

Opting for Silence:
**A history of the history of the Golden
Arrow Bus Services drivers' strike of 1992**

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A minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree of Masters of Arts in Public and Visual
History

Disclaimer:

I, Charlene Houston, declare that **Opting for Silence: A history of the history of the Golden Arrow Bus Services drivers' strike of 1992** is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

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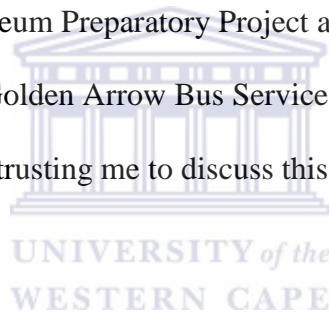
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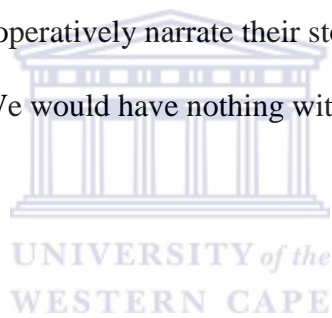
My formal studies have always had to compete for time with my work life. I appreciate the financial support provided through the University of the Western Cape that made full-time study possible for a period. Gratitude also goes to my manager who allowed me time off work to complete this thesis. I was fortunate to have my sister, Lorna Houston, help me to juggle work and the finalisation of the bibliography and formatting when I was running out of time.

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I dedicate this work firstly to my late maternal grandmother, Winifred Le Shauls, at whose feet I got my first lessons in the dynamics of historical production and who taught me that silence can be found in the very act of recovering stories from marginalised voices. Secondly, to my mother and father (Juanita and Robinson Houston), who consistently invest in my learning through always allowing me to question and challenge what is.

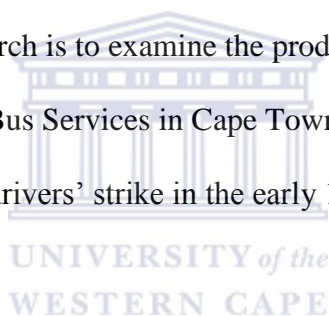
Lastly, I acknowledge all who cooperatively narrate their stories in the interest of contributing to public histories. We would have nothing without you.



ABSTRACT

In 2009 Hosken Consolidated Investments Foundation involved the University of the Western Cape in its efforts to develop a museum related to the Golden Arrow Bus Services company. As part of the Transport Museum Preparatory Project, also referred to as the Preparatory Project, I became aware of a bus drivers' strike in the early 1990s that has significance in the history of the bus company and its workers. I noted that stories of the strike were omitted from company histories and, significantly, from most of the narratives that former employees related about their time at Golden Arrow.

The primary purpose of this research is to examine the production of history and oral history related to Golden Arrow Bus Services in Cape Town, with specific reference to the silences regarding the bus drivers' strike in the early 1990s.



The scope of the study is the production of a company history (of Golden Arrow Bus Services) to date and an analysis of how the strike of 1992 has been recorded. To understand what has happened to the histories of the bus drivers' strike, this study includes questions about how people relate their stories, what is silenced, what is included and what is excluded, by whom and why. In the course of the study, a history of the strike will emerge. However the emphasis is on the politics of historical production and what the exclusion of the strike means.

I write in the first person to incorporate my encounters of silence as part of the Transport Museum Preparatory Project team and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

...we must be aware of the fact that those being interviewed know and understand much more about their lives than do the interviewers who are there to learn, that what we search for are the rules governing the lives of those we speak to.¹

Hosken Consolidated Investments Limited (HCI) is a black empowerment investment holding company which is listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. HCI's major shareholder is the SACTWU Investment Group, the investment vehicle for the South African Clothing and Textile Workers Union (SACTWU). The company's two most senior executives (Marcel Golding and John Copelyn) were senior SACTWU trade unionists. The group is involved in diverse investments in hotel and leisure, interactive gaming, media and broadcasting, transport, mining, clothing and property.²

Golden Arrow Bus Services (GABS) is wholly owned by HCI. It currently operates 1,035 buses during peak hours, serving 1,300 routes across metropolitan Cape Town. GABS and its predecessors under various company names³ have provided public transport services in Cape Town for 152 years.⁴ HCI acquired the bus company in July 2004. HCI acquired the bus company in July 2004 and confirmed that the management would not be replaced. HCI chief executive officer, Marcel Golding, said that the company "looked forward to playing a meaningful role in the Western

¹ Ronald Grele, *Envelopes of Sound* (Chicago: Precedent Publishing, 1985), 268.

² 'HCI Foundation' <http://www.hci.co.za/hci-foundation>, accessed on 20 October 2013.

³ Although Golden Arrow took over the larger Cape Electric Tramways company in 1956, the bus service in Cape Town continued to be known as 'City Tramways' or 'Tramways' after the original tramways operator until 1992.

⁴ 'Our Company: Golden Arrow Bus Services', <http://gabs.co.za/our-company>, accessed on 20 October 2013.

