

The role of national museums in South Africa: A critical investigation into Iziko

Museums of South Africa focusing on the representation of slavery.

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Declaration

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

Carlyn Strydom, 31 August 2016

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the ways in which museums have been used as vehicles to convey notions of the nation. It looks specifically at the Iziko Museums of South Africa's social history sites that deal with the subject of slavery. It is concerned with the absence of a narrative of slavery at Iziko museums before the demise of Apartheid and looks the historical and socio-political changes that lead to its emergence in South African historical consciousness. It is a study of the history of museums as well as the ways in which history has been used in museums. It looks at the ways Iziko, as a national museum, has guarded and promoted ideas of the nation as decided by the state. The thesis examines the ways in which the museum has transformed since its inception in the colonial period up to the present day. The time period investigated is 1825 to 2017.

Guiding questions for the thesis are: for what purpose were museums created in South Africa; what are the implications of colonial practice on the ways in which they functioned; why has the history of slavery has been disavowed in South African historical consciousness; what led to the rise of the study of slavery in South Africa; what has the emergence of the new museology meant for museum practice; how have heritage studies transformed the South African historical landscape.

The thesis begins with a theoretical literature overview of museums more generally and its links with power and representation and the colonial regime. It then moves on to investigate the origin and history of Iziko Museums of South Africa by working through published literature on the subject, unpublished materials, other institutional materials found in the Iziko archive and interviews conducted with past and current employees. It then looks takes an historical survey of South African historiography and its exclusion of the history of slavery and later the emergence of such a narrative. Lastly it looks at how the nation has been narrated by the state after Apartheid and how the museum responded to the new dispensation.

The thesis concludes that Iziko Museums of South Africa have transformed over the last two centuries in terms of the subject matter it studies. Museological activity has been diversified to include a range of subjects hitherto ignored in South African public consciousness due to the legacy of both colonialism and Apartheid. Most importantly it shows that the museum has continually responded to concepts of the South African nation and that national museums are inextricably tied to the nation-state.

Introduction

To control a museum means precisely to control the representation of a community and its highest values and truths. It is also the power to define the relative standing of individuals within that community (Duncan, 1995: 8)

It has now been widely accepted that museums play an important role in society. They are not merely spaces where one may go to observe art, an historical narrative, objects of natural science, or some other curiosity. Museums have been active in shaping knowledge for years and are always ideologically orientated. They are useful tools for those who wish to display their power, whether it is a private individual or the nation-state. As such museums have played, and continue to play, an important role in creating and maintaining identities.

This thesis is concerned with the evolution of Iziko Museums of South Africa from its early beginnings in 1825 to the present time. By focusing on the subject of slavery at Iziko's social history sites it aims to think through the changing representation of cultural history (now termed social history at Iziko), how this has been affected by certain historical moments, what this means to an understanding of the South African nation and how museums reflect such an understanding. Taking leave from Colin Bundy, its aim is to think about what the implications are of that historical moment for the ways in which the nation is constructed and deconstructed (2007:86) and how this relates to and impacts museum practice.

The museum in question, Iziko Slave Lodge (SL), forms part of a larger body of museums in Cape Town: Iziko Museums of South Africa. The body of museums comprise of previously separate institutions that came under one organisational structure during the amalgamation process in 1998 after the demise of Apartheid which ushered in a new political dispensation that directly impacted museums in the country. Iziko Museums deal with various subjects including art, social history and

natural history. This thesis is concerned with the subject of slavery as it is studied at Iziko across all their social history sites, with the greatest emphasis on the SL, as it is the only museum at Iziko that is solely dedicated to slavery.

Chapter 1 'Museums theoretically and their relationship with history' looks at the emergence of museums in the Western world and later the colonies. It ties the evolution of the museum in its nineteenth century formation to the colonial project. The chapter seeks to understand the relationship between history and the museum and the power of representation and argues that museums have largely been guided by the ideological imperative of the colonial nation-state, and as such, have created and maintained national identities in accordance with the colonial nation-state. Lastly the chapter looks at the 'new museology' and how it offers a new way to think about museums and museological work.

Chapter 2 'The birth of the museum in South Africa' examines the origins of museums in South Africa beginning in the nineteenth century with the establishment of the first and oldest museum, The South African Museum (SAM). It then looks at the establishment of the SAM'S offshoot the South African Cultural History Museum (SACHM) and the reasons for the separation of the SAM's perceived natural history and cultural history collections. Established in 1965, during the height of Apartheid, it has been argued that the SACHM was created to reinforce the Apartheid ideology of separation. The chapter looks at the guiding principles of the museum and its lack of adequate representation, most notably regarding the history of slavery. The chapter seeks to understand why this history was suppressed and questions who the museum was established for.

Chapter 3 'South African history and the question of slavery' is concerned with the historiography of slavery in South Africa. The chapter looks at dominant trends in South African historiography, the absence of an adequate history of slavery and at the emergence of a sustained narrative of slavery in the academy and in popular consciousness during the 1980s. It poses the question as to why this

history has been neglected for so long and looks at the change in approach after the 1980s. The chapter reflects on the emergence of heritage as a discipline in the academy and what this meant for the study of neglected history, with specific reference to the history of slavery. It shows the many ways in which the history of slavery has been used by various actors to narrate the complex history of South African slavery. In the end it concludes that this history has been solidified in South African historical consciousness and that it is now seen as an essential component of South African history.

Chapter 4 'Iziko Museums of South Africa, nation building and transformation' looks at the post-Apartheid period in South Africa. It addresses issues relating to the rebuilding of the nation by the African National Congress (ANC) and what this meant for national museums in South Africa. It reflects on the legal changes that were implemented for the Arts, Culture and Heritage sectors and how Iziko responded to the new dispensation. It then examines the changing narrative of slavery at the museum, largely due to the changed perception in the academy, and the proposed new developments for the SL. The chapter addresses transformation in the museum and asks to what degree the museum has transformed and whether the museum contributes to nation building. The chapter also demonstrates how national heritage sites are used to marshal the goals of the nation-state.

In conclusion the thesis thinks about what the museum could possibly be in South Africa and asks whether it can overcome its colonial legacy.

Chapter 1: Museums theoretically and their relationship with history

This chapter is concerned with the emergence of the museums more generally. By looking at the social, intellectual and political factors that have influenced their production it will demonstrate how museums have been active in shaping and maintaining identities linked to the state's conceptualisation of national identity. It then considers how the concept of the 'new museology' offers the opportunity to challenge dominant historical narratives and create museums that are more representative.

The origin of museums in the Western world¹

It is now part of traditional understanding regarding the emergence of museums that they were products of earlier exhibitionary practices whose aim it was to show off wealth and power. Two useful and complementary books that delve into great detail on this subject are *The Birth of the Museum: history, politics, theory* by Tony Bennett (1995) and *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* by Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (1992). Both authors trace the origin of the modernist museum, which emerged in the nineteenth century, and show that the museum was part of a continued project used to influence and shape ideas surrounding the natural and social world, which responded to the social, political, and intellectual realities of its time.

Bennett and Hooper-Greenhill both observe that the concept of the museum can be traced back to as early as the sixteenth century where the ruling classes would display their wealth to each other.

Later this concept developed and became known as the 'curiosity cabinet'. Curiosity cabinets

¹ I have simplified and summarised the origin of museums in this section to give an overview of the emergence of the museum as it is understood today. To understand the emergence of the museum in more detail Hooper-Greenhill's account is imperative as well as Bennett's. Both of these accounts offer insight into the history of museums, though from different viewpoints. Hooper-Greenhill, drawing on Foucault's idea of the episteme, is concerned with how epistemic shifts changed the way museums functioned, while Bennett is concerned with how museums and other forms of display were used as political tools to control and educate citizens. He draws on Foucault arguing that the shift in museum practice was both epistemic and governmental. Another more general account regarding the origins of museums is the edited volume by Impey, O and Macgregor, A. 2001. *The origins of museums: the cabinet of curiosities in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Europe*. London: House of Stratus.

attempted to offer a complete or partial view of the world; most of them displaying wonders of the natural world. Objects considered exotic or unusual were placed on exhibit and at times natural objects were manipulated to represent something that did not exist in the natural world but did exist within the mythological world (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992: 79).² Drawing on Foucault's idea of episteme, she states that these museums represented the Renaissance episteme; not governed by mathematic principles, but rather by 'systems of correspondence' (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992: 83). It was a way of ordering the world at a superficial and visual level. These cabinets, owned by the nobility and aspiring intellectuals in Europe, had the dual purpose of entertainment and education.

The French Revolution ushered in a new way for museums to function. Old collections were moved from the hands of the powerful elites and into the service of the state (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992: 167-8). Here one sees a new type of museum emerging; what Hooper-Greenhill terms the disciplinary museum. She traces the emergence of the first museum in France: The Louvre (established in 1792); the collection that made up that museum was based on the old collections and on Napoleon's plundering of other parts of Europe.³

This new museum was concerned with imparting knowledge to a passive audience; an audience that needed to be educated in the new democratic way (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992:171). Bennett argues the same stating that the new museum offered ways to 'exercise new forms of power' (1995: 19). He extends his argument further stating that the museum now became a vehicle in which to civilize the subordinate parts of the population (1995:28).

² This view is interesting because mythology, back then, was considered a credible history. See Mudimbe, V.Y. 1988. *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy and the order of knowledge*. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press and James Currey. He offers an interesting example of how magic (or mythology) was considered a real field of inquiry by focusing on the work of Claude Levi – Strauss. This shows that the early conception of the museum was one that would display the accepted knowledge of the time, which has had a lasting effect on museological practice.

³ Hooper-Greenhill (1992) discusses how the emergence of the Louvre was tied to Napoleon's military control of certain regions in Europe. There is a clear link between plunder, exploitation and museum. It is crucial to note this because from this time onwards this becomes collection practice for most museums in Europe and later the colonies, such as South Africa.

However, political reality was not the only driving force behind the new museum, scientific inquiry played an important part in its development. By the nineteenth century investigation into the natural world was premised on making a connection between organisms, as a way to demonstrate the long history of the earth. Hooper-Greenhill offers one example of how this translated into museums. She states that paintings were rehung to give some indication of the historical narrative surrounding various schools. The result was a history of art (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992: 186). Objects were no longer hung haphazardly by size or theme. At this time a more definite rationality began to emerge.

This brief and limited history shows that the museum, in its initial stages, had already realised its instructive function, influenced both by political realities and shifts in knowledge. By the beginning of the nineteenth century this instructive function was tied to the scientific endeavour of the colonial -state. The museum evolved into a space whose aim was to display the achievements of the colonial -state and more importantly to create and maintain colonial identities premised on the idea of racial and cultural difference. Bennett makes us aware of this new conception: ‘what changed, then, was not merely the classificatory principles governing the arrangement of exhibits. There was also a changed orientation to the visitor –one which was increasingly pedagogic...’ (Bennett, 1995: 41). Thus, the museum became an essential instructive tool for the transmission of the colonial – state’s understanding of the conquered world.

Early colonial exhibitions and the museum

The colonial museum...it often symbolised the dispossession of land and culture by whites through the rapid acquisition of specimens and artefacts. Such colonial acquisitiveness occurred on a global scale, representing a worldwide movement brokered by imperial power. The museum’s intellectual framework, its collecting habits, and so many of its methods were closely bound up with the nature and practices of imperialism. (MacKenzie, 2009:4)

In understanding how museums, specifically colonial museums, functioned it is important to understand the how the academic disciplines of the natural and human sciences influenced early colonial exhibitionary practices, as they exemplify the colonial gaze observed in museums from the second half of the nineteenth century.

During the last half of the nineteenth century, and at the height of colonial expansion (especially Britain's expansion), exhibitions displaying the acquired treasures of the imperial state were commonplace. They served to show the wealth of the nation to the viewing public. In this way it was not so different from previous displays of the powerful elites, however something new occurred at this time. Probably one of the best examples of this new kind of large-scale exhibition was the 1866 *Colonial and Indian Exhibition* in London⁴. The exhibition was divided by territory to display the various material goods under British control. It showed everything from tobacco to artefacts and even human beings.⁵ The inclusion of human beings in the exhibits, I argue, was one of the turning points in exhibitionary practice. Although the exhibition of human beings was not new⁶, the inclusion of human beings here, as something to be classed with a commodity or object, on such a grand scale, simply solidified pre-existing colonial attitudes based on racial superiority. These exhibitions entrenched the display of non-white human beings alongside everyday objects and commodities as part of standard museum practice. This thinking was strengthened by the discipline of anthropology whose aim it was to name and classify various living people.

⁴ This is just one example of the kinds of exhibitions that were taking place in the West at this time. The first exhibition of this kind took place in London in 1851 which was called the *Great Exhibition*. See Victoria and Albert Museum. 2016. *The Great Exhibition*. Available: <http://www.vam.ac.uk/page/g/great-exhibition/>. Other notable exhibitions were the *Exposition Universelle* carried out in Paris in 1855, 1867, 1878, 1889 and 1900. See De Tholozany, P. 2011. Paris: Capital of the 19th Century. Available: <http://library.brown.edu/cds/paris/worldfairs.html>

⁵ See the online catalogue of this exhibition for more detail on what was included and how human subjects were used in the exhibition. National Library of Canada. N.d. *Colonial and Indian Exhibition, 1866 official catalogue*. Available: <http://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/bibliography/38435#/summary>

⁶ For example, Sara Baartman, A Khoikhoi woman from the Eastern Cape in South Africa, was on display in Britain and France from 1810 until her death in 1815. She was treated as a human curiosity. My focus on the colonial large-scale exhibitions here is simply because they were more organised and determined. No doubt the early exhibition of people such as Sara Baartman made the inclusion of human beings possible due to the fact that they had become popularised and racial difference and superiority was accepted knowledge by this time.

In his 2003 book *Pasts Beyond Memory: evolution, museums, colonialism* Tony Bennett argues that after the 1840s the related fields of geology, palaeontology, natural history, prehistoric archaeology and anthropology became the product 'of a distinctive set of intellectual labours' (Bennett, 2003:1). The aim of these disciplines was to create a long history of the world from prehistoric times to the present. The idea of creating a long history of the earth, coupled with evolutionary theory had a tremendous effect on the way in which museums would function. Bennett shows how evolutionary theory was employed in certain exhibitions and museums which created a rift between what he calls 'civilised' and 'rude' peoples.

The disciplines of geology, palaeontology, archaeology, and anthropology so closely linked with museum practice attempted to bring about an entire history of the world and man's place in it. Bennett states that these sciences 'in their nineteenth century formation, aimed at the restitution of a historical discourse', one that was arrived at by scientific method (2003: 37). He considers these disciplines historical sciences and states that these sciences, particularly their methodology, influenced the human historical sciences. Focusing on Thomas Huxley's ideas of evolution and ethnology he states:

these formulations were to prove highly influential in developing the procedures through which- by combining physical traits and technological accomplishments to establish 'ethnological intervals', and depicting colonised peoples as an arrested stage of development-late nineteenth century Victorian anthropology measured the progress of cultures and civilizations (2003: 59).

This trend was not unique to Victorian England, in fact he states that this mode of representation in the museum extended to all English speaking parts of the world. Essentially, what was practiced in the metropole was practiced in the colonies.⁷ The human historical sciences attempted to sketch in the history of different people as a way to track, not only evolutionary changes, but also cultural

⁷ I am not suggesting that everything that was practiced in the metropole was taken as a carbon copy to the colonies. Museums in different places responded to their local environments, but the grounding principles were similar.

differences. As part of the set of 'distinctive intellectual labours' anthropology employed the same methodologies as the natural sciences and became synonymous with natural history in the museum.

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#### *A brief example of ethnological representation at the South African Museum*

I would like to intersperse this general discussion about the human historical sciences with a brief example of how ethnology (a branch of anthropology), premised on the idea of biological and cultural difference, was represented at South Africa's first and oldest museum, the SAM. An illuminating example of this is the life casts that were on display in the ethnology wing. The aim of the life casts<sup>8</sup> was to show the last remaining examples of the 'Bushman' (San) people of southern Africa. Between 1907 and 1924 the museum initiated a casting project to make life casts from what were considered to be last remaining pure San people of southern Africa. They were displayed in a variety of ways over the years. Emphasis was placed on their physical attributes and almost no attention was paid to the changing social environment they found themselves in. They were displayed as a group of people fixed in the past with no history and no future. The life casts were moved to a display known as the 'Bushman Diorama' in the 1950s, but still nothing was done to explain their history or their social lives. In South Africa this exhibition has been highly contested from the general public, to academics and even museum practitioners, for the racial stereotypes it portrayed. It was eventually archived in 2001. A display such as this clearly aligned itself with the out-dated theory of differences (physical and psychological) between races. It served to emphasise what one may term the colonial gaze in exhibitions: a view of the world as expressed from the vantage point of the coloniser which gave the people it aimed to represent no agency. At the same time this practice made it seem as though the coloniser was somehow separate from the colonised

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<sup>8</sup> There is extensive writing on this subject see Davison, P. 2001. Typecast: representations of the Bushmen at the South African Museum. *Public Archaeology*.1: 3-20. There was also an exhibition, curated by Pippa Skotnes, held at the South African National Gallery in 1996 to address the unbalanced representation of indigenous people at the SAM. See Centre for Curating the Archive. 2015. *Miscast Archive*. Available: <http://www.cca.uct.ac.za/projects/miscast-archive/> and the published book Skotnes, P. 1996. *Miscast: negotiating the presence of the Bushmen*. Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press.



and further increased the imaged evolutionary rift between living human beings. A display such as this, at that particular time in South Africa's history, could be seen as an aide to state ideology. This particular display shows how ideas of race can be translated as historical truth in the museum.<sup>9</sup>



The history that was represented in colonial museums served to display the history of the evolution of the earth and man's place in it. This was common in natural history museums, which generally included ethnological displays. The example of the SAM confirms this. What representation in the museum did was to reinforce scientific findings (whether they were true or not) and historicise them in exhibitions which became part a kind of public educational model.<sup>10</sup> The aim was to tell the viewer, in no uncertain terms, that black and white were indeed different.

