form it has taken; highlighting those aspects of the past which can be depicted as foundations for the “new” South Africa and as models for the present and the future; reinforcing the break with the past and the advent of the new regime by depicting the changeover as a dramatic improvement for all; and, thereby, celebrating the “new” South Africa, its values, its leaders and its first achievements. This approach is certainly useful in that it fosters adherence to and acceptance of the new regime, favours reconciliation, promotes the mobilisation of all for the common good and downplays frustrations and claims. However, many significant pitfalls can be highlighted. Indeed, the new public representation of the South African past tends to downplay the diversity of society and the difficulty of its transformation. Thus, the lack of thorough knowledge of the past featured in the new public representation hinders the process whereby contemporary South Africans and future generations can know and understand the past so as to deal with it and break with it in a true fashion; it also constitutes an obstacle to deal with the present insofar as the historical roots of current issues are not sufficiently known and understood. Moreover, by celebrating the advent of the “new” South Africa as an intrinsic and radical improvement for all, the new public representation of the past tends to silence: firstly, that individual and collective situations are still very diverse and that major (socio-economic) inequalities as well as racism persist within South African society, that people’s satisfaction and adhesion to the new regime is very uneven and that certain people’s attitude towards the past is informed by mourning, frustration or anger; secondly, that such important issues as democratisation or reconciliation cannot be considered as actualised merely by being promoted or proclaimed. In this sense, the new public representation of the past tends to be a presentist, homogenising and authoritative representation.

12.3. Reshaping the past

Post-apartheid South Africa illustrates the constructivist approach to national identity and collective representations of the past: it magnifies the processes whereby a national identity is fostered, a narrative of national identity promoted and the public representation of the past reshaped. It is thus a good example of the deliberate reshaping of the past and of the significance of the visibility of narratives and rituals in the public sphere. First, the new South Africa has quite deliberately promoted the reshaping of the representation of the national past in order to foster the emergence of a sense of national belonging, to highlight

commonalities and to promote the new vision for society. Indeed, reshaping the representations of the past has been conceived as a cornerstone of the reconciliation, reconstruction and transformation of society. It has thus largely been the outcome of a deliberate undertaking promoted by certain memory-makers and processed through specific public channels. Thus, some new leaders, in particular the Presidency or major ANC/government figures (Kathrada, Asmal) as well as other public figures (Boraine, Tutu) have highlighted the importance of dealing with the traumatic past –through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the broader public discourse on reconciliation– and the need of developing new symbols, re-incorporating a multiplicity of (formerly marginalised) voices and traditions and of promoting a more consensual and inclusive representation of the past through museums, national symbols, public commemorations, official discourse, etc. This deliberate reshaping of the past highlights the role and significance of narratives, symbols and rituals in shaping, modifying and contesting collective representations (of the past and of identity). It also shows the importance of the visibility, legitimacy and authority of these narratives and rituals in the public sphere. Indeed, in the “new” South Africa, the past has been constructed as a cornerstone of the new vision for society and as a stake in the political sphere; further, specific memory-makers actively promote certain rememberings and forgettings, certain representations and interpretations of the past. Thus, the South African case illustrates the influence of social and political groups, values and power configurations in shaping the representation of the past and makes it possible to highlight and deconstruct those discursive practices underlying and moulding the representation. It further underlines the need for social and political groups to publicly display and entrench their representations of the past and of identity in the public sphere.