Cape transport industry into the future".⁵ In 2005 HCI commissioned its social investment arm, HCI Foundation, to establish a transport museum based on this history.

The HCI Foundation is an independent trust, whose trustees include members of the HCI Board of Directors and employees from subsidiary companies. The Chief Executive Officer of the Foundation at the time of the museum project, Virginia Engel, also hailed from the trade union movement. The HCI Foundation inherited and absorbed the Golden Arrow Foundation (GAF) – the social awareness programme of the Golden Arrow Bus Services Company. HCI Foundation contributes to social development on behalf of the group's companies and also provides opportunities for upliftment among employees. Current areas of activity include bursaries, HIV/AIDS, youth development and environmental issues.⁶ The establishment of a transport museum was decided upon by the HCI Board in 2005 to "preserve the sector's heritage" and to bring reconciliation since "many people have suffered the indignities of the old apartheid transport system".⁷

The Foundation has acquired a number of artefacts from retired bus drivers and embarked on projects to capture the history (these are discussed in Chapter 2). HCI Foundation involved the University of the Western Cape History Department in this initiative in 2009, and a Transport Museum Preparatory Project was set up. The project's aim is to "create and deepen a field of knowledge around the question of

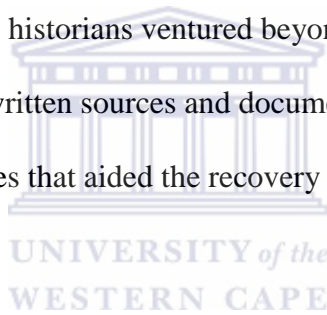
⁵ 'HCI purchase of golden arrow finalised' <http://www.hci.co.za/transport/hci-purchase-of-golden-arrow-finalised/>, accessed on 20 October 2013.

⁶ 'HCI Foundation' <http://www.hci.co.za/hci-foundation/>, accessed on 20 October 2013.

⁷ 'Transport museum on cards', www.hci.co.za/corporate-social-investment/transport-museum-on-cards, accessed on 20 October 2013.

buses, transport/mobility and the city" and "generate ideas as to how this may be translated into a cutting edge, world-class museum".⁸ As a member of the project team in 2010 my role was to investigate the oral histories that had been compiled through the HCI Foundation and also to begin a process of interviewing former employees, or 'pensioners' as they were called.

The custodian of the museum project, HCI Foundation, had viewed oral history as the central component of this museum. Since the emergence of the social history movement in South Africa in the 1980s it has been common practice to adopt oral history interviews as a methodology to recover marginalised or lost stories and to surface voices from below. Social historians ventured beyond the traditional mode of historical production centred on written sources and documentary archives to the use of oral history and other techniques that aided the recovery of the history of the oppressed classes.⁹



In preparation for my work, I revisited some oral history interviews that the HCI Foundation had commissioned in 2006, several years prior to UWC coming on board. A researcher (Carohn Cornell) had been introduced at a social gathering for pensioners hosted by the Foundation. Pensioners were asked to volunteer to be interviewed as part of the development of a museum.

⁸ Nicky Rousseau, Museum Preparatory Project, University of the Western Cape, Third & Final Report to HCI Foundation (November 2010), 1.

⁹ See C van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine a South African Sharecropper* (Cape Town, David Philip, 1996); and B Nasson, *Abraham Esau's War: A Black South African War in the Cape, 1899-1902* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003) among others.

Six life history interviews were conducted among former employees (including one with a group of three people) before the project was halted. The narrators included one of those pensioners who volunteered, another pensioner and his wife (John and Leah Stevens)¹⁰ and others who the researcher had sourced through her own network (Cornell also conducted a seventh interview with someone she referred to as a transport enthusiast, at the request of HCI Foundation. I did not have access to the interview recording or transcripts). Cornell was aware that workers might have had different experiences in the company based on their racial classification and also their involvement in struggles for improved working conditions. She therefore saw it as necessary to include diverse voices in the oral history project.¹¹ The decision to expand the process turned out to be significant in terms of the stories that emerged.

The expanded interviews she conducted included one with a former 'black' employee who was a unionist (Thami Thabatha), one with three 'coloured' unionists (two were still employed with the company) and an interview with a former 'coloured' employee and unionist (Carl Stewart).¹² An interview was also conducted with a former Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU)¹³ official (Tom Dunkley) who had been crucial to the development of what he described as a "revolutionary union"

¹⁰ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: The following footnote appears in the researcher's transcription of this interview: This interview was prompted by Mrs Stevens' speech at the pensioners' party about the role of wives – and the goodness of the Company. The interview was actually booked with Mrs Stevens – I thought she was a widow, only to find Mr Stevens at home.

¹¹ C. Houston, telephone conversation with Carohn Cornell, Cape Town, 4 October 2010.

¹² The notion of race groups is a social construct. Most of GABS history falls within the colonial and apartheid eras when racial segregation was applied through various means. Racial classification determined all aspects of life, including work life. Therefore, it has to be considered in facilitating an understanding of the peculiar experiences of transport workers under apartheid rule. Terminology used in this era to classify people into race groups is used throughout this study to elucidate the narrative. Here 'black' refers to a person who may have been racially designated during early apartheid as 'Bantu' and 'coloured' refers to the racial designation assigned to people with a mixed ethnic ancestry or slave ancestry or indigenous Khoisan ancestry.