Natural history museums were not the only kinds of museums that served to educate 'docile bodies' (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992: 169). Other examples include art and house museums. House museums generally periodised certain aspects of the history of civilised man by creating invented living scenes and art museums showcased the artistic (read: intellectual) achievements of various artists from the West.<sup>11</sup> These types of museums have generally been described as cultural history museums. The classification between museums as natural history and cultural history created an even further distance between civilised and uncivilised man.<sup>12</sup>

In this way the museums of the colonial past had the effect of giving more legitimacy to the colonial project which has been described by V.Y Mudimbe as a way to organise the world the West came into contact with (1988:1). MacKenzie states that '...museums... came to evoke civic, colonial,

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<sup>9</sup> The ideas about race and the Bushmen were commonplace in South Africa and Britain see Skotnes, P. 2001. Civilised off the face of the earth. *Poetics Today*. 22 (2): 299-321.

<sup>10</sup> This model included schools, churches, public libraries, botanical gardens, etc. Any place where education was promoted and order desired. This is part of my understanding of the colonising structure.

<sup>11</sup> A good study on art museums is Duncan, C. 1995. *Civilizing Rituals: inside public art museums*. London: Routledge. In the book she shows the evolution of the art museum and the various ideological forces that have shaped them.

<sup>12</sup> This will be explored more in chapter 2 in relation to South Africa where this division was employed by the Apartheid government.

national and imperial power...moreover it often reflected the manner in which we should think in terms of urban and regional identities' (2009: 7). Mackenzie cautions that we must not be too quick to simply say that the museum was a metonym of the state. Many museums emerged from private collections and were funded by donors (Mackenzie, 2009: 8). I am not suggesting that the museum was a metonym of the state but one must bear in mind the intellectual, political and social climate in which such museums emerged. It was during the period of rapid colonial expansion which must be seen as an influencing event in the history of museums, one that has had a lasting effect on practice.

### *Power, history and the museum*

So far I have given a more general account of how certain histories were employed in the museum. It is here that I want to think a bit more about the relationship between history as represented in the museum and its relationship with power.

Michel Trouillot states in *Silencing the Past: Power and the production of history*: 'History is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots.' (1995: xix). With reference to the museum (and a museum, in its most general sense, must be understood as an institution that produces history) the concept of it as an authoritative space for the dissemination of knowledge allows it to have a certain power in society. Narratives are produced at the museum that give legitimacy to certain worldviews and because the museum is seen as a space where the highest standards of scientific rationality and objectivity are practiced, the narratives they produce have been accepted as truth and have gone largely uncontested.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> This is only with reference to old museums that have been left uncontested for many years. In the present age museums are seen as spaces of contestation and confrontation. See for example Abrahams, L. 2014. An uncertain remaking: changing the Hout Bay Museum, 1979-2013. MA thesis. UWC and Witz, L. 2010. Number 3, Museums, histories and the dilemmas of change in post-Apartheid South Africa. Museum studies programme. Available: <http://ummsp.rackham.umich.edu/number-3-museums-histories-and-the-dilemmas-of-change-in-post-apartheid-south-africa/>

Trouillot further states: 'Historical representations – be they books, commercial exhibits or public commemorations – cannot be conceived of as only vehicles for the transmission of knowledge. They must establish some relation to that knowledge.' (Trouillot, 1995: 149). As I have previously stated, museums are always ideologically motivated whether it is by state, private or commercial motivations. It is these motivations coupled with the actual history they produce that shape the museum. And it is these motivations that we must look to in order to understand what the museum aims to do and how it creates and manages identities.

As the example of the SAM shows, the museums of old tended to present a somewhat fabricated or rearranged history.<sup>14</sup> On museums Barthes has correctly stated that: 'museums manipulate material things, set up relations and associations and create identities' (quoted in Hooper-Greenhill, 1991:6). As an institution that bore close relation to the colonial project museums have been active in shaping the way in which knowledge is received and have, for the most part, employed similar categorisations as the colonial state. V.Y Mudimbe states that the colonial project or what he calls the 'colonizing structure' did three complementary things: it dominated physical space, reformed people's minds and integrated local histories into a Western perspective (Mudimbe, 1988: 2).<sup>15</sup> This same hypothesis can be applied to the museum.

When thinking about history and the colonial state the observations mentioned above must bring us to thoughts of what it means for certain worldviews to be imbedded in museums. If we agree that the colonising structure, in its ultimate goal, was to assert its version of history on the subjects it dominated (including the colonised subjects and those in the metropole) and that this version of history was to advance the colonising agenda, then the types of museums that were products of that historical moment will reflect the agenda of the state. Such narrow conceptions of history and national identity are prone to exclude other narratives that do not correspond with the state's

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<sup>14</sup> This is not unique to the SAM as I shall demonstrate in the next chapter; the same arrangement of history, to correspond with a certain worldview, was evident at another South Africa museum.

<sup>15</sup> I have paraphrased this. Mudimbe actually states that it reformed *native's* minds and integrated local *economic* histories into the Western perspective (emphasis is added to the words I omitted in the main text).

agenda. These are generally subaltern narratives that disturb the narrative of colonial progress (as we shall see in the following chapters). In this way the museum became an ideological tool for the colonial nation-state by projecting its ideas of what the nation is. Ivan Karp and Corrine Kratz make clear: museums '...have become an essential form through which to make statements about history, identity, value, and place and to claim recognition.' (Karp & Kratz, 2006: 4). It is clear that the museums that were products of the colonial project were complicit in narrating histories that reinforced the ideals of the colonial nation-state.

### *The new museology*

On the one hand a retrospective analysis of the evolution of museums allows us to understand their founding and guiding principles; on the other hand, it assists with an understanding of museums in their present state and allows us to see the engrained practices still evident today. An analysis of this kind should allow for the possibility of imagining new ways to do history in the museum.

The term 'the new museology' has been referred to numerous times in the museum world. It generally refers to understanding museums as socially constructed institutions. In his 1989 edited book *The New Museology* Peter Vergo states that the new museology concerns itself with the meaning and function of museums in society, as opposed to the old museology which was concerned with the methods employed in museums, such as conservation and display techniques (Vergo, 1989: 2). The new museology requires us to think critically about the socio-political environment museums are created in and to unpack their complicity with other forms of governance (wittingly or unwittingly). The new museology, then, forces us to confront the museum not as a place for authoritative knowledge but as a place where the notion of historical truth is put into question. Since the 1970s it has become commonplace to pose such questions. The shift in museum practice has moved 'to reveal the socially structured ways in which meaning is made, communicated and reproduced in museums' (Ross, 2004: 1). This shift has also moved away from the curator as an

authoritative figure who works outside of the community to one where community participation has become essential to offer a more well-rounded representation.

Hooper-Greenhill makes us aware that although we have come to a new understanding in our approach to museology, old practices are still engrained in the museums of old. She states that the modernist museum model is enduring in its nature and that the aim of what she calls the 'post-museum' will be to retain some of the characteristics of its parent and use it to its own ends (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000: 152). This means that the old museum in contemporary society must wrestle with its founding principles and develop new ways in which to utilise the knowledge it has created, thereby generating new knowledge to suit its socio-political context.

As stated before, the most enduring quality of the museum is that it has been active in shaping public opinion and has thereby shaped national identities. The most important aspect of this new approach to studying museums should be '...unmasking of the complicity the public history museum has in defining and guarding the nation, of advancing an uncritical acceptance of the benefits served by the nation and of nation-building, and of understanding how a national identity is defined' (Trofaneko, 2008: 258).

The following chapters will reflect on museum practice in South Africa and will look at the ways in which this challenge has been taken up. In South Africa the challenge becomes one of addressing the legacy of colonial museums in a post-colonial society.

## Chapter 2: The birth of the museum in South Africa<sup>16</sup>

This chapter will explore the origins of museums in South Africa, starting from the early nineteenth century when the push to record South Africa's natural resources for scientific purposes reached a peak. It traces the origin of the first collection of objects which later served as the original collection of the SAM; later at the formation of the SACHM; the construction of its archive and what this meant for museum display. Finally, the chapter questions why the history of slavery has been absent in a museum that was aware of this history.

The investigation period is from 1825, when the first museum was established, to the early 1990s when change was on the horizon in the South African museum field due to the significantly changed political landscape. The aim of this chapter is to show how the museum was used as a medium to transmit the ideology of the South African state at that time, which demonstrated clear links with imperialism.

### *Early beginnings*

In South Africa the emergence of museums was directly linked to British colonial rule and the activities that were taking place there in the scientific and museum communities.<sup>17</sup> But before we reach the stage of an official museum, let us briefly trace the emergence of the collection that would come to be housed at the SAM.<sup>18</sup>

As early as the seventeenth century, Dutch settlers began collecting the natural wonders of South Africa. These were mostly animal objects (hunting trophies) which were displayed at the Castle in Cape Town. By 1727, the first collection of non-zoological objects, collected by the German Joachim

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<sup>16</sup> Of course this is borrowed from Tony Bennett's book *The birth of the museum*.

<sup>17</sup> Various intellectual societies emerged at this time that were directly linked to Britain such The South African Philosophical Society (1877), The South African Association for the Advancement of Science (1902) and the growing South African College (1829) which is now The University of Cape Town (MacKenzie, 2009:89-90).

<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed recollection of the early history of the SAM see Summers, R. 1975. *A history of the South African Museum, 1825-1975*. Cape Town: A.A.Balkema.

Nickolaus von Dessin (1704-61), was bequeathed to the church and a separate exhibition space was opened to display the collection which became known as the Dessinian Collection. The collection was handed over to the Cape Town Library (established in 1818) and later the SAM acquired what was left of the collection in 1861 (MacKenzie, 2009: 80).

In 1821, a Scotsman named Andrew Smith arrived at the Cape and was deployed to Grahamstown to assist the medical team with the injuries of those involved in the Frontier Wars. While he was stationed there, he began collecting ethnographic and natural history specimens. Smith was to become the superintendent of the SAM in 1825 after Lord Charles Somerset, Governor of the Cape, issued a public notice for a museum. The stated aim was to have a museum dedicated to the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms so that the colonists could familiarise themselves with the local resources of the colony. During his time as superintendent Smith continually travelled to further his collection for the museum, which was now only open to scholars and members of the elite. It was by no means a public museum.<sup>19</sup> When Smith left the Cape he took his collection with him and the museum was left defunct between the 1830s and 1855. (MacKenzie, 2009: 81).

In 1855 Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape, revived the museum and it was reconstituted in 1855 by Government Gazette<sup>20</sup>, two years later the museum was given legislative backing<sup>21</sup>. This was the beginning of a more formalised museum under a Board of Trustees, however, there were still not sufficient museum professionals at this time and the SAM progressed slowly with a great emphasis on collection and descriptive display, with very little work done to analyse and contextualise the collections (Davison, 2005:102).

The SAM was established as a general museum with collections relating to natural history and other miscellaneous collections relating to 'articles of human manufacture' (Davison, 1990: 152), however, it became known to the general public as a natural history museum because most of the work

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<sup>19</sup> At this time the museum occupied the Old Supreme Court building in the complex of the former Slave Lodge, which is the present location of the Iziko Slave Lodge.

<sup>20</sup> Government Gazette no. 25 of 1855 (Gore, 2004:27)

<sup>21</sup> Cape of Good Hope, an Act to Incorporate the South African Museum, no. 17 of 1857.

undertaken by the museum was related to the natural sciences. As was the practice at that time (from the middle of the nineteenth century) anthropological methodologies were much the same as the natural sciences and anthropological displays generally found themselves alongside displays of natural history in museums (Bennet, 2003; Davison, 1990: 151). This too was true of the SAM which began displaying human subjects in the museum in the early 1910s. The most controversial and well known of these was the 'Bushmen' life casts which were only taken down as recently as 2001 (as discussed in chapter one).

Complicating this situation was the intensified study of 'native' people through an anthropological lens in South Africa. It is now common knowledge that anthropology emerged as a field of study during the wake of colonial conquest (Lewis, 1973; Apter, 1999) as a means of trying to understand traditional cultures which only served to other them. In South Africa social anthropology, from when it was formalised as a discipline in the academy in the 1920s, (Rich, 1984) was closely related to the political agenda of the state and the idea of ethnic and tribal separation known as Apartheid (Gordon, 1988; Rich, 1984). Although the discipline of social anthropology was not necessarily practised in South Africa as an aide to state policy the insights gained by academics tied to the University of Cape Town and the University of the Witwatersrand did influence some state policy (Rich, 1984). The most explicit example of this was the discipline of anthropology as practiced at the Afrikaans-speaking universities of Stellenbosch and Pretoria, known as *volkekunde*<sup>22</sup>, which was directly tied to the state policy of Apartheid and was influential in creating Apartheid policies (Gordon, 1988).

At the SAM anthropological specimens were displayed in such a way which indicates a buttressing of state policy. Although this fact has been downplayed by those who worked there (Davison, 1990; Davison, 2013: personal communication) it is clear to see why some may suggest that it fed into

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<sup>22</sup> *Volkekunde* was practiced in South African Afrikaans-speaking universities and by government officials. It was a branch of anthropology whose underlying assumption was the belief in primordial ethnic and cultural difference (Davison, 1995:158).



Apartheid ideology indirectly. Anthropological displays were exhibited in a way that reinforced racial stereotypes that were common place in South Africa and Britain. To further complicate this the SAM's first ethnologist, Margaret Shaw, worked closely with state ethnographer N.J Van Warmelo who collected data for the state which was used to aide Apartheid policies (Davison, 1990:157).

I want to be bold and state that the museum was intrinsically linked to the state's agenda of Apartheid (and Apartheid must be understood as the personification of colonialism). There is no other way to read their depiction of indigenous people. We might suggest that this was the common trend in museums of this kind globally, but within the socio-political context of South Africa such a general statement cannot be made. To further problematize matters the separation of the cultural history and natural history collections in the 1960s and the complete separation of the museum into the SAM (which continued to display indigenous heritage) and the SACHM (which only displayed cultural history relating to white people) affirmed that these museums were closely ideologically affiliated with the state's racist agenda.<sup>23</sup>

#### *The creation of the SACHM*

The museum has its origin in the SAM, which for most of its history, was considered a general museum with collections relating to natural history and cultural history. The collection of objects which served as the basis for the creation of the SACHM dates as far back as the inception of the SAM and was largely neglected by those employed at the museum.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> I must stress that museum staff were not ordered to change the manner in which they worked by the state (Davison, 1990). However, the move by the state to separate the museums and collections does indicate that the state wished to have some degree of control over the kinds of museums the SAM and SACHM came to be during the Apartheid era.

<sup>24</sup> This was because those employed at the SAM, in its early days, were not experienced in cultural history. For example, the first superintendent of the museum Dr. Andrew Smith (1825-1837) was a surgeon and amateur collector; the first curator, Jules Verreaux (1829-1838), was a taxidermist; the curator under the newly reconstituted museum, in 1855, was Edgar Layard (1855-1872) who studied law in England and was an amateur ornithologist (Summers,1975).

In 1936 the SAM recognized the need to have a separate building for the purposes of accommodating the growing cultural history collection. The Old Supreme Court<sup>25</sup> was considered for this purpose. However, it was only in 1964 that this came to pass (SAM, 1964: 2). In 1957 an action committee was set up to create a cultural history museum for the SAM's historical collection. The first step in achieving this goal was to employ a historian for this purpose. The action committee approached the Department of Education, Culture, and Science and in 1958 Dr. Mary Cook was appointed. Cook began the process of placing all objects of cultural significance in a new separate register (Vollgraaff, 1998: 9). It was also in 1959 that the Old Supreme Court began the process of renovation to transform the building into a cultural history museum with the responsibility vested in the SAM. In 1964 the split of the collections was complete and in 1969 the legal separation of the two museums took place. The SACHM was now officially a separate institution.

The above represents a basic outline of the establishment of the SACHM. What we turn to next is the socio-political climate at the time in order to understand the push to create a museum exclusively for white culture in South Africa.

Prior to the National Party (NP) victory in 1948, which institutionalised Apartheid in South Africa, museums had been included in the portfolio of the Minister for the Interior, during this time museums operated with a large degree of autonomy. In 1948 this changed and museums were transferred to the Minister of Education, Art and Science and a Commission of Inquiry was set up to look into the needs of all state-aided institutions (Davison, 1990: 159; Mazel, 2013: 187). In 1954, with the promulgation of the State-Aided Institutions Amendment Act<sup>26</sup>, the SAM came under direct

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<sup>25</sup> This building has a long history dating back to 1679. It was initially used as a slave lodge to house the slaves of the Dutch East India Company and later served as government offices as well as the Supreme Court. See Bushel, S.2012. 'Memory and Authenticity: The Slave Lodge in Cape Town, a critical inquiry into the relationship between change, authenticity, memory and public perception of the Slave lodge' in R. Shell. *From diaspora to diorama: the old slave lodge in Cape Town* for a detailed analysis of the building's architectural and cultural significance.