12.4. A process in the making

To conclude this study, I wish to underline that the process of shaping the representation of the past and the national identity is still very much in the making in post-apartheid South Africa. The trends and developments examined in this study are multi-layered, fluid and, at times, ambiguous ones. Thus, the “new” representation of the past at once supports the democratisation process and constitutes an authoritative and homogenising representation; thus, the meaning of “reconciliation” is very diversely understood in the society at large but also within the Truth and Reconciliation Commission or the government; thus, ambiguities and tensions between non-racialism, multi-racialism and Africanism subsist within the African National Congress and the government; thus, a balance has to be found between the re-integration of marginalised traditions and consensus in the shaping of the conciliatory narrative of the past; and so on. In this sense, there are great uncertainties about which trends and features will prevail over others in the new identity narrative and representation of the past. Moreover, the trends and developments which I analysed are very recent trends (the “new” South Africa is barely 5 year old and the Robben Island Museum 2 year old) and the reshaping of collective representations largely consists in a reconstruction from above. It is thus too early to determine to what extent the new narrative of national identity and the new public representation of the past will be performative and consequential and to tell whether South Africa can/will become a democracy, a nation, a reconciled and unified society and a multi-cultural and peaceful country.

❧ BIBLIOGRAPHY ❧

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- 1- Academic sources
 - 1.1- Formal publications: books, articles in journals, published conference papers
 - 1.2- Unpublished papers and theses
 - 1.3- Videos
- 2- Official sources
 - 2.1- Official publications
 - 2.2- Addresses, messages and statements by officials
- 3- Press articles
- 4- Archives materials

1- Academic sources

1.1- Formal publications: books, articles in journals, published conference papers

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DEPARTMENT OF ARTS, CULTURE, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY	1996	<u>White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage: All Our Legacies, Our Common Future</u> Pretoria. June 1996
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA	1996	<u>Constitution of the Republic of South Africa</u> Act 108 of 1996
	1995	<u>Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act</u> Act 34 of 1995
	1994	<u>New National Public Holidays Act</u>
	1993	<u>Constitution of the Republic of South Africa</u> Act 200 of 1993
	1936	<u>National Public Holidays Act</u>
SOUTH AFRICAN COMMUNICATION SERVICE	1996	<u>South Africa Yearbook 1996</u> Pretoria: South African Communication Service

2.2- Addresses, messages and statements by officials

The addresses, messages and statements by government officials can be found in library since they are printed and chronologically collected under the title Press Releases of the South African Communication Service. They are also released on the official web site of the Service of the government communication and information system (<http://www.gcis.gov.za>).

Acts, addresses and information concerning the Truth and Reconciliation Commission can be found on its web site (<http://www.truth.org.za>).

BENGU S.	1995	<u>Statement by Professor S. M. E. Bengu, Minister of Education, June 16</u>
	y	<u>Message to the Youth</u> ?, 15/06.1995
	1995	<u>Speech by Minister Bengu at the Freedom Day Celebrations in Pretoria</u>
	f	Pretoria, 27.04.1995
MANDELA N.	1998f	<u>Address by President Nelson Mandela at the South African Freedom Day Celebrations</u>
		Cape Town, 27.04.1998
	1998	<u>Speech by President Nelson Mandela at the official opening of the</u>
	hr	<u>Vulindlela Water Supply Scheme on Human Rights Day</u> Taylors Halt Stadium, 21.03. 1998
	1997	<u>Address by President Nelson Mandela on Heritage Day</u>
	h	Robben Island, 24.09.1997
	1997	<u>Address at the Commemoration of the Twentieth Anniversary of Biko's death</u>
	b	East London, 12.09.1997
	1997	<u>Address by President Nelson Mandela at the South African Freedom Day Celebrations</u>
	f	(translated version - English only) Upington, 27.04.1997
	1996	<u>Speech By President Nelson Mandela at the signing of the Constitution</u>
	c	Sharpeville, 10.12.1996
	1996	<u>Speech by President Nelson Mandela at the unveiling of the monument to</u>
	h	<u>Enoch Sontonga on Heritage Day</u> ?, 24/09.1996
	1996	<u>Speech by President Nelson Mandela on South African Women's Day</u>
	w	?, 09/08.1996
	1996	<u>Speech by President Nelson Mandela on South African Youth Day</u>
	y	Pietersburg, 16.06.1996
	1996	<u>Address by President Nelson Mandela at the South African Freedom Day Celebrations</u>
	f	Pretoria, 27.04.1996