<sup>26</sup> State-aided Institutions Amendment Act no. 48 of 1954.

government control. This meant that all permanent appointments required government approval. At the same time many of the Board members were state appointed. This meant that the SAM lost much of its previous autonomy (Davison, 1990: 159).

In 1955 the state set up the Duminy Commission to investigate the needs of state-aided institutions. In 1960 it became the Booyesen Commission which recommended that the SAM's cultural history department develop as a separate institution. After this time tangible steps were taken in this direction (Mazel, 2013: 187). The developments at the SAM matched that of all museums across the country where cultural institutions were coming under direct control of the government (Mazel, 2013: 187). With regards to the SAM government control was linked to the Afrikaner Broederbond (AB)<sup>27</sup> whose aim it was to take control of all aspects South African life in order to entrench Apartheid ideology (Mazel, 2013; Wilkens & Strydom, 2012).

In his paper 'Apartheid's child: the creation of the South African Cultural History Museum in the 1950s and 1960s' (2013) Aron Mazel (Director of the SACHM from 1998-2002) argues that the creation of the SACHM was directly influenced by the policies of the Apartheid government. His investigation into the control of the SAM's Board demonstrates that the Board was largely comprised of members of the NP and the AB who were ideologically motivated by the 'Apartheid dream' (Mazel, 2013: 167). However, those who worked at the SAM and later the SACHM have downplayed the role of the AB and the government in the creation of the museum. Patricia Davison, who worked as an anthropologist at the SAM from the 1980s states:

Although in retrospect the removal of the history collections to a separate museum, at a time when the policy of apartheid was ascendant, could be interpreted as a political move from above, this

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<sup>27</sup> The AB was a secret society working for the cultural and economic advancement of Afrikaners in South Africa. See Serfontein, J. 1979. *The Brotherhood of power: an exposé of the secret Afrikaner Broederbond* and Wilkens, I. & Strydom, H. 2012. *The super-Afrikaners: inside the Afrikaner Broederbond*

would be an over-simplification that overlooks a number of other factors including the precedent set by the major museums abroad and, perhaps more importantly, the fact that at another state-aided institution, the Transvaal Museum in Pretoria, the boundary between natural history and cultural history was drawn to include anthropology with cultural history. Similarly, at the Africana Museum in Johannesburg ethnographic collections were treated as part of the historical collections. It seems to follow that there was no consistent state policy to separate anthropology from cultural history in museums (Davison, 1990:160).

Similarly, Helene Vollgraaff who worked at the SACHM from 1990 to 2007 as a museum scientist stated:

The establishment of the SACHM, in 1964, is considered by some to be an effort by the National Party Government to create a museum solely dedicated to the history of white, especially Afrikaans, culture. Although there is little doubt that the prevailing political culture did influence the establishment of the museum, the shape of the museum was also the result of a steering process of the white population of Cape Town - Afrikaans and English speaking - for the establishment of a cultural history museum in Cape Town and the need for an appropriate home for the history collection of the South African Museum (1998:3).

There may have been no consistent state policy on how museums would function during Apartheid and it may have been a steering process from the general public, but with reference to the museum under investigation here, Mazel makes it clear that the creation of the SACHM was influenced by Board members who were members of the AB. One may infer that the guiding ideologies of that secret organization may have given impetus for the creation of a museum solely dedicated to white culture. Further Mazel states:

While the separation of the SAM into natural and cultural entities reflected a division that characterized many colonial museums globally and, therefore was not unique in its own right, its manner and timing in the South African context made it a deeply political act intimately associated with the implementation of apartheid (2013:188).

and:

Given the fundamental imperative of apartheid to separate the racial groups it is not difficult to understand how the newly created SACHM with its emphasis on white South African and European history and material culture was consistent with the ideals of this political system. (2013: 189)

To further complicate the relationship between the state and the museum the SACHM was opened on Jan van Riebeeck Day, 6 April 1966<sup>28</sup>, which can only be read as a further indication of the museum's intended purpose and affiliation with Apartheid ideology.

The first published annual report of the museum stated its aims:

... to sketch in the cultural historical background of the many peoples who settled in South Africa, the importance of the Far-Eastern trade to the opening up of this country, and in the archaeological section, to show something of the origins of Western Civilization (SACHM, 1976:2).

The aim of the museum is clear: it would be a colonial museum celebrating the achievements of those who forcefully took the country from the indigenous population and would pay almost no attention to their history, nor to the history of other sections of the population that were forcefully brought to South Africa during the wake of colonialism.<sup>29</sup> The museum itself became a vehicle that

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<sup>28</sup> The museum was opened on Jan Van Riebeeck Day, a national holiday to celebrate the founder of the Cape Colony. Vollgraaff describes the opening ceremony which was officiated by Senator Jan de Klerk, Minister of Education, Arts and Science: 'Mr. JC Heunis, member of the Executive Committee of the Cape Province, on behalf of the Administrator of the Cape, placed wreaths on the tombstones of Jan and Maria van Riebeeck. A separate opening function was held for the Muslim population of the Cape' (1998:8). The separate opening for Muslims demonstrates the museum's compliance with the Apartheid regime. The museum's compliance is also reflected in their annual reports; they list employees and visitors by race. The archive shows the separation of ablution facilities for Europeans and non-Europeans (SACHM file D3/1). These are just some examples of the mundane ways in which Apartheid policy impacted society. These examples demonstrate that although museums may consider themselves neutral in terms of the research undertaken, in the larger scope of the way in which they function, they cannot escape the socio-political climate and by that definition cannot be considered neutral institutions.

<sup>29</sup> It must be noted here that the museum's original purpose as outlined in Vollgraaf (1998) was to create an art museum which would include the material culture of indigenous people. This did not materialize and it was only from the 1980s that the SACHM began to display such objects. The museum did include displays on Cape Malays. I am not sure of the reason for this but it could be suggested that I.D du Plesis' work on the Cape Malay culture and his creation of a distinct Malay identity played a role. Cape Malay culture was seen as exotic and worthy of celebration in some ways. See his work: Du Plesis, I. D. 1972. *The Cape Malays: history, religion,*

promoted white culture and at the same time disavowed the histories of other sections of the population.

What does the establishment of the museum indicate? Firstly, the composition of the Board of the SAM clearly shows that the people who pushed for the establishment of a cultural history museum were members of the AB who were driven by the Apartheid dream. Secondly, the opening of the museum on Jan van Riebeeck Day<sup>30</sup> clearly signals an alliance with Apartheid ideology and its version of the nation based on white culture. Lastly, the stated aim of the museum, to show the historical background of those who settled the country (read: white culture) and not the culture of other people in South Africa feeds directly into Apartheid ideology.

The above section has dealt with the creation of the SACHM and the ideology driving its creation. The next section will look at how the museum functioned from its inception in 1965 to the early 1990s to try to understand the role of this museum in South Africa at that time.

### *Classification and the colonial archive*

...the archive [is] not simply a recording of the past, but also something that is shaped by a certain power, a selective power, and shaped by the future, the future anterior. (Derrida, 2002:40)

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*traditions, folk tales: the Malay quarter*. Cape Town: A.A Balkema. This thinking also plays into Apartheid ideology because during Apartheid a race category known as 'coloured' (which included Malay people) was invented by the government and was seen as better than black but not on par with white. Slavery was not represented until the 1990s, although I have found evidence in the archive which details the layout of the SACHM exhibitions which would have included slavery. The proposal was never carried out 'Memorandum on the use of the Old Supreme Court by the S.A Museum' 1964, SACHM Collection. SACHM file D3/1.

<sup>30</sup> To further understand the importance of this move it is essential to know the history of the Jan Van Riebeeck Tercentenary festival which was carried out in 1954 by the NP government in order to create a narrative of the South African nation based on the idea of Jan van Riebeeck as the founder. See Witz, L. 2010. *Apartheid's festival: Contesting South Africa's national pasts*. In this book Witz outlines the difficulties faced in staging this exhibition based on white culture. There was contestation from many South Africans regarding the imagined nation the NP government wished to create.

An archive is a revealing space. It can be approached as spaces for unbiased<sup>31</sup> interpretation. For example, if one were to study a specific object or collection of objects the information gleaned will most likely relate to that specific subject and nothing more. But that is a superficial understanding and use of an archive. Closer investigation of an archive, if we conceive of it as part of a system in an institution (such as a museum), will reveal more. The archive can be thought of as the skeleton of an institution. It is that structure which supports and connects everything in the organism known as the museum. It is the first point of call for the museum when exhibitions are created and when other forms of knowledge are generated. The archive reveals exactly the ideological, social, intellectual, and political circumstances that influenced their creation, which in turn, reveals the guiding principles of the museum. For archives do not emerge spontaneously (although they do seem to come together haphazardly at times), they are carefully constructed spaces structured to represent the specific worldviews of those who are in control of them.

Much of my thinking regarding archive is derived from Foucault and his understanding of what an archive is. He states (and this must be the starting point) that: 'the archive is the first law of that which can be said' (1976: 129). Taking this point further, in the context of colonial archives, Stoler (2002) argues that the archive is the representation of an epistemological landscape. If one views the archive in this way (an epistemological landscape that allows what can be said or interpreted), then the museum's archive should reveal the nature of the museum itself. I do not attempt to go into detail regarding the epistemological landscape here; I am more concerned with the ideological landscape in which the museum functioned.

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<sup>31</sup> Ann Laura Stoler argues in 'Colonial Archives and the arts of governance: on the content of the form' (2002) that the archive is not necessarily neutral and that ideological implications are apparent in them. Here I use the term unbiased to indicate that although there is inherent meaning embedded in the creation of archives, meaning still needs to be made by the researcher.

No archive is neutral and by extension no museum is neutral. There are unwritten laws that govern these spaces which are directly linked to the episteme of the era<sup>32</sup>; further the museum (including its archive) are embedded with ideological bias. In South Africa the creation of the museum was characterised by colonialism. Colonialism, itself was characterised by a desire for knowledge of the unknown, by way of domination and subjugation. This moment othered the people it came into contact with, and borrowing from Mudimbe (1988), completely transformed our knowledge of Africa. The archive, and by extension the museum, provided ideal grounds for the transformation of South African history.

This section explores the classificatory system at the SAM and later the SACHM, which relate to material culture of human manufacture, to show how the museum created a certain version of South Africa which was linked to the nation as conceived by the NP. It shows how the classificatory system used at the museum and all subsequent work undertaken was so closely linked to the impetrative of not only imperialism, but more importantly, the Apartheid government. The museum, then, became an ideological extension of the state.

As previously stated the collection of the SACHM was born out of the SAM. The early historical collections at the SAM were placed in the Antiquities Register under an array of heading such as 'exotic antiquities', 'exotic curios', 'exotic implements', and 'colonial antiquities'. From 1855 to 1896 the SAM placed all objects of human manufacture under a general Miscellaneous Collection and in 1896 the Department of Anthropology and Antiquities was formed (Davidson, 1990). The items in that department included objects of Egyptian, Asian and European origin in the antiquities section and objects relating to indigenous people of Southern Africa (such as weapons) as well as human

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<sup>32</sup> For example, one may think of the various disciplines practiced at the museum and how this relates to the larger landscape in which the discipline functions. My thinking regarding this is influenced by Foucault's understanding of the epistemic landscape in the *Archaeology of knowledge* and *the order of things*.



remains<sup>33</sup> in the anthropological section (SAM Antiquities Register, 1899-1935). There was not much work undertaken in this department from 1855 up until 1933 when Margaret Shaw was appointed as the first Ethnologist at the museum. Her work focused mostly on the material culture of indigenous people of Southern Africa as well as some work on the numismatics collection (SAM Annual Reports from 1933-1982; Summers, 1975).

From 1933-1959 (before the new historical register was created) the historical collections at the SAM were placed under numerous headings such as 'Miscellaneous Antiquities' (SAM, 1942) and 'Exotic Antiquities' (SAM, 1955). In 1958 exotic antiquities and South African history were grouped together under the Department of Anthropology. This was done because in the view of the SAM these two subjects would be better placed under the care of a historian, which was the hope of the museum as these subjects were not within the field of any one at the SAM (SAM, 1958). However, the classical archaeology collection was excluded from the newly formed History Department (SAM, 1959:6). When the transfer register was created in 1959 the objects of cultural history relating to South African colonial history, exotic antiquities and classical archaeology were placed in the register under no formal headings. It seems the objects were ordered according to the type of material or the place it came from. As Davison notes:

In practice the research that was undertaken at the Cultural History Museum tended to be most closely related to diffusionism. The concern was to trace the history of certain artefacts and cultural styles to their countries of origin...there was no separation of departments and only the numismatics collection had a separate register....The other collections, with the exception of the Classical and Oriental antiquities, weaponry, and furniture, were later classified according to materials – ceramics, textiles and metals. (1990:161-2)

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<sup>33</sup> The SAM has a long history of trade in human remains. For detailed analysis of the SAM and other museum's trade in human remains see Lessagick, M., Rassool. C. 2000 *Skeletons in the Cupboard: South African Museums and the trade in human remains 1907-1917*. The museum has, since 1996, attempted to repatriate the remains to the communities affected.

The creation of the SACHM and more importantly, the creation of its archive, demonstrate a clear link with the ideas that emerged from the colonial state.<sup>34</sup> Highly influenced by, anthropological methodologies and the idea of ordering the world into exclusive categories that separated colonial subjects from those who wielded power, the idea perpetuated by this new museum was that colonial history was the only kind of history that could be valued as cultural history. This classification left no room for the histories of the many people who inhabited South Africa.

### *Slavery in the archive: the ghost that was there*

I have not yet touched on the issue of slavery at the museum because I wanted to give a more general account of the way in which the museum functioned. Now I will turn specifically to objects relating to slavery and how they were treated in the museum. The SAM had collected objects relating to slavery as early as 1903. It is in this year that the first object relating to slavery can be traced; what is believed to be the slave bell from the Oranjezicht farm in Cape Town, dated 1775. The bell itself spent much of its life at Koopmans de Wet House<sup>35</sup> and presently resides in the collection. Over the years numerous objects were added to the collection: slave certificates, smoking pipes, garments, and the largest collection relating to slavery, the Duminy Collection<sup>36</sup>, which consists of various objects which are presently classified according to their material of manufacture. These include paper works (artworks), textiles (costumes) and other miscellaneous objects. When the SACHM was created all these objects were transferred to the museum. However, no real

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<sup>34</sup> I would like to point out that the ideas of classification were not always set out with the proper know-how when initiated. The case of the SAM's early collection clearly shows this, with names of departments changing often and listings under arbitrary headings. The early archive seems to demonstrate a degree of uncertainty. Stoler points to this in *Along the archival grain*. She states: '...producing rules of classification was unruly and piecemeal at best...grids of intelligibility were fashioned from uncertain knowledges; disquiet and anxieties registered the uncommon sense of events and things; epistemic uncertainties repeatedly unsettled the imperial conceit that all was in order...' (2009:1). However, the common denominator in the SAM and later the SACHM archive shows that the term cultural history could only never be affixed to non-white people.

<sup>35</sup> Koopmans de Wet House is a nineteenth century house museum that celebrates colonial history. Its history also reflects links with slavery but this is barely mentioned in the museum. This is being rectified by the current curator, Lynn Abrahams.

<sup>36</sup> Francois Renier Duminy (1747-1811) was an officer of the VOC and a slave owner. His descendants donated a collection of miscellaneous items to the museum in the 1960s. See Duminy, A. 2005. *Francois Renier Duminy, 1747-1811: French Mariner and South African Pioneer* for his biography.

attention was paid to these objects (no research was done on them, nor were they displayed), their lives were confined to the archive. As Davison notes:

...collections are complex and revealing artefacts of museum practice, as well as fragments of former social milieu. Objects held by museums constitute a material archive not only of preserved pasts but also the concerns that motivated museum practice over time. These concerns can seldom be separated from relations of power and cultural dominance. Museums have often been described as places of collective memory, but selective memory may be a more accurate description (1998: 146).

It was only in the 1990s that some of the objects were included in displays, which severely downplayed the subject of slavery.<sup>37</sup>

#### *Silences in the archive = silences in exhibitions*

Let us briefly turn to the various museums under the SACHM banner and describe their displays.

Firstly, turning to the SACHM; the first published annual report (1976) of the museum (published ten years after the official opening in 1966) describes the displays that were in the museum. Each room had a different theme; they were styled in the European fashion and included displays covering ancient Rome, Egypt and Greece in the archaeology department; the Chinese department included Chinese porcelain; the Oriental room included objects from India, Malaysia and Siam; the Cape Room displayed Cape made furniture; a Dutch room displaying objects of Dutch origin; the Engel Apotheek which served as a reconstruction of a nineteenth century chemist shop; a silver room; a Japanese room; an arms and armour room; a philatelic and numismatics room; a maritime room; a Cape Malay room; a music room; the Talbot room which displayed various objects donated to the SAM by Sir Humphrey Talbot in 1947; and finally in the courtyard the tombstones of Jan van Riebeeck and his wife Maria de la Quellerie. There was no attempt to interpret the displays and they were merely described. As Vollgraaff states:

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<sup>37</sup> I will elaborate more on this point in chapter 4. For now I simply trace the treatment of the objects up until the 1980s before slavery became a topic of critical academic research in South Africa.

Various cultures were placed in isolated units without showing the mutual influences from one culture to the next. The emphasis on the old culture of European tribal lands indicates as Eurocentric approach and a denial of Cape and African heritage (1998:32).

Other museums under the SACHM banner included Koopmans de Wet house which was transferred to the museum in 1964; Groot Constantia<sup>38</sup> and Hoop op Constantia, transferred to the museum in 1969, meant to show life at the farm; Bertram house which was developed as an early nineteenth century English townhouse, transferred to the museum in 1975; Stempastorie dedicated to objects relating to national symbols<sup>39</sup> transferred to the museum in 1977; Bo Kaap Museum transferred in 1978, which was dedicated to the life of a Cape Malay family<sup>40</sup> and the Maritime Museum, displaying artefacts relating to shipping in 1990.<sup>41</sup>

All the museums now under the control of the SACHM attempted to sketch in some aspect of life in South Africa, with special emphasis on Cape Town. Not a single museum displayed anything relating to the history of slavery, although, as mentioned, there was evidence of this in the archive. There are numerous possibilities as to why this was so; perhaps it did not fit within the mandate of the museum, perhaps they had no one specialising in the study of slavery, perhaps they were too aligned with the Apartheid government and the history of slavery disturbed the narrative of Western

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<sup>38</sup> Groot Constantia dates back to 1685 when the land was granted to Simon van der Stel and is the oldest wine farm in the country (Iziko, 2016: online) <http://iziko.org.za/museums/groot-constantia-manor-house>. Also see Van der Merwe, M.1997 *Groot Constantia, 1685-1885: its owners and occupants*.

<sup>39</sup> This was the house in which M.L de Villiers composed Die Stem, the national anthem of Apartheid South Africa (SACHM, 1980: 18)

<sup>40</sup> I.D Du Plessis, who served on the SACHM Board for a number of years and is credited with inventing a Cape Malay identity, was in charge of this museum. See his works: I.D. du Plessis. 1972. *The Cape Malays: history, religion, traditions, folk tales: the Malay quarter*. For a criticism of his work see Jeppie, S. 1989. I.D Du Plessis and the reinvention of the Malay c. 1935-1952.

<sup>41</sup> Interviews with ex-staff members have brought no real clarity as to why these museums were transferred to the SACHM but it has been suggested that this was part of a government wide plan to place all cultural institutions under the appropriate leadership and as the SACHM was the only cultural museum in Cape Town at that time, the museums were transferred to the institution. Matthys van der Merwe, who currently works at the Maritime museum, and who has worked for the SACHM since the 1980s, suggests that this move was done so that the state could have more control over certain cultural institutions (Personal communication, 2016, January 12). Considering the political climate at the time and the influence of the AB in every aspect of South African life this assessment seems appropriate.

civilization which was the basis of the institution. Whatever the reason, it must be noted that the kind of knowledge being produced and disseminated at the SACHM and its satellites related only to the contributions made by Europeans, with a degree of influence from the Far East and Egypt, to South African civilization. In this narrative there was no place for the history of non-white people in South Africa.<sup>42</sup>

### *A museum for which nation?*

The emergence of museums in South African had a direct link with colonisation. As demonstrated, the arrival of the Dutch and later the arrival of the British ushered in a new way to understand the natural resources of the country through collection and exhibition. Leslie Witz argues that the creation of museums in South Africa

...had historic associations with forms and content of expertise that were infused with ideas of racial science, used categories that drew upon and supplied regimes of colonial administration and employed hierarchical classificatory divisions that placed the category of culture, supposedly derived from European settlement, at the apex. (2009: 1).

At the SAM and later the SACHM this was clear not only with the division of these two museums but also in the division of their collections, specifically with the separation of anthropology and cultural history which had, at a stage, been included in the same department. This shift reinforced the idea that cultural history was a product of Europe and was not to be found among the those considered non-white in South Africa. By displaying objects of material culture derived from Europe, Egypt and the East the museum demonstrated that cultural history was a product of specific people, which played into the ideologies of the Apartheid government. As Witz states:

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<sup>42</sup> In an interview with Helene Vollgraaff, she expressed that the neglect of certain histories in the museum was largely due to a neglect within the academy. She stated that because many of the people who came to work at the museum were from Stellenbosch University where an Afrikaner climate was prevalent this impacted on the type of work that was done at the SACHM. She made it clear that no one was particularly pro-apartheid (nor were they obliged to follow state conventions) but the prevailing political and social climate certainly influenced the way in which the museum functioned (Personal communication, 2016, January 13).

central to the functioning of apartheid as it gradually took shape from the late 1940s was the structuring of South Africa as a nation that was supposedly derived from European settlement and that simultaneously was grounded and indigenous. In effect this included all those who, from the 1950s, were racially classified as white and excluded the majority of the population who were then categorised into definable ethnic entities, with separate nationhoods... The category 'history' as it came to be employed in South African museums reproduced the division between the racially bound nation and the ethnically separate 'people'. (2009:9)

The SACHM, whether this is openly admitted or not, expressed an ideological affiliation with a government based on the separation of cultures. The idea of separation was further strengthened when the Tricameral parliament came into effect in 1983, and divided museums into 'general affairs' and 'own affairs'.<sup>43</sup> It was clear from here on that museums were not neutral institutions. The SACHM was classified as a 'white own affairs' museum which clearly demonstrated the nation that it would serve.

### *Concluding remarks*

The formation of the SACHM and its functioning during the Apartheid regime demonstrates that the museum was meant to be a bastion of white culture. The kinds of displays at the museum and the disavowal of other cultures not classified as white reinforced the accepted cultural knowledge of that time held by certain portions of South Africa and the Apartheid government: that black and white were different and did not share a common history. The creation of the SACHM shows a clear link with imperialism where the goal was to carve out a niche for cultural institutions that served the interests of the white population. More importantly, the SACHM promoted and helped to mould white colonial identity as the only valued national identity in South Africa. The history of the SACHM demonstrates that their guiding principles were deeply colonial in nature. The museum was simply a

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<sup>43</sup> Of this classification Vollgraaff (1998:10) states that many staff members were unhappy and opposed this change because they thought the museum collections would be split as the SACHM had collections (such as their Cape Malay collection) that did not relate to white culture. They did not oppose the separation on moral grounds.

reproduction of the kinds of museums observed in Europe and Britain; museums which celebrated colonial conquest.

Further complicating this was the fact that the history of the building in which the SACHM was located was known to those who worked there. However, this history was not acknowledged during the Apartheid regime. This is an important point for the next two chapters where we delve into the ways in which the history of slavery was dealt with in the academy and public consciousness. They will show that the impetus for narrating a history of slavery at the museum was closely linked to the trends within the academy and that this change in approach was largely a result of the shifting political landscape in South Africa.

## Chapter 3: South African historiography and the question of slavery

South African historiography, from its early beginnings in the nineteenth century to the first half the twentieth century, has largely been concerned with histories relating to the economic or political factors influencing the creation of the country. In the nineteenth century these narratives were mostly concerned with the emergence of the South African state and the great men that made it possible. In the twentieth century issues of class, dispossession of land, and other narratives surrounding the turbulent state South Africa found itself in, because of segregationist and later Apartheid policies, became common. In all of this time the history of slavery in South Africa has received very little attention. Although it is common knowledge that Cape Town was a slave colony from the seventeenth century up until 1834, this long history had not been given adequate attention. It is only fairly recently that a more critical and sustained analyses of slavery has emerged both within the academy and in the public arena.

This chapter seeks to understand this relative amnesia when it comes to the history of slavery in South Africa. By looking at South African historiography from the nineteenth century to the present time, it will uncover the dominant topics addressed over this time period, the emergence of sustained scholarship on slavery towards the end of the twentieth century, and the current state of South African historiography

### *Dominant trends in South African historiography*

South African historiography is generally divided into five dominant schools: the settler or colonial school, the British imperialist school, the Afrikaner nationalist school, the liberal school and the revisionist or radical school.



The settler or colonial school was concerned with the civilising mission of colonisation. The pioneer of this tradition was George McCall Theal<sup>44</sup> who introduced the theory of the Cape being vacant when the colonists arrived. His work held negative views of African people and he viewed the British and missionaries as pests. Another writer in this tradition was Edward Cory who wrote six volumes on *The Rise of South Africa between 1910 and 1939* (Visser, 2004:2-3). In his work he showed great respect for the Afrikaners, although the core of his study was the British in the eastern districts. He was not sympathetic to African people and he viewed missionaries as burdensome (much like Theal). In this tradition the history of South Africa was one of differences between the white settlers, with almost no attention paid to the indigenous people. This tradition gave legitimacy to the colonial project (Saunders, 1988: 36-44; Visser, 2004:2-3; Allen, 2008: 11; Bank, 1997: 279).

The British imperialist school was concerned with the expansion of the British Empire and their perceived superiority over the Afrikaners. The subject matter in this tradition was concerned with the British takeover of the Cape Colony from the period after 1795. It included the wars with the Xhosa and the activities of British governors and the British settlers in the eastern frontier districts (Visser, 2004; Allen, 2008). Writers in this tradition included James Chappon's<sup>45</sup>, *Britain's Title in South Africa, or the story of the Cape Colony to the days of the great Trek* (1901), which was expressly anti-Boer and critiqued Theal's representation of British rule in the Colony; Alexander Wilmot's *The History of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope* (1869)<sup>46</sup> and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Great Boer War* (1901).<sup>47</sup>

The Afrikaner nationalist school occurred in two phases. The first was the pre-academic phase which reflected an anti-British imperialist trope. The work focused on the battle between the British and the Afrikaners during the nineteenth century. The Great Trek and the second Anglo-Boer War were

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<sup>44</sup> Theal wrote extensively on South Africa see for example Theal, G. 1964. *History of South Africa*. Cape Town: Struik.

<sup>45</sup> Chappon, J. 1902. *Britain's Title in South Africa, or the story of the Cape Colony to the days of the great Trek*. London: Macmillan.

<sup>46</sup> Wilmot, A. 1869. *The History of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope from its discovery to the year 1819*. Cape Town: J.C.Juta.

<sup>47</sup> Doyle, A.C 1901. *The great Boer war*. London: Smith, Elder & Co.

its main focal points. This became its master narrative (Visser, 2004: 4). Gustav Preller was one of the most significant writers of this period. His only book to focus on a general history of South Africa *Day- Dawn in South Africa* (1938) placed great emphasis on the role of leaders in the Great Trek and was expressly anti-British; it was also anti-black. The aim of his work was to instil a sense of pride in the Afrikaners after their defeat during the second Anglo-Boer War. A high degree of Afrikaner nationalism is expressed in this work.<sup>48</sup>

The academic phase began at Stellenbosch University by two Dutch historians E.C. Godee-Molsbergen and W. Blommaert. They trained a number of historians in the scientific principles of history, some of the historians received part of their training in European countries so there was always a Eurocentric view present in their work. The themes present in their works included military history, the deeds of great figures and politics (Visser, 2004: 4). One of the most prolific and controversial of the Afrikaner tradition was F.A. van Jaarsveld. His works concentrated on the changing dynamics of Afrikaner nationalism. His book *Die ontwaking van die Afrikaanse nasionale bewussyn, 1868-1881*, published in 1957, deals with the emergence of Afrikaner nationalism. His other works *Van van Riebeeck tot Vorster, 1652-1974* (1974) and later the updated version *Van van Riebeeck tot P.W. Botha* (1982) were the standard undergraduate textbooks at the Rand Afrikaner University where he taught. These texts dealt with the social, economic and political aspects of the Afrikaners in the building of the South African nation. They were unique in that they gave attention to the history of relations of black and white (Allen, 2008; Visser, 2004). Van Jaarsveld was critical of the Afrikaner tradition, which he thought to be lacking scientific rationality and purely in service of Afrikaner nationalism (Mouton, 2007: 6). His work offered a more liberal approach to the understanding of South African history and the Afrikaner's place in it. His greatest contribution was on the study of South African historiography. It was he who divided the schools into Afrikaner republican, settler, imperialist and liberal (Visser, 2004: 5).

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<sup>48</sup> Preller also devoted a portion of this book to the subject of slavery, but as to be expected his exploration of slavery was as an institution. He defended the practice of slavery and criticised British emancipation efforts (Allen, 2008: 65)

The liberal school began in the 1920s. The school was concerned with the role of black people in South Africa and was influenced by industrialisation which brought with it new social and economic problems (Visser, 2004: 6). The pioneer of this tradition was W.M. Macmillan, followed by his student C.W. de Kiewiet. Macmillan and de Kiewiet<sup>49</sup> held the view that South African history was regressive because the country had adopted unfortunate race policies. They also held the view that the relations between English and Afrikaners had been given too much attention in historical writing and that the basis of South African history was the relations between black and white (Saunders, 1988: 96). Although these men held more liberal views, they still maintained the old tradition of South Africa being a vacant land prior to colonisation and held paternalistic views towards African people. According to Saunders they were stuck in the white supremacist tradition and did not view African people as people with any agency (Saunders, 1988: 98). Other works in the liberal tradition included the 1969 *Oxford history of South Africa* by anthropologist Monica Wilson and historian Leonard Thompson. This work was inspired by African independence across the continent during the 1950s and 1960s, which brought with it a renewed sense of place for African history. This work offered an Africanist approach to South African history and attempted to show that black people were equally as active as white people in shaping South Africa society, it was also hostile towards Afrikaner nationalism. (Saunders, 1988: 157)

The radical school emerged as a direct result of the *Oxford history* and the increasing black resistance to government (Visser, 2004: 10). The *Oxford history* was criticised by radical historians because they claimed the work failed to interrogate the material conditions that led to inequality.

Another criticism levied against the book was that it paid too much attention to race and in this way

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<sup>49</sup>See their works: Macmillan, W.M. 1919. *The South African Agrarian Problem and its Historical Development*. Johannesburg: Central News and Macmillan; W.M. 1927. *The Cape Colour Question: a historical survey*. London: Faber & Gwyer. and de Kiewiet, C.W. 1937. *The Imperial Factor in South Africa; a Study in Politics and Economics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press ;de Kiewiet, C.W. 1941. *A History of South Africa, Social and Economic*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

buttressed the very issue it attempted to counter (Saunders, 1988:159). This resulted in what Nigel Worden refers to as the 'historiographical revolution' in South Africa (2000:3). This revolution centred on the debate between liberal and radical historians in the South African academy. The debate was defined by the economic implications of apartheid rule. The liberals believed that capitalism played a progressive role in undermining Apartheid, while the radicals held the view that Apartheid benefited directly from capitalism (Stolten, 2007: 15-17). It has been suggested by Belinda Bozzoli and Peter Delius (1990) that the liberal school was highly criticised by the radical left because they failed to transcend the bounds of early liberal history (Macmillan for example). They had not changed their approach in dealing with African history (or rather an African dimension in South African history) instead they merely continued the early liberal trend with more space allocated to the history of African people.

The radical tradition, on the other hand, was influenced by the material conditions of the black working class and was closely connected to labour movements within the country. Ross, Mager and Nasson (2011) identify the early 1950s as the period when a more radical popular kind of history emerged that was closely related to the changing political landscape. By the 1970s this genre of struggle history was expanded to include works linked to the Unity Movement, activist biographies and labour histories. Much of the work was done outside of the country by political exiles.

Radical historians approached history in a different way than their counterparts, the liberals, and their work was closely related to the field of social history that emerged during that same period. A great portion of the work undertaken by radical historians was done on the ground using oral narratives and personal correspondence. Their work served the purpose of bringing the history of the oppressed peoples into the fore.

The Wits History Workshop (WHW), was central to this new trend within South African historiography.

WHW was founded in 1977, a year after the 1976 Soweto uprising, and in tandem with the growing momentum of popular resistance to the apartheid regime. This was history in and for 'struggle', an academic project set on speaking back to power: challenging the official apartheid version, as well as 'liberal' versions, of the past, and making sure that these dissident histories were popularised in dissident publics.' (Posel, 2010:32-3).

The WHW was run by Belinda Bozzoli and first volume to come out of that workshop had a strong emphasis on class. *Labour, townships and protest. Studies in the social history of the Witwatersrand* (1979) focused on African migration to cities and the relationship with the migration and political action (Visser, 20014: 11). The book is concerned with doing social history; that is history at a micro level which reflects the daily realities of ordinary South Africans. The WHW has produced numerous works on the social aspects of South African life and continues to operate in the post-apartheid era.<sup>50</sup>

One of the most popular radical histories to emerge from the new conception of history was *The seed is mine: the life of Kas Maine a South African sharecropper, 1894-1985* by Charles van Onselen (1996). This book was based on years of interviews with Kas Maine and his social and professional circles and presents the life of a man who was struggling in a racially stratified country.<sup>51</sup>

The works produced by radical scholars were significantly different to previous historical works. One could even say that their approach to doing was democratic as they were concerned with allowing other voices to emerge in the South African historical landscape. Certainly, the radical school was more inclusive in its approach.