MBEKI T.	1996 hr	<u>Statement by President Nelson Mandela on Human Rights Day</u> 20.03.1996
	1995 r	<u>Message by President Nelson Mandela on Reconciliation Day</u> 16.12.1995
	1995 w	<u>Message by President Nelson Mandela on Women's Day</u> 9.08.1995
	1994 p	<u>Statement of the President of the African National Congress, Mr NR Mandela, at his inauguration as President of the Democratic Republic of South Africa</u> 10. 05. 1994
	1998	<u>Statement of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki at the opening of the debate in the National Assembly on 'Reconciliation and Nation-building'</u> Cape Town, 29.05.1998
MTSHALI L.	1997	<u>Address by the Deputy President, the Hon. Thabo Mbeki, South African Youth Parade</u> Cape Town, 16.06.1997
	1998 m	<u>Notes for a speech made by Minister LPhm Mtshali, Minister of Arts and Culture, on Museum Restructuring and the Signing of Agreements</u> 30.06.1998
	1998 l	<u>Statement by the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Mr Lionel Phm Mtshali on Legacy Projects</u> 15.06.1998
	1996	<u>Media Statement by the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, Mr Lionel Mtshali: The future Management and Development of Robben Island</u> 4.09.1996
NGUBANE B.	1996 f	<u>Presentation by the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology at the media briefing on the Freedom Day celebrations</u> Pretoria, April 22, 1996
	1996 h	<u>Media Statement by the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology Dr B. S. Ngubane and the Council of Culture Ministers- Heritage Day: Nkosi Sikilele I Afrika centenary</u> Robben Island, 26.03.1996
	1995	<u>Media Statement by the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology Dr Ben Ngubane: Robben Island declared a National Monument</u> 20.12.1995
TUTU D.	1995	<u>TRC Chairperson D. Tutu's address to the first gathering of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission</u> ?, 16.12.1995

3- Press Articles

I hereafter indicate only the newspapers and press clippings files consulted in libraries, archives or on press websites. The specific references of articles quoted or evoked in the main text are specified in footnotes.

Newspapers

The Cape Argus (CA)

The Cape Times (CT)

The Mail and Guardian (M&G)

The Sunday Independent (SI)

The Star (Star)

Press clippings files

University of Cape Town - African Studies Library

- Files: Robben Island: 1909-1969; 1970-1986; 1987-

- Files: Flags

University of the Western Cape - Mayibuye Centre

South African Press Clips, Catalogue n°3

- Box: Communities

* File: Robben Island (from 1988)

- Boxes: Culture and media

* Files: Flag issue/ National Symbols/ Anthems, 1988-1992

* Files: Monuments/ Museums/ Antiques, 1988-1992

- Boxes: Extra-parliamentary politics

* Files: Day of the Vow/ December 16

* Files: June 16/ Soweto Day (from 1978 to 1992)

* Files: Sharpeville Day (from 1980 to 1992)

Robben Island Museum

- Files: May 1997 to February 1998

Web sites

- (South African) Independent Newspapers web site (<http://www.inc.co.za>) : this site allows searches by dates and key words for articles published in The Cape Argus, The Cape Times, and The Star, over the previous year.

- The Mail and Guardian web site (<http://www.mg.co.za/mg>)

4- Archives materials

University of Cape Town - Manuscripts Library

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|--|
| AFRICAN
NATIONAL
CONGRESS | 1989 | <i>The national anthem; The symbols of the African National Congress; South Africa's National Days</i>
in <u>ANC- Information Pack: the ANC calls for your support</u>
in Mary Burton Papers (BC 1065): SASH alliances and interests; political organisations and leaders: ANC (D 4.1) |
| UNITED
DEMOCRATIC
FRONT | 1987 | <i>May Day !</i>
in <u>UDF News: Newsletter of Western Cape Region</u>
Observatory: UDF
in Mary Burton Papers (BC 1065): SASH alliances and interests; political organisations and leaders: UDF (D 4.6) |
| | 1987
? | <i>Remember June 16</i>
in <u>UDF News: Newsletter of Western Cape Region</u>
Rondebosch: WESCO
in Mary Burton Papers (BC 1065): SASH alliances and interests; political organisations and leaders: UDF (D 4.6) |