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<sup>50</sup> See for example the book Brown, J.; et al. 1991. *History from South Africa: alternative visions and practice*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press for an overview of the WHW and some of the histories they produced and their website <https://www.wits.ac.za/history-workshop/publications/> for more recent works.

<sup>51</sup> See Rassool, C. 2010. 'Power, knowledge and the politics of public pasts.' Where Rassool problematises the way in which this history was produced. He claims the Kas Maine was merely inserted into Van Onselen's narrative of resistance as a 'contextual device' and by doing so further silenced him within the academy. He further states that this was the 'ironic consequence of this epic'. In an '...attempt at restoring Kas Maine to the historical record...was the deepening of his subordinate status through being named, categorised and naturalised as marginal...' (83). There are some of the issues historians, especially social historians, face when attempting to speak on behalf of others. This argument is taken up in more detail by Bernard Magubane. 2007. in 'Whose memory – whose history? The illusion of liberal and radical historical debates.'

It must be understood that the debate between liberal and radical historians was a debate that took place in the academy. Although radical histories were being produced outside the academy (the *South African Labour Bulletin*<sup>52</sup> for example) those involved in the debate were seeped in the throes of white hegemony. Bernard Magubane (2007) has been very critical of the debate. To him it amounted to nothing more than an intellectual exercise which silenced the voices of black people. For him the major problem with this period of historical writing is that the black author is not writing, instead his/her history is being written by an outsider (a white person) who does not appreciate the struggles of the black person. For him the debate was 'an effort to retain the substance of white hegemony in South Africa' (2007:261). The issue of black representation in the historical field has been identified by many such as Magubane himself, Stolten (2007) Hamilton, et.al (2010). This has largely been because of the practice of Apartheid's unequal education and the lack of access to resources such as archives and libraries (Magubane, 2007). This is one of the biggest challenges in post-apartheid historiography; one that is yet to be dealt with properly.<sup>53</sup> However, the liberal/radical debate shows us, quite clearly, that history is contested terrain, always subject to criticism and reinterpretation and implicated in power dynamics (much like the museum). As Chakrabarty (1991) has stated the job of the historian should be not only to write history but to use history to critique past practices. This should enable a better understanding of the past by allowing us to gain insight into the material conditions that led to change in the approach to history and the debates surrounding them, as the political situation has always had an impact on the way in which history was practiced.

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<sup>52</sup> The journal was established in 1974 and is still in existence. It covers a range of topics relating to culture, politics, health and many others. See their website <http://www.southafricanlabourbulletin.org.za/>

<sup>53</sup> The current debates and protests at various university campuses are evidence of this. See for example 'Why Africa's professors are afraid of colonial education being dismantled' available: <http://theconversation.com/why-africas-professors-are-afraid-of-colonial-education-being-dismantled-50930>

*The history of slavery in South African historiography: twentieth century writings: Before and during Apartheid*<sup>54</sup>

Historical scholarship on South African slavery has, for the most part, always been present in South African historiography. One of the earliest authoritative histories on the country found in the pages of the *Cambridge History of the British Empire Volume 8*<sup>55</sup> of 1936 addresses the issue of slavery, the 1941 book on South African history by renowned historian Eric Walker also features slavery. Writers such as Macmillan in *The Cape Colour Question: a historical survey* too deal with slavery. However, the manner in which this history is dealt with in each of these books presented a one-sided, distorted history. It is a version of history presented through the viewpoint of the slave-masters. Themes that emerged were slavery as a necessary evil, a labour system that had to be implemented because the indigenous Khoi and San would not oblige the colonists. The traditional theme of slavery at the Cape being mild is repeated by each of these works. None of them deal with the lived experiences of slaves nor do they offer critical analysis of slavery. They are descriptive works at best. In 1950, Victor de Kock published his book *Those in Bondage*. It was the first book to deal exclusively with the subject of slavery, but this work too offered no new insights and repeated much of the tradition of presenting slavery as mild, the slave-masters as kind people, slavery as necessary and had deeply racist overtones. In 1977 Anna Boeseken published her book *Slaves and free blacks at the Cape 1658-1700*. It was an attempt to reconstruct the lives of the slaves but failed in its attempt because it was descriptive rather than analytical and treated slavery as a cultural artefact (Allen, 2008:116)

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<sup>54</sup> I have chosen not to detail the nineteenth century writings here, because, as to be expected, there was not much written nor were the books written actual historical accounts. Few writings by, for example, Mentzel, O.F.1921. *A geographical and topographical description of the cape of good hope*. Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society.; Wright, W. 1969 *Slavery at the Cape of Good Hope*.New York: Negro Universities Press; and works by Theal .G.1964. *History of South Africa* offer some perspectives on slavery. Much of the attitudes present in these works were merely repeated by historians during the twentieth century who drew on these works to create their narratives (except for Wright's work which was not given much attention after publication as it was in the liberal tradition. He was highly critical of the administration at the Cape).

<sup>55</sup> Successive issues of the *Cambridge History of the British Empire* include the 1963 version and the 1975 version which changed its title to the *Cambridge History of Africa*. However, none of these newer versions offered anything new regarding slavery and were more concerned with the achievements of Empire.

The works during this period, which is roughly the late 1920s to late 1970s, have a central feature in common: they struggle to fit the history of slavery into South African historiography. The books dealing with South African history in general tended to gloss over slavery and the books dealing with slavery exclusively tended to deal with it as a relic of the past with no understanding of the effects of that past on contemporary society. One could say that these works created a sanitised version of slavery.

In attempting to understand the relative absence of slavery in South African historiography prior to the 'golden era' of the 1980s and 1990s Greg Cuthbertson (1992) offers three possible explanations. The first is the Africanist approach to South African history that emerged with the *Oxford History of South Africa*. He states that because of this trend, which emphasised Africans as shapers of their world, a narrative regarding slavery which regards the European slavers as shapers of South African society was rejected because 'it smacked of Eurocentrism' (33). The second issue is that African radicals were too concerned with explaining the origins of racial stratification on the frontier so the history of slavery fell to the wayside. The last possible reason he offers is that it was difficult to place the history of slavery (which was seen largely as a product belonging only to the Cape) within the larger narrative structure of the radical school and its historical-materialist analysis (34).

These arguments are convincing. I believe that another issue to consider is the lack of a group identity<sup>56</sup> within the slave community and their later descendants. History, so far as has been explained, seems to be concerned with fostering nationalist (or group) identities and as no such collective identity emerged during the slave period nor after, this may be a reason that this history is viewed as supplementary to a South African national narrative and not central to it. The issue to note is that, although the history of slavery existed in historical consciousness, it never received a great deal of attention in the larger South African historical landscape.

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<sup>56</sup> See Worden, W. 2010. *Slavery in Dutch South Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and Ross, R. 1983. *Cape of torments*. London, Boston, Melbourne, Henley: Routledge on this issue.



### *Shifts in consciousness prior to the demise of Apartheid*

During the late 1970s and the 1980s numerous articles were published by a range of historians on slavery in South Africa. This work provided some insights into Cape slavery through analysis of primary documents. For example, a conference held at UCT in 1989 called *Cape Slavery and after* introduced topics that reflected the contribution of slaves to South African society. The South African journal *Kronos* has steadily been publishing works relating to slavery for many years from well-known Cape slave historians and others. Some examples include works by authors already mentioned in this chapter such as Christopher Saunders and Anna Boeseken and emerging scholars from that period such as Nigel Worden, Robert Ross and Robert Shell. Each of these works deal with a specific topic relating to Cape slavery ranging from working conditions, emancipation and attempts at personal histories.

Two significant books that deal exclusively with the subject of slavery were published during the 1980s. They are *Cape of Torments: slavery and resistance in South Africa* (1983) by Robert Ross and *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* by Nigel Worden (1985). In *Cape of Torments* Ross focuses on the instances of slave resistance by using court documents as a means to understand the reasons for punishment (which was, in this instance, resistance to slavery). He also debunks the romantic view of slavery as being mild at the Cape. *Slavery in Dutch South Africa* by Worden presents a more comprehensive understanding of slavery. An important aspect that stands out in this work is his understanding of South African historiography. Worden states that in general, South African historiography has focused more on industrialisation and when slavery was broached it was often parochial and apologist (1985:2).

Both these works point to an increased awareness of the effects of slavery and its continued legacy in South Africa. These are pioneering works because they attempted to place the history of slavery within the master narrative of South African history. As we shall see later, the 1970s and 1980s and the demise of apartheid led to an expanded South African historiography.

In the early 1990s two significant books emerged dealing with Cape Slavery. The first was *Breaking the chains: slavery and its legacy in the nineteenth century Cape Colony* (1994) edited by Nigel Worden and Clifton Crais. The book offers a number of essays from various scholars studying Cape slavery with an emphasis on the effect of that institution on contemporary society. The issues dealt with in this book range from social hierarchies in slave society (Wayne Dooling), to 'Prize Negroes' and the limited freedom they possessed (Christopher Saunders), to changing identity and the experiences of Mamre residents (Kerry Ward). As a whole, the book emphasises the significance of slavery to the founding of the Cape Colony and South Africa.

Robert Shell is regarded by many in the public and academic realm as the foremost authority on Cape slavery. His 1994 book *Children of Bondage: a social history of the slave society at the Cape of Good Hope 1652-1838* is by far his most well-known work. In this book he uses statistical information to supplement his narrative of slavery at the Cape. He notes that in the previous studies Cape slavery is treated as static. His aim in this book was to demonstrate the evolution of the institution. Going into great detail about the social lives of those bound to the institution (slave and slave owner) he shows that the changes in slavery are central to understanding the changes in society at that time.

This is by no means a comprehensive list of all the works regarding slavery in South Africa. I have merely listed a few that show the changing trends in studying Cape Slavery. During the 1980s and 1990s the studies that emerged tended to focus on what we may term 'microhistories'. Instead of the grand narrative of slavery that emerged in from the 1950s; the 1980s and 1990s saw an approach to the study of slavery that was closely related to the approach taken by radical scholars and their employment of social history methods (Cuthbertson, 1992:27). A greater attempt was made to understand the social and sometimes material aspects of that legacy on society. By the 1990s slavery had become an important topic within the academy and was seen as central to the narrative of South African history by some historians.

### *Slavery in popular consciousness*

The academy expressed a certain neglect when it came to slavery in South African historiography up until the 1980s but this has not meant that this memory was absent in the country. Slavery has always been part of popular consciousness. Freed slaves and their descendants celebrated Emancipation Day on 1 December throughout the nineteenth century (Worden, 2009:24-5). The festival was a celebration of the freedom from slavery and oppression and highlighted the resistance to oppression (South African History Online, 2017). Although it lost popular momentum with the changing political landscape over the years, this can be seen as the first attempt by ordinary people to preserve this memory. However, by the twentieth century, and especially during the Apartheid regime, this memory had been forgotten.<sup>57</sup>

One of the earliest novels to emerge on slavery was *When the slave bell tolled* by V.M Fitzroy in 1970. The book attempted to offer a description of the lives of slaves, but in the end failed to offer a real understanding of slavery because it is written from the viewpoint of the masters. One of South Africa's most prolific writers, Andre Brink, has written a great deal on the subject of slavery. His books *Chain of Voices* (1982), *The rights of desire* (2000) and *Philida* (2012) offer the reader various perspectives on slaves and slavery. Books aimed at children include *The Golden Kris: saga of Dain, slave at the Cape* by M. Cassiem d'Arcy (1988) which tells a romantic story of a prince brought to the Cape as a slave. Other written popular narratives on slavery include the weekly Cape Argus column by Jackie Loos, a regular feature to this day, which deals with various aspects of slave history. Another early popular work on slavery is the music video by Abdullah Ibrahim (a legendary South African jazz musician) 'the brother with perfect timing' (1986) which portrays the arrival of the first slaves on the Amersfoort (Pastor, 1990:53).

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<sup>57</sup> This celebration was to re-emerge in 1996, with the December 1 Movement. See Worden, N. 2009. 'The changing politics of slave heritage in the Western Cape, South Africa'. *The journal of African history*. 50 (1): 23-40 for more on this.

These are just a few examples that demonstrate that slavery is part of collective historical understanding and memory in South Africa. That slavery was a well know part of the country's history, whether expressed in celebratory performances or inscribed in books, shows that it is not only formalised disciplines and institutions that create and maintain certain historical information and memories. Ordinary people are actively involved in preserving the memories that are central to their identity.

As keepers of public memory, museums too should fulfil the role of representing various aspects of our history. However, this has not been the case in South African museums, specifically at Iziko. The history of slavery had effectively been wiped out of the museum's institutional consciousness and only appeared in fragmented form in the middle of the 1990s. This lack of representation can be attributed to the lack of representation in the academy as Iziko has generally relied on academic interpretations of the past to construct their exhibitions. It was only in 2006 that the history of slavery was reflected at Iziko sites. What is curious about the museum is that they were very late to engage with this history in their space, but also that they were very late to employ new strategies when it came to creating exhibitions, such as using social history methodologies or even simply involving the communities they wished to represent. It is not hard to understand why the museum can be thought as a metonym for the state. In all its life it has never challenged the state nor the status quo, nor has it sought alternative visions or practices.<sup>58</sup>

The previous sections demonstrate that historical memory regarding slavery emerged at about the same time, in more sustained form, in the academy and in popular consciousness (with the exception of the museum). It also shows that Apartheid had a crippling effect on the ways in which histories were studied and that resistance to Apartheid brought with it a new way to practice South African history, particularly with reference to slavery. It clearly shows that the practice of history is influenced by the socio-political order.

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<sup>58</sup> All of this will be explore in more detail in the next chapter

*New History: South African historical narratives after Apartheid*

After the demise of Apartheid there was increased focus of the discipline of history. At the governmental level a number of initiatives were established to deal with restructuring the new historical narratives to reflect the new nation. In 2001, then minister of Education Kader Asmal initiated the South African History Project (SAHP). The aim of the SAHP was to create awareness of the importance of history at school and higher education institutions. It aimed to encourage the recording of oral history and create a network of historians, at all levels, to revise and rewrite history textbooks. (Bam, 2005:169-70).

The South African Education Trust (SADET) was established to create grand national narratives for the new nation. It was initially meant to tell the story of the ANC but was later expanded and focused on the 'road to democracy' (Visser, 2004: 17). Various professional historians were contracted for this purpose and one could conclude that this was an attempt to place a certain narrative as central to the narrative of the new nation; the narrative of the fight for freedom.

At the same time professional historians from the academy were interrogating new historical spaces. No longer bound by the narrative of the active struggle for freedom, historians expanded their scope to include issues of health, the environment, gender and heritage. One might term these 'smaller histories' that were not bound by the imperative of the state to narrate the history of struggle and freedom.

Regarding slavery the narratives that emerged seemed to continue the pattern of writing of the 1980s and 1990s. Most of them look at specific issues pertaining to slavery and they continue to unearth various aspects of this buried history. For example, the book by Wayne Dooling *Slavery, emancipation and colonial rule in South Africa* looks at the impact of emancipation on the Cape gentry and how they dealt with this new change. Nigel Worden has continuously been publishing works that deal with a range of issues relating to slavery such as resistance in 'Slave resistance in the

Cape Colony' in the edited volume *Resisting Bondage in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (2007) as well as the edited volume *Trails of slavery* (2005) published by the Van Riebeeck Society. Robert Shell has also been working on slavery and published regularly on the topic until his death in 2015. One of his most accessible works is the compilation CD-ROM *From diaspora to diorama* which looks specifically at the Slave Lodge. It includes works by a number of scholars who have written about the Slave Lodge; from Ockert Geysers's 1958 history of the lodge to more recent studies on museology in the Slave Lodge. This work, which is huge in magnitude, offers an in-depth look at the Slave Lodge's history from its origins up until its present use as a museum.

In official general history books slavery does not fare so well. The most recent authoritative history of South Africa the *Cambridge History of South Africa* in two volumes does almost nothing in the way of offering new perspectives in dealing with slavery. The subject of slavery is left to the first volume which covers the period 'from early times to 1880'. The three chapters<sup>59</sup> that deal with colonial society offer the usual statistical information regarding slavery and no new insights. The book has a definite Africanist approach and tells us more about the indigenous groups in South Africa than it does about slaves or slavery, it reads like an updated version of the liberal *Oxford History*. Other general histories that were published after Apartheid include the updated versions of *A history of South Africa* (2014) by Leonard Thompson and *South Africa: a modern history* (2000) by Rodney Davenport and Christopher Saunders. Neither of these books deal with slavery in any meaningful way; they offer nothing new and are more concerned to show how South Africa has progressed from colonial society to democracy. It seems that general historical publications of South Africa still struggle to adequately deal with the history of slavery as an important part of South Africa's history.

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<sup>59</sup> They are 'Khoesan and immigrants: the emergence of colonial society in the Cape, 1500-1800' by Robert Ross; 'Turbulent times: political transformations in the North and East, 1760s-1830s' by John Wright and 'From slave economy to settler capitalism: the cape colony and its extensions, 1800-1854' by Martin Legassick and Robert Ross. An exception to this book is the last chapter by Paul Landau 'Transformations in consciousness' which tries to think through the results of the mixing of various cultures that came to be in South Africa (including slaves) and offers a social and cultural understanding of history as opposed to the politics and economics of the other chapters (Gordon, G. 2010: 533).