University of the Western Cape - Mayibuye Centre

Mayibuye Centre Oral History Collection (MCOH), Catalogue n°4, to be updated¹

- | | | |
|------------------------|------|---|
| MCOH 2.2.6 | 1994 | <i>Launch of <u>Robben Island: Symbol of Resistance</u>: Speeches by Govan Mbeki, A. Odendaal, (?)</i>
Cape Town, August 30, 1994 |
| MCOH 14.2 | 1994 | <i>Celebrating Democracy Festival, 1994: Robben Island Panel</i>
School open Day,
University of the Western Cape, Bellville, July 23, 1994 |
| MCOH 14.3
(or 2.11) | 1993 | <i>Opening of Esiqithini- The Robben Island exhibition: Speeches by Prof. J. Gerwell (UWC), Dr M. Cleever (SAM) and A Kathrada</i>
South African Museum, Cape Town, May 26, 1993 |
| MCOH 14.1
(or 2.16) | 1993 | <i>The Robben Island Project: Interviews of A. Odendaal and N. Yengeni</i>
?, May 27, 1993 |
| MCOH 14.5
(or 2.17) | 1993 | <i>The Robben Island Project: Interviews of P. Davison and A.. Kathrada</i>
?, May 27, 1993 |
| MCOH 14.4
(or 2.18) | 1993 | <i>Interviews of A. Odendaal on SABC Radio about the Robben Island exhibition</i>
Cape Town, May 27, 1993 |

¹ The organisation of the cataloguing of the oral history collection is in the process of being modified; in particular to create a sub-group encompassing all materials related to Robben Island. This can explain certain discrepancies in the referencing of the sources here listed as well as discrepancies that could appear at a later date between the information given in this bibliography and the final state of the reference numbers attributed to documents.

❧ ANNEXES ❧

**Annex 1- National symbols :
national flag and coat of arms**



Annex 2- public holidays

Date	Apartheid era		Post-apartheid Regime	Event celebrated	First celebration
	Apartheid Regime	ANC under apartheid			
January 1	New Year		New Year		
January 8		Founders' Day		Creation of the ANC, 1912	
March 21			Human Rights Day	Sharpeville killings, 1960	1995
April 6	Founders' Day			Arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck, 1652	
Easter Friday	Good Friday		Good Friday		
Easter Monday	Family Day		Family Day		
April 27			Freedom Day	First multiracial elections, 1994; Coming into force of the Constitution, 1994	1995
May 1			Workers' Day		1990
May	Ascension				
May 31	Republic Day			Proclamation of the Republic, 1960	1961
June 16		Youth Day	Youth Day	Soweto uprising, 1976	1995
June 26		Freedom Day		Killing of 18 persons in Alexandra, May 1st, 1950 Adoption of the Freedom Charter, 1955	
August 9		Women's Day	National Women's Day	Women's march to Pretoria, 1956	1995
September 10	Kruger Day			Birth of Paul Kruger, 1825	
September 24			Heritage Day	Shaka Day/ death of Shaka, 1828	1995
December 16	Day of the Vow	Heroes Day	Reconciliation Day	Battle of Blood River, 1838; First MK attacks, 1961	1948/1995
December 25	Christmas		Christmas		
December 26	Day of Goodwill		Day of Goodwill		

Sources: 1936 National Public Holidays Act; Brownell, 1993; ANC- Information Package: South Africa's national holidays, 1989; 1994 Public Holidays Act; Lowry, 1995.

Annex 3- Excerpt from President Mandela's opening address of the Robben Island Museum – Robben Island, Heritage Day, 1997

President Mandela's address for the opening of the Robben Island Museum on Heritage Day in 1997 consisted of two parts: the first half dealt with the issue of the politics of representation, culture and heritage under colonialism and apartheid and in the "new" South Africa while the second half was dedicated to Robben Island. I reproduce here only this second half of the address.

'(...)

Friends, Ladies and gentlemen;

Robben Island is a vital part of South Africa's collective heritage.

Siqithini – the Island – a place of pain and banishment for centuries and now of triumph – presents us with the rich challenge of heritage. Its future has been the subject of intense and wide-ranging debate.

How do we look at the histories of different people who lived here, through various ages: lepers, prisoners, jailers all together; leaders of resistance not only from South Africa but from as far afield as Namibia and the Indonesian Archipelago? How do we give expression to these diverse histories as a collective heritage?

How do we reflect the fact that the people of South Africa as a whole, together with the international community, turned one of the world's most notorious symbols of racist oppression into a world-wide icon of the universality of human rights, of hope, peace and reconciliation?

How do we represent the tradition of intense political and academic education that the Island has come to symbolise?

These and many other important issues are canvassed in the 200 or more submissions received on the future of the Island, and they will be given full consideration.

I am confident that we will together find a way to combine the many dimensions of the Island, and that we will do so in a manner that recognises above all its pre-eminent character as a symbol of the victory of the human spirit over political oppression; and of reconciliation over enforced division. In this way we will help strengthen the ethos of heritage as a binding force, rather than as a divisive one, as a force for truth rather than an artificial construct to satisfy all and sundry.

When Cabinet decided that Robben Island should be developed as a National Monument and National Museum, it set in motion its redevelopment as a cultural and conservation showcase for South Africa's democracy which will also maximise its educational potential.

In the short time since January this year, when the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology took over responsibility for the Island, great progress has been made in this direction. We thank Professor André Odendaal and the interim administration for their sterling work, and we are certain that their experience and expertise will continue to stand us in good stead.

Today, a second phase of the Island's redevelopment begins. We wish the new Council well in the challenging task with which they have been entrusted.

This ceremony confirms for us that the struggle for human dignity and freedom – throughout the world, and in particular in South Africa – is an ongoing one.

It challenges us to ensure that future generations of South Africans can claim the heritage of a nation that has eradicated the legacy of grinding poverty that our generation inherited for most of its people; the heritage of a nation that has deracialised all spheres of social life and secured the dignity of all its diverse communities.

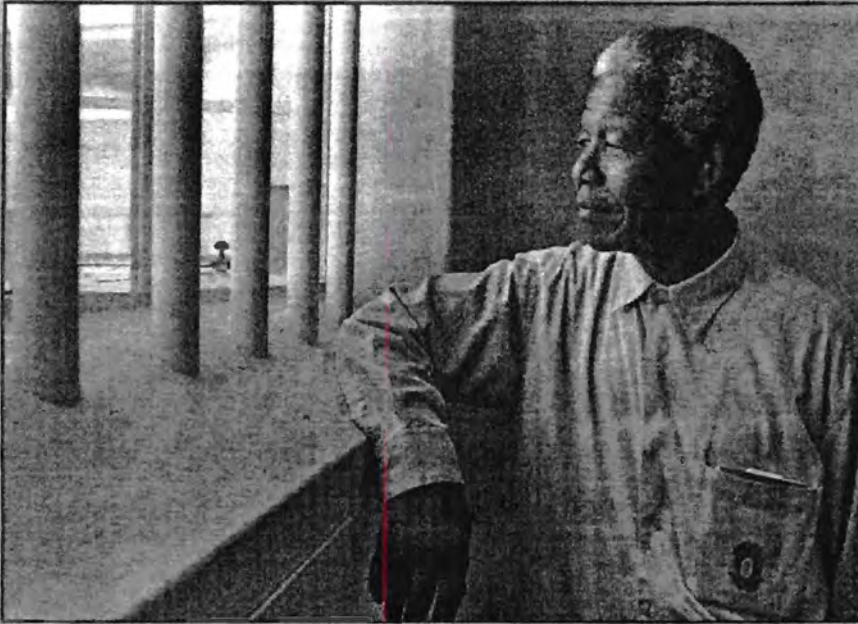
Let us recommit ourselves to the ideals in our Constitution, ideals which were shaped here on Robben Island and in the greater prison that was Apartheid South Africa.