### *Slavery beyond the academy*

Another way to look at slavery and its legacy has been through the lens of identity politics. In the writing of historians such as Jackie Loos, Robert van der Ross and Alan Mountain the issue of identity, recapturing a neglected past and instilling pride in that past are explored. In *Up from slavery* (2005) Van der Ross offers a history of slavery using secondary sources. His main focus is on the Malay slaves as his book is concerned with fostering a sense of pride within the coloured community. His book attempts to place the legacy of slavery within the contemporary purview and is a clear demonstration of what he perceives to be a neglect of acknowledgement in the coloured community.

In *Echoes of Slavery* Jackie Loos (2004) relays the stories of slaves in the last thirty years of slavery. She deals with the sexual exploitation of women and resistance to slavery, amongst other things. Again in this book, as with van der Ross, Loos notes the contemporary relevance slavery has in society and also acknowledges that this past has been largely neglected in the public's minds as a result of Apartheid. For her it is essential that this past be remembered, not just as a labour institution but also as a story of the people who lived through this.

In *Unsung heritage* (2004) Alan Mountain offers a an overview of slavery, then he moves on to discuss the many ways slaves have left their imprint on South African life. In the last part of the highly illustrated book Mountain canvases the farms of the Western Cape in attempt to show what he perceives to be the legacy of slavery on the farms.

Slavery has also been explored in films such as *Slavery of love* (1999) by John Badenhorst which focuses on the relationship between Malay slaves and Dutch settlers (Herbstein, n.d.online) and the documentary *The commander's slaves: a different kind of landed gentry* (2000) by Ramola Naidoo which tells the story of five female slaves and how they acquired wealth once manumitted (Gqola, 2007).

The books by Loos, van der Ross and Mountain are all aimed at the larger public and could be considered public history books. These books and previously mentioned novels and films all point to an increased awareness amongst public intellectuals for the need to have this history popularised so that it becomes part of our collective consciousness as South African citizens. These works show, to some degree, that the history of slavery has been solidified in popular South African historical memory.

### *Heritage and history*

Heritage studies have become increasingly popular in South Africa. In the academy heritage studies have soared over the last fifteen years. It has been identified as an avenue outside of the discipline of history, but still related to that discipline, in which the past can be understood. However, during the early years of democracy this was not well received in some academic circles. The biggest critic of heritage as a form of history was Jane Carruthers (1998) who argued that heritage was a lesser form of history and was not as reliable because it did not meet the same requirements as the discipline of history. According to Carruthers, heritage was prone to fancy, myth making and invention (much in the same way that David Lowenthal views heritage) (Rassool, 2000: 4). However, not everyone saw the rise of heritage<sup>60</sup> in the pessimistic light. The historians John Wright and Tim Nuttall challenged that heritage could be useful to historians because it would open up new ways for historians to engage with history (Rassool,2000).

Indeed this has been the case. At the governmental level it was recognised that heritage was important for understating the various historical strands of the past, but also, and more importantly, within the mandate of the new ruling party and its task of nation building, heritage was viewed as that space in which the nation would come together in harmony. Various projects were undertaken by the state (such as the Legacy Projects constituted by the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and

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<sup>60</sup> I borrow this phrase from Rassool, C. 2000. 'The rise of heritage and the reconstitution of history in South Africa' *Kronos*. 26: 1-21.



Technology), new museums emerged and old ones were transformed. The heritage of slavery has been seen as fundamental to the new political dispensation. Freedom Park in Pretoria is seen as one of the most important sites relating to South African heritage and includes a monument to slavery and the new national heritage legislation is the first to include slavery an important component of South African national heritage.<sup>61</sup>

Popular projects include a reflection centre on the South African-Thai slave connection by public historian Patric Tariq Mellet. He also has a website dedicated to early Cape life and slavery.<sup>62</sup> Lucy Campbell, a heritage activist, regularly conducts tours around the Western Cape with a specific emphasis on slavery and Khoi heritage and various farms around the Western Cape such as Solms Delta and Vergelegen have installed exhibitions on site to acknowledge the role slavery played in the establishment of South Africa. It is clear, at the present time, that the history of slavery is a dominant topic in South African historical consciousness.

It could be argued that heritage has overshadowed history as the dominant mode to engage with the past. This might be because it is more accessible (in form and content), it is more engaging (because it uses visuals) and perhaps because heritage sites have been open sites of contestation where stakeholders are given the opportunity to engage practically with their history and have themselves represented on their terms (in the best cases, this is not true for all sites). What has become clear in South Africa is that the heritage industry has become important in the public sphere and needs to be seriously studied if one maintains, as the state does, that heritage is meant to promote social cohesion. In this regard, state-aided institutions such as the Iziko body of museums are important because they 'give material form to authorized versions of the past, which in time become institutionalized as public memory' (Baines, 2007:177).

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<sup>61</sup> National Heritage Resources Act no. 25 of 1999.

<sup>62</sup> See Mellet, P. n.d. *Cape Slavery heritage Siam healing Bloubergstrand Cape Town*. Available: <http://www.asirawanshh.com/SA-THAI-Heritage/> and Mellet, P. 2016. *Camissa people: Cape slavery and indigene heritage*. Available <https://camissapeople.wordpress.com/>

However, this is not to say that heritage has displaced history. Heritage is invariably dependent on history. Whether it is academic history used at heritage sites (this is most common in state-aided institutions) or oral history employed, more commonly at local (community) heritage sites. Heritage and history must be seen as complementary to one another. Within this view, I argue that the landscape of history has been opened to reach beyond the confines of the discipline of history in the academy. It must be remembered that 'history is not confined to one institutional space nor to one type of methodology.' (Jeppie, 2005: 2)

### *Concluding remarks*

South African historiography has largely been concerned with nationalist narratives which were tied to the goals of the state; from early times to the present with interspersions of 'radical' types of histories. In the current historical landscape both these interpretations of the past are prevalent.

We may conclude by saying that history (in its early formation) was not concerned with telling the full story of the country but rather with narrating a story which served the interests of those in power. In the present time we might say the same is true. South African history is still used as a tool to serve the state. Even with the new political dispensation the trend of celebrating certain individuals or groups of individuals, such as the ANC, has continued. However, the radical tradition has had a democratising effect on the way history is understood and practiced by allowing us to engage with histories from those who are not in power. If anything, the historiography of South Africa shows us that history is contested terrain, where competing narratives are found.

This chapter has sought to demonstrate the changing nature of the history of slavery in South African historiography; from a neglected subject to one that has been solidified in South African historiography and public consciousness. It shows the different ways in which the history of slavery has been worked into historical memory by those more closely aligned with the state's agenda and by those who are not and demonstrates that the history of slavery is alive in South Africa with

multiple ways to engage with this history and heritage. Most importantly this chapter has shown that history, particularly in the form of heritage, is important to an understanding of the nation and has the power to contribute to nation building.

## Chapter 4: Iziko Museums, nation building and transformation

This chapter seeks to understand the role of Iziko Museums in contemporary South Africa by looking at the museum's social history sites and their representation of slavery. The first point of inquiry is thinking about what the South African nation is and the national agenda regarding nation building. Secondly, it will look at whether it is possible to state that Iziko museums contribute to nation building as a state subsidised institution, by looking at how they have dealt with change after democracy was achieved. Lastly, it considers what the museum could potentially be in South Africa.

### *Theorising the South African nation*

The advent of democracy in South Africa brought with it a new way to think about what the South African nation is. The ANC, as the ruling party in the country, has been at pains to redefine the nation based on the equality of all citizens. The first attempt to narrate the new nation and promote nation building came about in 1996 with the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Set up as a public hearing in terms of the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act, No. 34 of 1995, the TRC allowed victims and perpetrators of Apartheid to give testimony. The TRC was premised on the notion of forgiveness whereby the victims of the atrocities of Apartheid were told to forgive the perpetrators based on their testimonies. Although this process has many flaws, mainly because of the lack of accountability from white South Africans, the TRC is seen as an important step in the transition to justice and democracy (South African History Online, 2011). The TRC did help with the transition into a new society, but the issues relating to structural violence (which are a product of both colonialism and Apartheid) and which are still experienced in every facet of this country, most notably in the economy, have not been adequately dealt with.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> The increase in student protests at universities across the country (Rhodes Must Fall) and the increase in civic action relating to affordable housing (Reclaim the City) are just two recent examples of the effects of not adequately dealing with the recommendations of the TRC. See their Facebook pages: Rhodes Must Fall. Available: <https://www.facebook.com/RhodesMustFall/?fref=ts> and Reclaim the City. Available: <https://www.facebook.com/ReclaimCT/> The TRC has commonly been referred to as a failed nation building project because the ANC government did not implement most of the recommendations of the final document

In 2000 the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR) was launched as an extension of the TRC 'to achieve justice and reconciliation and self-consciously located itself in post-TRC South Africa to contribute towards nation building.' (Cloete & Kotze, 2009: 31). 2016 saw the twenty year commemoration of the TRC. In commemorating this the IJR hosted numerous dialogues to address current concerns relating to the TRC process and outcomes. In these dialogues many people voiced dissatisfaction with the current status quo, the lack of transformation in the economy and the increasing public instances of racism. All these factors have been identified as divisive and an obstacle to nation building.<sup>64</sup> The IJR is an important organisation because it recognises that nation building is a continuous project and they actively strive towards achieving this goal.

Beyond the TRC, the ANC government has used various conceptual frameworks to promote nation building. The first of these conceptual frameworks was the 'rainbow nation' idea. Coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in its simplest terms it acknowledges the nation as a diverse group of people bound to the territory of South Africa. The rainbow nation thesis asserted that South Africans had a common identity that was made up of different colours (Bundy, 2007: 80). The second conceptual framework was the 'African Renaissance', introduced by Thabo Mbeki as early as 1998. The African renaissance sought to assert an African hegemony in the country. The underlying feature of the African renaissance was to allow the newly liberated majority's interests to be served by the state. (Bundy, 2007: 82). Colin Bundy has pointed out that the first two conceptual frameworks for the new South African nation have failed because

None has provided a coherent, unifying, ideological and political framework which might make possible some shared popular understanding or some meaningful programme of action in the public

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which would have made the transition into our new society easier for those who has been excluded from the economy under Apartheid (see Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report volume 5 for the list of recommendations. available: <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/report/finalreport/Volume5.pdf>

<sup>64</sup> The dialogues held by IJR this year relating to the mentioned issues. See *IJR's first #TRCat20 dialogue event on Cape Town TV: 'Reconciliation and Betrayal' (part 1)* available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beAdfp1PfXk>

sphere. This failure is in large part explicable by the extent to which all... discourses operate with racial identity as an unquestioned given.' (2007:93)

If this is the case, the question that must be posed is what South African identity is before we can understand the purpose of nation building. Ivor Chipkin in *Do South African's exist? Nationalism, democracy and the identity of 'the people'* concludes that there is no true South African identity because there is not one culture, tradition or language that unites the nation, the only marker of a South African identity is geography (2007: 177). On the other hand, Anthony D. Smith argues that national identity is based on a sense of political belonging. He states: '...nations must have a measure of common culture and civic ideology, a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas, that bind the population together in their homeland.' (Smith: 1991: 11). In the absence of one culture, tradition, or language, one may conclude that it is rather one of shared goals and values that constitute the South African nation. The Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) defines the South African nation as:

...a social formation based on the unity and equality of its members consisting of the following shared and recognised attributes: shared origin and history, an internationally recognised territory, a unitary sovereign state, single public education system, nationally recognised languages, nationally recognised cultures, nationally recognised religions, shared values, shared symbols, a shared national consciousness. (DAC, 2013: 2)

One may conclude that South African identity is one that recognises the diversity of the population, gives equal rights to all groups and is bound by their shared values. The only problem with such a notion is the assumption that all South African share the same values. Recent civic action points in the opposite direction.

The third conceptual framework, and it is the moment we live in now, is that of social cohesion. The basic definition of social cohesion is ‘the extent to which a society is coherent, united and functional, providing an environment within which its citizens can flourish.’ (DAC , n.d: i). However, as the DAC document points out, social cohesion is only necessary in a time of crisis (DAC, n.d:ii). The present discourse on social cohesion<sup>65</sup> as a form of nation building draws on the concept of diversity.

Although not explicitly stated in any of the policy documents, the DAC defines social cohesion as the degree in which various communities and individuals enjoy mutually beneficial relationships based on a shared solidarity to the nation. In this way diversity is implied. The DAC further elaborates on the role of social cohesion and nation building stating that social cohesion is done at the micro level (generally community based), while nation building is at the macro level; therefore, it is essential for micro relationships to be developed and maintained in order to facilitate nation building (DAC, 2013: online).<sup>66</sup> Nation building is defined as:

...the process whereby a society with diverse origins, histories, languages, cultures and religions come together within the boundaries of a sovereign state with a unified constitutional and legal dispensation, a national public education system, an integrated national economy, shared symbols and values, as equals, to work towards eradicating the divisions and injustices of the past; to foster unity; and promote a countrywide conscious sense of being proudly South African, committed to the country and open to the continent and the world. (DAC, 2013: 1)

Let us problematize the concepts relating to nation building and social cohesion in a society that now reflects an increasing level of dissatisfaction and increased resistance to the status quo. In South Africa the status quo has changed very little. We still experience a large degree of social stratification premised on race (due to the legacy of both colonialism and Apartheid) interspersed with instances of upward social and economic mobility for those discriminated against by those

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<sup>65</sup> Social cohesion is not new discourse in South Africa, it has just become the slogan of the present government. Its genesis is the advent of democracy.

<sup>66</sup> The museum may be interpreted as a micro level organisation that contributes to social cohesion/nation building.

systems, however this relates to a very small portion of our nation. As stated above in the DAC document social cohesion is only needed in a time of crisis. With the current state of affairs (the dissatisfaction with the ANC due to nepotism and cronyism) we have seen a myriad of civic interventions that oppose the state of affairs, all the while the ruling party maintains its stance on the project of nation building as successfully moving forward.

The concepts relating to nation building such as the rainbow nation, an African renaissance and social cohesion have not yet been able to materially change the lives of the majority<sup>67</sup>. In South Africa there seems to be two sides to the idea of the nation: there is the government rhetoric that aims to promote the myth that South Africa is indeed a cohesive society<sup>68</sup> and there are the forces on the ground that are becoming increasingly vocal about the lack of transformation in the country. What this shows is that the business of nation building is not stable, nor complete. The nation as a concept and all nation building strategies must constantly be re-evaluated so that responses to recreating or managing the nation respond to the socio-political climate of the time. The nation building project is perpetually an incomplete one.

In trying to rebuild the nation social cohesion has been used not only as a theory but also as a practical tool (which includes various processes). In 2012 the DAC hosted the Social Cohesion Summit in which members of the public were invited to discuss issues relating to social cohesion and nation building. One of the key objectives identified, in relation to this study, was the need to promote heritage and culture by establishing new museums and transforming old ones to promote the heritage of all South Africans (Jack, 2015). As an agent of the DAC, national museums such as Iziko must adhere to such agendas. With this understanding in mind the next sections will explore

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<sup>67</sup> The only significant change in the new dispensation has been the outlawing of legal racism, but the founding principles of the systems of both colonialism and Apartheid which discriminated against black people still exist, particularly relating to full integration in the economy.

<sup>68</sup> Afrobarometer surveys suggests that South Africans are experiencing more social cohesion than before 1994, which is true but as this is statistical information it must be used with caution. See their website *Afrobarometer*. 2016. Available: <http://afrobarometer.org/countries/south-africa-0> with all survey results from 2000 to the present.



how Iziko contributes to nation building by looking at the process of transformation undertaken since democracy was achieved.

### *New legislation in the arts, culture and heritage sector*

Before we delve into the real changes that occurred at the museum, it is essential to consider the heritage landscape in South Africa once democracy had been achieved. Prior to democracy there had been numerous discussions regarding the state of the South African arts, culture and heritage. For example, the 1987 South African Museums Association (SAMA) conference was in opposition to the Tricameral Parliament which saw museums divided into 'general affairs' and 'white own affairs'. This interference by the state was seen as a last attempt at the failing Apartheid government to maintain control of state assets (Hall & Kros, 1994: 16). At the conference a declaration was adopted in which all museum professionals advocated for the democratisation of museums in South Africa. In 1990 a Pilot Committee for the Investigation of a National Museum Development Policy, chaired by the Deputy Director of the Department of Education, was established. In 1991 SAMA requested to meet with the Minister of National Education to discuss national museum policy. In the same year the ANC established the Commission on Museums, Monuments and Heraldry (CMMH) to develop policy for cultural institutions in the country. This led to the 1992 Bloemfontein meeting in which both SAMA and the ANC participated (Vollgraaff, 2015: 42). Shortly after the Bloemfontein meeting the National Party (NP) government announced the establishment of the Museums for South Africa (MUSA) Intersectoral Investigation for National Policy Group. The ANC responded to this by disbanding the CMMH and replaced it with the Commission for the Reconstruction and Transformation of the Arts and Culture (CREATE). CREATE saw the MUSA process as undemocratic and a last attempt by the NP to entrench the status quo of those in top positions at museums (Gorsane, 2004:8; Vollgraaff, 2014: 42). This led to a deadlock at the 1994 SAMA conference where both sides were given the opportunity to present their cases. This was followed by the Arts and Culture Task Group (ACTAG) process under the newly appointed Minister of Arts, Culture, Science

and Technology, Dr. Ben Ngubane. This process allowed all policy documents that had come out of previous processes to be reviewed in order to draft new policy guidelines. The result of this was the ACTAG White Paper on Arts and Culture (Gorsane, 2004:9).