May this monument and the Museum strengthen our resolve that never again shall this land see the oppression of one by another; nor the suppression of any community's heritage.

In conclusion, it now gives me great pleasure to formally open the new Robben Island Museum, the first new major heritage institutions of democratic South Africa.

I thank you!

Annex 4- Robben Island Museum :
advertisements



The view of the prison yard
wasn't the vision that
sustained him through 27 years

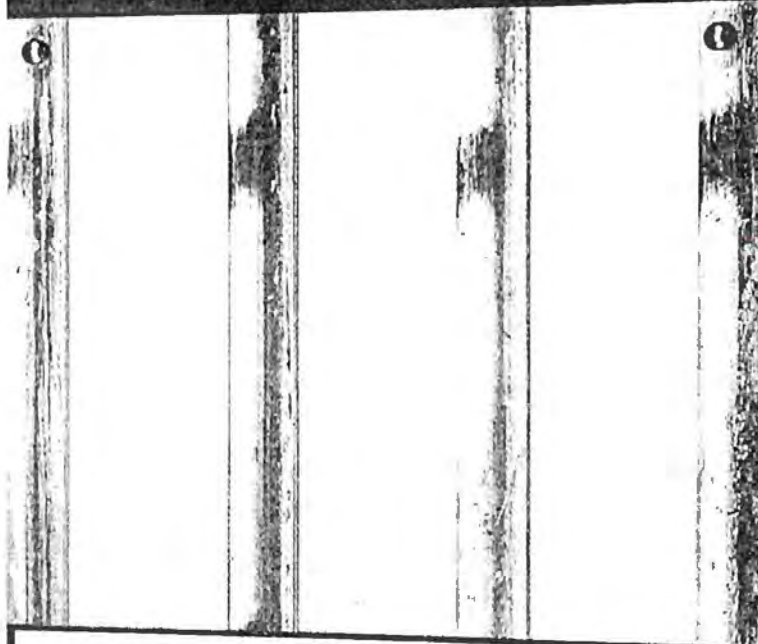
Today, South Africans embrace democracy, tolerance
and human rights. Heritage Day celebrates the strength
of the human spirit and all it's achieved.
When we open the Robben Island Museum this Wednesday
that's the message we'll send the world.



Heritage Day 24 September
Democracy, Tolerance and Human Rights

Watch your local press for details of Heritage Day celebrations in your area.

**TO UNDERSTAND WHAT
ROBBEN ISLAND WAS LIKE,
YOU HAVE TO
PUT YOURSELF THERE.**



You can visit Robben Island any day of the week.

Tickets available 07h30 to 17h00 at the Jolly 1 Terminal and 07h30 to 18h00
at the Clocktower Terminal, Bertie's Landing. Adults R100, Students/Pensioners R70.

Children (aged 4-14) R50, no charge for children under 4.

For information phone (021) 419 1300.

IIIY
Robben Island



**TRAVEL
7.1 NAUTICAL
MILES TO SEE
JUST HOW FAR
WE'VE COME.**

It is a short trip to Robben Island, but the walk to Robben was a long one.
Take a journey like this and discover all that we are and all that we want to
be. Robben Island.

Tickets are available from 07h30 to 17h00 at the terminal at Jolly 1 and more
about the island at the Clocktower Terminal. Adults R100, Students/Pensioners R70.
Children (aged 4-14) R50, no charge for children under 4. For more information phone (021) 419 1300.

IIIY
Robben Island