The above outline indicates that the South African heritage landscape was highly contested at a professional as well as governmental level and more importantly it indicates the importance of heritage and related institutions to the state. This is because of the influencing nature of museums as recognised by both political parties.

The White Paper<sup>69</sup> has been the leading document to set out guidelines for new and old museums and other cultural institutions and associated practitioners. The policies in the document are in keeping with the ANC's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).<sup>70</sup> One of the most significant points in this document for the present discussion was the restructuring of national museums into two flagship institutions, one in the Western Cape and the other in Gauteng. This resulted in the amalgamation of five national museums and their satellites in Cape Town. The body of museums that make up Iziko became the Southern African Flagship Institution (SFI) in 1999.<sup>71</sup> Further recommendations from the White Paper include an emphasis on intangible heritage which it noted had been neglected, community participation in the arts and culture sector, and other recommendations regarding funding, governance, and current museum classification ('white own' and 'general' affairs) (DACST, 1996). The White Paper also stresses that national museums must

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<sup>69</sup> At the present stage the White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage has been redrafted and is under review as well as a new policy document for national museums. What this will mean for national museums remains to be seen. See Vollgraaff, H. 2015. A vision for museums in South Africa: a review of policy proposals. SAMAB. 37: 41-54 for a critique on the draft national museum policy and the lack of transformation in South African museums in general. And Van Graan, M. 2013. 'Revised White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage: A critique by Mike van Graan' for a critique on the revised white paper in which he states that it serves the interest of the DAC more than it does the arts, culture and heritage sectors. These are important documents because they point to the continued contestation in the South African heritage landscape.

<sup>70</sup> Section 3.4 of the RDP specifically deals with the arts and culture sector and how they have been historically represented under colonialism and Apartheid. The goal of the RDP is to transcend this historical legacy. (ANC 1994. *The Reconstruction and Development Programme*).

<sup>71</sup> This was passed by the Cultural Institutions Act no. 199 of 1998. The Act provides for the establishment of councils for declared cultural institutions that must report to the Minister of Arts and Culture, payment of subsidies to named cultural institutions and the creation on a National Museums Division amongst others. (Cultural Institutions Act, 1998).

align themselves with the 'overall goals of the government.' (DACST, 1996). This includes the promotion of social cohesion across all museum sites and the implementation of policies that support those who had been previously disadvantaged under Apartheid.

National legislation regarding the country's heritage includes the National Heritage Resources Act (NHRA) no. 25 of 1999<sup>72</sup> which sets out the role and duties of SAHRA (South African National Heritage Resources Agency) and the management of the national estate. An important aspect to this new legislation is the recognition of slavery and slave related sites as part of South Africa's cultural heritage (this is the first legislation to do so) and 'living heritage' which includes ritual, oral history and popular memory. This is progressive legislation in that it includes hitherto ignored heritage. (NHRA, 1999: 8; 14). How new policy and legislation has been implemented in the museum is the next point of investigation.

#### *Museum response*

Before the SFI was created under the Cultural Institutions Act, discussions around the future of the museum had been taking place with staff members and community representatives. Issues regarding the relevance of the SACHM in the new South Africa, affirmative action with regards to staff and board members, community participation in museum matters and other issues arose. Although not much came of these meetings they did initiate an environment for change (Vollgraaf, 1998: 15). Museum staff were aware that they could no longer continue to operate as they had under the old political regime. There was an entire climate for change that came both from the state and museum professionals which included changes in the museum's orientation and all policies relating to museological functions. At the core of the new SACHM model was the acknowledgement of the exclusionary nature of the museum and the need to promote diversity in order to facilitate nation building as per the ACTAG White Paper (Vollgraaf, 1998: 22-29).

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<sup>72</sup> Under this legislation all Iziko sites are declared provincial heritage sites which forms part of the national estate, including their objects. See SAHRIS. 2016. Available: <http://sahra.org.za/sahris/> for their database of all heritage assets.

The restructuring of the heritage sector (particularly museums) not only lead to symbolic changes but also a change in the organisational structure of the amalgamated institutions. Iziko is now governed by a Council, appointed for a three year term by the Minister of Arts and Culture. In keeping with the Cultural Institutions Act of 1998, the duties of the council are to formulate policy, care for all property within the institution, raise funds, and other duties. The council in conjunction with the Minister appoints a CEO who oversees all operational duties at Iziko. These include human resources, customer services, finances, institutional advancement, and core functions which include the education and public programmes, natural history collections, social history collections and the art collection.

In 1999 the SFI was born<sup>73</sup> which comprised of the following museums: South African Museum (SAM), South African Cultural History Museum (SACHM), William Fehr Collection, South African National Gallery (SANG), the Michaelis Collection and their satellites.<sup>74</sup> In 2001 the museums became known as Iziko which means hearth in isiXhosa. The name change was chosen to reflect the transformed institution as an African museum of excellence: 'The hearth is traditionally and symbolically the social centre of the home...Iziko was thus envisaged as a space for all South Africans to gather...and share stories and knowledge passed from one generation to the next.' (Iziko, 2015: 6). This name change suggests a symbolic shift in the museum and its focus but what does this mean on a practical level?

One of the most significant changes for the museum in thinking about redressing past practices has been the integration of its social history collections. The separation of the collections of the SAM and SACHM in the 1960s lead to an artificial division between what had been conceived of as cultural history and natural history. Within the old classificatory system anthropology had been classed with

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<sup>73</sup> The amalgamation process was a difficult process. Staff members had to re-apply for their positions and some expectations were not met. This led to some internal conflict in the museum. (Nadjwa Damon, Personal communication, 2016 April 22).

<sup>74</sup> The satellites include Bo Kaap Museum, Groot Constantia Manor, Maritime Centre, Koopmans de Wet House, Bertram House, the Planetarium, Rust en Vreugd and the SAS Somerset.

natural history and cultural history was thought to be made up of colonial or white history exclusively. This division resulted in neither of the museums being able to address the complex relationships that characterise South African social history (Davison, 2005: 101). The integration of all social history collections now means that there is the possibility for an interdisciplinary approach to museum work at all of Iziko's sites (Davison, 2004:101). The social history collection now includes archaeology (which is further divided into pre-colonial and colonial archaeology), indigenous knowledge/ethnography, ancient and classical cultures, ceramics, textiles, furniture, woodworking tools, glass, toys, philately and numismatics, silver, transport, weaponry, and the William Fehr Collection.

The new classificatory system, at best allows curators and educators to draw from all social history collections (the social history collections are conveniently located at the Iziko Social History Centre), but it still shows the deep colonial mentality that the museum finds itself in; there does not seem to be a break with the old classificatory system, it is simply an amalgamation. In addition, the continued division between natural history, social history and art is a problem; in fact, this classification simply reinforces the gap between all Iziko collections. Even more problematic was that in 2016 ethnographic collections were still displayed in the SAM.<sup>75</sup> This issue was addressed in the workshop hosted in 2016 'Re-imagining Iziko museums'.<sup>76</sup> One of the outcomes of conversations around

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<sup>75</sup> It can be regarded as insensitive to continue to display indigenous social history with natural history (this sentiment was expressed at the workshop and in every interview). In 2013 the SAM redesigned the ethnography wing; however it still continues to perpetuate the stereotypes of old. It seems that this will be addressed in the coming year, but I am not too hopeful because much of the changes over the years have been superficial and do not adequately address past practices and the future prospects of the museum in a post-colonial space. Much of the discussion at the workshop was directed at 'quick fixes' in the museum and not at long term plans that address structural and theoretical issues.

<sup>76</sup> I attended this workshop which was held in March 2016. It involved a select group of interested stakeholders. The outcome of this workshop is yet to be seen. It is questionable what the outcome will be or if there will be any change as a similar process was carried out in 2012 and nothing came from this. The full scope of the 2012 project is available in the report from the consultancy firm MTE Studios. Bruton, M.2012. Big Picture heritage consultancy for Iziko Museums of South Africa. MTE Studios. (Unpublished).

creating a more representative museum has been the permanent closure of the ethnography gallery. What will happen in this space and to the objects displayed in the gallery is yet to be seen.<sup>77</sup>

Iziko is currently undergoing a restructuring process and these issues will be addressed. One of the aims of this new restructuring (an on-going process which began in 2012) is to restructure the three disciplines (social history, natural history and art) into one organisational structure because there are still huge gaps in the way in which they operate. It is not immediately clear what this restructure will look like, but it does indicate a changed perception of the museum in the twenty first century.<sup>78</sup>

One of the difficulties lies in transcending the historical legacies of the disciplines and the ways in which they operate in the museum along with getting older staff on board with this change.<sup>79</sup> It is clear that there is a realisation at Iziko that the legacies of the old regime are still a challenge and there is a willingness to change this. However, these changes are ones that will take some time to achieve not only because the business of change at such a large institution is a complex task but also because of the many ways in which the legacies of the old regime still prevail at the museum.

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<sup>77</sup> On 12 September 2017 Iziko and the Institute for Creative Arts facilitated an intervention at the SAM in the ethnography gallery called 'Investigating the colonial crime scene'. This was a symbolic gesture that signalled a shift in museum practice where the theory of decolonisation was stressed in order to bring about change in the museum. It was the last public intervention in that space which is now closed. It is difficult to know what this means to the museum as discussion around the space and the collections in that space have come to a standstill. Staff members are not sure what will happen next. I had the chance to speak to various heritage activists and members of the public on the day and to them this closure amounts to nothing. Some see it as 'too little too late' as they have urged the Iziko to close the display years ago. Others said it is a superficial attempt at redress.

<sup>78</sup> An issue relating to the Iziko archive that needs to be addressed is the acquisition and storage of oral history data. In an interview with Paul Tichmann, an Iziko social history curator, he mentioned that Iziko does not have a formalised oral history collection and that the material relating to oral history has been stored on computers of staff. The question he posed was what would happen to this material once the staff members in possession of this material leave. He did mention that there was discussion about creating a digital archive for the material but nothing has come of this. So something that Iziko must also take cognisance of in the new restructuring is how to deal with its oral history collection. Good practice may be to consider organising their archive by themes that are dealt with at the various museum sites. For example: there exists no archive on slavery. The items relating to slavery are located in various collections across the social history collection, organised by the material it is made from, which makes it difficult for researcher's accessibility. To me this system is somewhat illogical. When organising an archive it is essential to think about accessibility, something Iziko seems to have overlooked.

<sup>79</sup> This point was mentioned in every interview I conducted. Iziko has in its employ many people who worked at the museum during Apartheid and some of them are not eager for change. Many of them still operate as they had during the old political regime. Why this is allowed in the current socio-political landscape has not been addressed as yet.

## *Slavery at Iziko*

As chapter 2 stated, when the SACHM was formed in 1965 the items relating to slavery were moved to this museum but no attention was paid to it. The earliest traces of slavery at the museum appeared in the 1990s. The objects relating to slavery, which seem to have been sporadically interspersed within the old SACHM exhibitions, had very little to say about slavery and seemed more like an attempt to show that the museum was slowly uncovering this long-neglected history in its space.<sup>80</sup>

In 1996 UNESCO approached Wally Serote, then chairman of Parliament's Arts and Culture Committee, to set up a South African chapter to their global Slave Route Project (Eichmann, 2012: 3163).<sup>81</sup> Many stakeholders were involved in the initial meetings and planning of this project but it never took off as there was a lack of clear goals and responsibilities as well as a lack of funding and support from the government (Eichmann, 2012: 3203).<sup>82</sup> Although nothing took off in Cape Town, the amount of planning and involvement by individuals and organisations did result in progress. The SACHM staff were closely involved in this process and one could suggest that this led to the reinvigoration of the SACHM space and its satellites as a space for the history of slavery.<sup>83</sup>

The greatest symbolic change was the renaming of the building on Heritage Day in 1998; the SACHM became the Slave Lodge (SL). On this day a number of events regarding the history of slavery were

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<sup>80</sup> See Cornell, C. 1998. Whatever became of Cape Slavery in Western Cape Museums. *Kronos Journal*. 25:259-279. For the early treatment of slavery at the SACHM and Eichmann, A. 2012. Representing slavery In South Africa: A critical reading of the exhibition "Remembering Slavery" at Iziko's slave lodge. Honours Thesis UWC. In R. Shell. 2012. *From Diaspora to Diorama* for a detailed description of the exhibition.

<sup>81</sup> The slave route project began in 1994 in Benin as a global project to uncover the history of slavery and the slave trade. The goal is to better understand the causes and modalities of slavery, the impact of this cross-cultural institution in order to promote human rights, fight against racism and to create new forms of identity and citizenship (UNESCO, n.d: online).

<sup>82</sup> It has been suggested that the lack of government support was due to the fact that the history of slavery did not fit within the new mandate of nation building as slavery was seen to be shrouded in identity politics. In South Africa it has been argued that slavery is a product of the Western Cape and belongs mostly to the coloured population which has made it difficult to narrate this history as a South African history that extends to all citizens. See Eichmann, A. 'Representing slavery'.

<sup>83</sup> A special meeting held in 1996 shows the plans for the redesign of the SACHM and its satellites to deal with the history of slavery as part of the UNESCO Slave Route Project. SACHM file A6/2/14 'Slave Route Project meeting 12 November 1996'.

carried out in collaboration with the UNESCO Slave Route Project. This symbolic gesture signalled the new direction the museum was taking with this suppressed history. As a site that witnessed the slave experience and as a national museum the SACHM could no longer suppress this history if it wished to be an actor in the task of nation building.

The tangible aspects of this history in the museum exhibition space were slow to arrive. It was only in May 2006 that Iziko officially opened its permanent exhibition on the history of slavery in the SL named 'Remembering Slavery' within the larger theme of the museum 'From human wrongs to human rights'. There were many factors hampering the exhibition such as funding, staff disagreements on the content and form of the exhibition and execution.<sup>84</sup> 'Remembering Slavery' occupies the lower floor of the SL in six galleries, each deals with an aspect of slavery. The permanent exhibition at the SL is positive in that it firmly situates the museum as a site dedicated to the history of slavery. In this way it makes a statement on the significance of slavery to Iziko museums and possibly to the public. We can assert that the history of slavery is present in the consciousness of the museum and by extension will be present in the consciousness of the viewing public. However, the exhibition lacks a sense of what slavery actually was and how it has shaped and affected society. It fails to offer an understanding of what slavery was like as an labour, economic and social institution. It lacks the human element and is rather superficial in its representation. At best the exhibition offers facts about slavery but it does not do enough to tie this to contemporary society. The tone of the exhibition is academic and in this way it is hard for one to relate to anything in the exhibition. In a way the exhibition has artifactualised slavery as a relic of the past. In an interview with Nadjwa Damon, an educator at Iziko, this was mentioned. However, she stated that the exhibition becomes useful as a tool to engage with contemporary issues relating to race, identity and xenophobia, to name a few, in guided tours/lessons. This kind of understanding is not, however, offered to the lone visitor. This is one of the downfalls of the exhibition. It caters more to an

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<sup>84</sup> See Eichmann, A. 'Representing slavery' for detailed description of the delays in the execution of the exhibition. It is not my intention to rehash this history here.



academic sensibility (with its fact based and distant in its approach) than to the average user. As Damon stated in the interview slavery is a living, breathing entity and as such the museum should move in that direction with future exhibitions (Damon, personal communication, 2016 April 22).

The theme 'from human wrongs to human rights' is expressed in other galleries in the museum. Temporary exhibitions have dealt with issues relating to other human rights violations, most notably Apartheid. There have also been a number of temporary exhibitions that deal with slavery held at the lodge since the repurposing of this space such as 'Dis Nag: the Cape's hidden roots in slavery' in 1998, the UNESCO 'Lest We Forget' travelling exhibition in 2004-5, 'Afro- Brazil' in 2008 and 'Ships of Bondage' in 2013. These are just a few examples of exhibitions that deal with slavery which were done in collaboration with Iziko and external partners. This has become an important part of their work in order to fully utilise the platform of the museum. It is not only exhibitions that have helped to situate the SL as a bastion for the history of slavery. There are daily educational programmes for all levels that use the site to tell the story of slavery, there are public programmes for specific commemorative holidays, and regular lectures and collaborations with academics and researchers. So the scope of Iziko's engagement is large and does not begin and end with the exhibitions. However, as exhibitions are the central aspect to the museum and its engagement with the public, they are treated here as the highest aspect of the museum's work. This sentiment was stated in the 'Re-imagining Iziko Museums' workshop in 2016 with the proposal to change existing exhibitions.

The history of slavery can be found throughout Iziko's social history sites. The Bo-Kaap museum, Koopmans de Wet House and Groot Constantia Orientation Centre all offer different angles on this history. They are not the best exhibitions in that they are static and mostly offer statistical and descriptive information. There has been conversation surrounding the improvement of these sites to make them more relevant and reflective of the historical time period we are in as some of these sites can still be interpreted as colonial sites.

It is not only the satellite museums that seem to be colonial in nature, the SL is a complicated and confusing building. The downstairs galleries and a portion of the upstairs galleries deal with the theme of the museum but a large portion of the upstairs galleries still display the colonial exhibitions that were originally on display when the museum opened in 1965, almost unchanged. This is something the SL has been criticised for for a long time but the rebuttal is always that funding hampers the full transformation of the museum. From personal experience and personal communication with current and ex-staff I know this to be true. However, this is not the only factor hampering change; the highly bureaucratic nature of the institution has been identified as another.<sup>85</sup>

#### *The post-Apartheid/postcolonial museum in South Africa*

Iziko museums have seen a range of changes since the early 1990s. Transformation has become a key term in the post-Apartheid landscape for the institution. The issue of redress is an important aspect and priority for transformation. This relates to its operation in terms of employment equity<sup>86</sup>, collections, research and access to all museum services (educational programmes, collections, research, and exhibitions). This last point has become the pivotal focus point for Iziko (Iziko, 2015:11).

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<sup>85</sup> For example: the slow rate of change in exhibitions at Iziko has been attributed to funds. In interviews with staff members it was noted that most of the money allocated to Iziko by the DAC goes to salaries, specifically top management salaries which are high while other staff at the lower levels such as curators, conservators, etc., (the people doing everyday work to make sure the museum functions) are paid much lower salaries. It was suggested that the high salaries paid to top management could be better used to finance everyday museum activities such as educational programmes and new exhibitions. Those who stated this in interviews have asked not to be named.

<sup>86</sup> 'Iziko employs the Employment Equity Strategy that, if Iziko is unable to find a suitable black applicant and a white applicant is found to be the most suitable applicant for a position that is in an occupational level where black males or females are under-represented, then the most suitable white applicant may be appointed, on a fixed term contract (with benefits for a period of no more than three years, on condition that the appointee transfers skills to a black employee' (Iziko, 2015:60). Various interviews did not support this claim. Those who stated this in interviews have asked not to be named.

At the 'Re-imagining Iziko Museums' workshop the issue of transformation was highlighted again. The workshop focused on the three major Iziko sites: the SANG, SL and SAM.<sup>87</sup> The basic argument in the workshop was that permanent museum exhibitions are due for an upgrade in order to attract more people and also to continue with the transformation agenda started in the 1990s. Each museum presented a proposal for their site. Here I focus on the SL.

The proposal indicates that all existing museum exhibitions will be replaced, including the long-standing colonial exhibitions that occupy the second floor. The museum will retain its main theme 'From human wrongs to human rights' as this creates a broader scope for the museum to operate in. The main subject will still be the history of slavery. There are six new conceptual sub-themes that the museum will deal with in addition to creating a reference group in order to allow communities to participate in the knowledge production at Iziko and within their own communities. The first will be an exploration of Mozbiekers at the Cape. The idea is to tell the story of the slaves who came from the East African coast as not enough of this history is represented at the museum or in slave histories for that matter.<sup>88</sup> The second idea is to redevelop a portion of the courtyard into a slave knowledge garden. The proposal suggests that research would be done on the plants slaves used for medicinal, aesthetic and spiritual reasons. It will be a joint project with all Iziko collections including art, natural history and social history. The third proposition is to have an exhibition about the slave school at the slave lodge. It will draw on existing information to examine the training of slaves for crafts specifically designated to slaves and the slaves who taught at the lodge to tell the story of individuals where the information is available. The fourth idea is to tell the story of the building. It aims to trace the emergence and development of the South African political economy from slavery

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<sup>87</sup> The Iziko satellite museums were not included because it is believed that the major sites should be the Iziko's primary concern now.

<sup>88</sup> There are a few works on this history. It has been under-represented in the general narrative of slavery in South Africa. See Partric Harries. 2005 'Making Mozbiekers: History, Memory and the African Diaspora at the Cape', in Benigna Zimba, Edward A. Alpers, Allen F. Isaacman (eds.), *Slave Routes and Oral Tradition in Southeastern Africa*, Maputo.; Shell, S. 2013. From slavery to freedom: the Oromo slave children of Lovedale, prosopography and profiles, DPhil Thesis, UCT.

and colonialism to apartheid. It will look at issues relating to race, power and control through the use of the space from a slave lodge, to the Supreme Court, to the SACHM and finally to its present use as the SL. The fifth issue that will be addressed is slave resistance. Some aspects of the history of the lodge and slave resistance already exist in the SL and the aim of the redevelopment will be to expand on this. The final proposition is to have a memory centre in the lodge (this has been suggested and planned for years ago but never came to fruition). The idea would be to have a space where the public can actively participate by encouraging community participation through research (Tichmann, 2015).

The proposal does not have definite date of implementation but it was suggested that some of the proposed changes should be realised within the next year.<sup>89</sup> The positive aspects of the proposal are that it envisions the museum and the processes by which the museum creates content to be more closely related to the community, which we may suggest contributes to social cohesion. General museum tradition has been (this specifically in the case of the development of the 'Remembering Slavery' exhibition) to be overly reliant on academic interpretations of the past and not on the community's understating of their past. This is probably one of the most important things a museum can do if it wishes to aid in nation building/social cohesion. Museums have largely been seen as exclusive and unwelcoming spaces for most of the public (this was mentioned many times at the workshop). This legacy must be addressed if any of the goals mentioned regarding full transformation are to be achieved.

The proposed changes noted earlier apply only to the exhibition spaces at the museum and it was noted in the workshop that the aim of the changes was to get more 'feet through the door'. At a superficial level it seems that Iziko has transformed, but speaking to staff members and ex-staff members another narrative emerges. It seems that Iziko management understands transformation

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<sup>89</sup> As of September 2017 nothing has happened in this regard.

differently from staff members. When I asked staff members about what transformation is at the museum many agreed that for Iziko (as a bureaucratic structure) transformation means making superficial changes to the institution (such as changing exhibitions, employing more black staff, hosting workshops to make it seem like the museum is continually striving to transform) and not actually changing the institutional culture of the museum that began with its inception, which continues to persist. It was suggested that the museum needs to think beyond transformation and look to decolonise the entire way it functions. This means that Iziko must first begin with the institutional culture that still privileges white workers over black<sup>90</sup>, their top down management structure<sup>91</sup> and rethink their classificatory system. Perhaps then can they can claim to be a transformed institution.

#### *What is an African museum of excellence?*

The current social and political climate has called upon all South Africans to look beyond the rhetoric of transformation and question the structures that remain unchanged after twenty two years of democracy. The same questions apply to Iziko as a state-aided institution. Iziko<sup>92</sup> prides itself on being an African museum of excellence (Iziko, 2015: 6). SAMA defines an African museum as rooted in its local context, a museum that validates local knowledge and local knowledge systems, respects

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<sup>90</sup> In the post-apartheid period the 'sunset clause' was created to ease the transition from Apartheid to democracy for civil servants. Iziko has a system whereby they continue to contribute to the pension and medical aid fees of retired staff (until their deaths), called 'post-retirement benefits'. This is not unique to Iziko; all DAC institutions have this system in place. Interviews with Iziko staff and the CEO showed a difference of opinion regarding this. According to some staff members this applies to white and black staff that worked at the museum before democracy, but there is a discrepancy in the type of medical aid and pension that each race group receives. Other staff members and the CEO claimed this false, while many refused to comment on this. It is clear that this is a contentious topic at Iziko and is viewed in a negative light by many. (Omar, Personal communication, 2016 June 20). Staff members who commented on this have asked not to be named.

<sup>91</sup> Iziko is currently undergoing a restructuring process. My interviews with staff members and the CEO did not bring any clarity as to what this means. The CEO declined to go into detail about the restructuring and staff members stated that they were not consulted on this process; the CEO refuted this claim. It seems that there is a lack of communication across the board at Iziko. This is one of the issues that contributes to the slow rate of transformation because it seems that not everyone understands what the central goal of the institution is (Omar, Personal communication, 2016 June 20). Staff members who commented on this have asked not to be named).

<sup>92</sup> Here I am referring Iziko as an entire institution including all the museums under their banner, because the problems identified relate to the larger institution not just the SL under investigation, and when talking about structural issues it is impossible to speak only of the SL.

traditional intellectual property practices, integrates natural and cultural history and includes living heritage and the spiritual landscape (Vollgraaff, 2015:47). Surely it must mean more than that. It seems that when we talk about transformation in South African museums we tend to talk about the superficial changes the public can see but we do not talk about structural changes within institutions so that they can better provide for the public.

I do believe that Iziko has transformed to a certain extent. There are new exhibitions that speak to neglected history and it has become a space where people can engage and debate on various contemporary issues. I would say that Iziko does contribute to nation building in terms of engaging a diverse range of people within their museums. The public image Iziko presents is certainly positive. However, Iziko fails in terms of addressing the institutional culture that exists and if it truly wants to be regarded as a museum of African excellence this institutional culture must be addressed moving forward. For the museum cannot simply be a space that celebrates diversity, engages in difficult issues, and encourages collaboration across all demographics; it must also be a place that proactively breaks down and does away with colonial/Apartheid institutional habits.<sup>93</sup> As an institution Iziko is still suffering from a heavy colonial hangover.<sup>94</sup>

### *Concluding remarks*

This chapter has sought to give an understanding of the changes that have occurred at Iziko with specific reference to their representation of slavery and the larger South African heritage landscape

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<sup>93</sup> In the course of my research I was denied access to Iziko's institutional records. I requested the records relating to the amalgamation of Iziko and all subsequent council and management meetings relating to the governance and functioning of the museum. This request was repeatedly denied. As a public institution with a responsibility to the public based on transparency, this is very troubling. I was also denied the opportunity to interview the Director of Core Functions Bongani Ndhlovu and the Director of Operations Denise Crous which would have greatly assisted in a better understanding of the museum. The level of non-compliance and secrecy at Iziko does not reflect a democratic and transparent institution. It seems that Iziko, in the way in which it functions, still adheres to some of the institutional habits of the old regime. This is something that was repeatedly mentioned in interviews with staff. Staff who commented on this have asked not to be named.

<sup>94</sup> I borrow this term from Francisco Goya Vega.2015. 'Columbus, how do I get rid of my hangover?' In the volume *Decolonising Museums* by L'Internationale Online.

in the twenty three years since the end of Apartheid. Below I present some issues that need to be addressed for the museum to continue its transformation agenda.

As has been stated by Iziko the museum should inspire people, respect our diversity and promote and conserve our heritage to the benefit of future generations (Iziko, 2015:6). If this is the purpose of the museum we may state that Iziko is on the right path. However, the museum must also address the institutional culture that remains largely unchanged.<sup>95</sup>

There are three issues that need to be addressed at Iziko for transformation to continue. The continued hierarchy at the museum has been identified as a problem. It was noted in every interview that there is no real communication between the Council, top management and staff members. Because of this lack of communication there does not seem to be a consensus on a clear goal for all who work at the museum which was mentioned as a problem in the way of transformation. I would suggest that Iziko think to democratise the way they go about making decisions by implementing a strategy that includes the voices of employees at all levels for the future direction of the museum.

Following on the first point, the lack of community participation presents itself as a problem. Iziko may consider adopting a more aggressive approach when it comes to community engagement. Perhaps focusing more on what knowledge they can receive from the community, rather than always trying to be the bearer of knowledge. The museum should be a place where knowledge is reciprocated; where the public learns from the museum and in turn the museum learns from its

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<sup>95</sup> These issues are not unique to Iziko, most cultural institutions and other state-aided institutions have simply adopted a model of 'business as usual' and have continued with the practices initiated by the old regime. There has not been a proper interrogation of the way in which the museum functions on a structural level, they have simply made adjustments. The current state of affairs suggests that these issues are only now being addressed in the larger South African landscape (here I am thinking about the student protests that call for decolonisation of the university). We are experiencing a paradigm shift in South Africa, and the world as a whole, concerning the ways in which institutions behave and the call to decolonise is one that cannot be ignored.

audience. This will encourage engagement beyond the level of visit-view-leave. I believe that one of the key reasons Iziko's relationship with the public has been slow to improve is because those excluded from the nation in the past (read: all non-white people) still do not feel a sense of belonging or ownership of the museum, it is still largely seen as a bastion of white culture, even though there have been initiatives to change this and Iziko continues to improve its engagement with the public, it is a slow process and past efforts show that it will take a large amount of time to change this perception.<sup>96</sup> However, I do believe that a stronger concerted effort could change this.

Lastly, the sunset clause is a problem because it drains the monetary resources of an institution that desperately needs funds for acquisition, new exhibitions and other museological activities. It allows those who have historically benefited from the apartheid regime to continue to do so to the detriment of the historically disadvantaged. The sunset clause may have been necessary in the immediate post-Apartheid stage to negotiate a peaceful transition into democracy, but in the current landscape there is no place for it because it does not contribute to national building.<sup>97</sup> However, as has been mentioned this is not unique to Iziko, but if Iziko maintains that it strives to be an African museum of excellence they should take steps to challenge apparent status quo.

The above points relate to three key areas that have were identified as the greatest challenges to Iziko during interviews (no doubt there are many more). If Iziko maintains that it strives to be an

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<sup>96</sup> Personal experience shows that Iziko's community participation (by this I mean people who have the power to assist the museum with knowledge generation) extends to a repeated select few people. Attendance at workshops and other events such as exhibition openings, dialogues, etc. always produce the same people and voices. I am not sure for the reason and it may simply be that the public at large is not interested in museums but more work needs to be done by the museum to reach others who have the ability to contribute to knowledge generation at the museum.

<sup>97</sup> Iziko has set a cut-off date as 2004. This means that any new staff members will not receive these benefits. The sunset clause was never meant to be a permanent fixture in South Africa, but what we can see with this is that it is meant to benefit those who have been historically privileged. See Ntlemenza, T. 2012. 'Does South Africa still have room for sunset clauses?' for an analysis and critique of the sunset clause. To him the sunset clauses were more suited to those who benefited from Apartheid and did not help to transform the South African economy enough.



African museum of excellence these are some of the issues that need to be addressed as well as the continued efforts to engage with neglected histories in their everyday museological activities.

In the current socio-political landscape Iziko finds itself in a privileged position to make positive change. The current debates regarding decolonisation and institutional change should be accepted as a welcome challenge by Iziko. At this juncture Iziko has the ability to seriously engage with the issues that have been hampering the transformation of the institution since democracy. If Iziko is truly serious about redress and assisting with social cohesion they will take up this challenge with renewed determination.

## Conclusion: Future Museum

This thesis had attempted to offer an understanding the evolution of social history at Iziko and the role of the museum. By focusing on how cultural history has been conceived of more generally in colonial time periods, then at the SACHM and later the SL. The changed narrative in the museum relating to slavery shows that South African cultural history is no longer viewed as exclusively belonging to a certain portion of the population. The exhibitions on slavery and the new understanding of social history have made it possible to assert that views on cultural history have become more diversified and inclusive after Apartheid. One may conclude that the museum now reflects, in part, the many identities that make up the South African nation.

This thesis has also shown that the museum is closely related to the agenda of the state and is seen by the state as an essential tool for nation building. Museums can rarely, if ever, escape the socio-political climate which gives shape to them.

At the present time the call to decolonise institutions is receiving great attention in the South African public sphere. Decolonisation means not only reorganising exhibitions and public programmes around neglected history; it also means taking a stance against exclusionary practices that still find themselves in our public institutions. This means that museums must constantly strive to unearth historically neglected histories to be more reflective of the society it wishes to represent in addition to thinking about new ways to deal with the legacies of the past relating to institutional practices.

This reflection on museum practice by way of the SL has shown that the museum is largely conceived of as an aide to the state's agenda. In this way the role of the museum has not changed significantly in the post-Apartheid period. Yes, there has been a change in the museum's orientation due to political developments, but it is still thought of as that institution that must reflect the nation. One wonders if, in the twenty first century, the notion of the museum in service of the nation exclusively is relevant. We see that the museum is bound by the guiding principles that came about with its

establishment during the colonial period and not much has been done to transcend the legacy of the museum as an aide to the state and in service of the nation. This is one of the ways in which the museum is deeply rooted in concepts of modernity and coloniality (Tlostanova, 2014:124). A decolonised museum might mean thinking beyond the confines of a theory of the nation and to think about the other ways communities conceive of themselves in this increasingly globalised and transnational world. In South Africa, however, it seems almost unimaginable that this could be achieved because the country is still coming to terms with what it means to be a unified nation after Apartheid.

## Appendix

This is an incomplete list of those interviewed others have asked to remain anonymous.

### **List of people interviewed:**

Esther Esmiol, Iziko Social History Curator. Interviewed 14 January 2016.

Helene Vollgraaff, Heritage Practitioner and ex-SACHM employee. Interviewed 13 January 2016.

Lynn Abrahams, Iziko Social History Curator. Interviewed 25 January 2016.

Matthys van Der Merwe, Iziko Social History Curator. Interviewed 12 January 2016.

Nadjwa Damon, Educator at Iziko. Interviewed 22 April 2016.

Omar Badsha, South African Artist and ex- council member at Iziko. Interviewed 1 June 2016.

Paul Tichmann, Iziko Social History Curator. Interviewed 18 March 2016, 14 April 2016

Riason Naidoo, Curator and ex-director of Iziko SANG. Interviewed 6 May and 7 July 2016.

Rooksana Omar, Iziko CEO. Interviewed 20 June 2016

Shanaaz Galant, Iziko Social History Curator. Interviewed 4 May 2016.

Susan Glannville-Zini, Director of Institutional Advancement. Interviewed 9 June 2016.

Veliswa Baduza, CEO of SAHRA, ex- Director of Operations at Iziko. Interviewed 8 June 2016.

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