¹³ COSATU is an umbrella body of 33 trade unions established in 1985 as a result of unity talks between unions explicitly opposed to apartheid and committed to a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa. <http://www.cosatu.org.za>, accessed on 21 October 2013.

among the workers toward the end of the 1980s.¹⁴ Between them a different narrative emerged to that of the pensioners. They constructed labour history narratives that included accounts of a devastating strike in the early 1990s.

Broadly speaking, two central narratives pertaining to GABS history emerged from these interviews. The first emerged from pensioners (mainly Mike and Leah Stevens) who, through their ongoing contact with the Foundation, had been invited to participate in the oral history project. Leah Stevens made the following comments in the interview:

...nobody actually thanked the company for the innings that they had – they had a good innings. And one of them was... well, I will say the clothes. You know, they got clothes for free. It saved them a lot of money because Tramways even thought of giving them shoes! And they never had to buy clothing. There was hardly any sense for us to mend shirts because every three months they used to get a new issue of shirts, and every six months they got a new uniform. And then it was that Christmas party! Oh, it was the best. You know, the children looked forwards so much to those Christmas parties because there was everything. There were pony rides besides the eatables. There were cakes and sweets and ice cream. And this gentleman... what was his name... he was always there.¹⁵

Her husband responded to questions about implementing segregation on the buses by saying that everyone knew what the rules were so there were no incidents and also commented on the hesitance among ‘white’¹⁶ drivers to accept ‘coloured’ drivers. He also recalled the time when ‘coloured’ drivers did not earn equal wages with their

¹⁴ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Tom Dunkley, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 3 May 2006, HCI Foundation.

¹⁵ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Leah Stevens, extract from oral history transcription, interviewed by Carohn Cornell, 30 March 2006, HCI Foundation. She is referring to Issy Pasvolsky, a former managing director.

¹⁶ This term is used to denote a presumed group of people who were classified as ‘white’ under apartheid legislation.

‘white’ counterparts. He expressed gratitude to the company for looking after them for all the years he was employed.

A second thread emerged from stories of those who were not part of the HCI Foundation pensioners’ network. They could be referred to as trade union leaders and through their interview processes a history of two trade unions emerged. The Transport and Omnibus Workers’ Union (TOWU) started in 1918. The union was in a closed shop agreement with management which meant that no other union was allowed to organise workers in the bus company and all workers were compelled to become members. Typical of other unions in the early 20th century (often described by union activists as 'sweetheart unions', it worked more in cooperation with management than towards building solidarity among workers to improve their lot.¹⁷ One union leader described it as follows:

First of all, TOWU was seen... in my opinion... as a company union. This is the company’s union and I don’t want to be ... to a company. They are racist. There are no benefits in the company. Everything gets dictated to you – and that didn’t go down well. And they were supportive of the apartheid government – the company. They were subsidised by them. And that’s why the revolt was against the company, but primarily against the government.¹⁸

TOWU continued to enjoy a monopoly in the bus company until the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) was established in 1986. The establishment of the TGWU (today known as SATAWU – South African Transport and Allied Workers Union –the result of a merger of small unions in 2000) triggered a turn in union

¹⁷ A sweetheart union is one where the status quo between management/owners and workers is maintained through management influence over its leaders in exchange for favour. Workers benefit through a system of patronage rather than through recognition of labour rights.

¹⁸ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Barry Links, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed with two others by Carohn Cornell, 3 May 2006, HCI Foundation.

politics in the transport sector toward a more radical transformation agenda that also addressed social issues.¹⁹

...we argued that the future of the bus industry depended on nationalisation of public transport, so politically within the unions, socialism was a very, very powerful political force and regime amongst the workers, and, nationalisation of the public transport system was essential in order to provide safe, reliable and cost effective transport to communities.²⁰

The unions began competing for members. At TOWU's Annual General Meeting in 1989 the outgoing chairperson referred to TGWU in a comment about "raiding unions",²¹ causing division among members. Tom Dunkley recalls that workers realised that,

this was undemocratic, and saw this wasn't really the new unionism that was streaking the country and that workers had no power in TOWU, and who wanted to transform TOWU and battled and battled and realised that the President of TOWU was going to fight at all odds because he was going to lose his shift or his privileges of time off, maybe he didn't have a shift or he had half a shift because of his position and many of those people, a significant core of them became part of Transport and General Workers Union as coloured workers organising together with Xhosa-speaking workers.²²

However, the unions later collaborated and held joint negotiations with the company and also embarked on industrial action together from the early 1990s.

These narrators spoke of their working conditions over the years. These included an increasing number of incidents wherein their personal safety had been compromised.

¹⁹ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: In his interview Tom Dunkley recalls that the union challenged the company on a range of issues from the provision of a safe working environment, the safe passage of commuters to the future of public transport. They argued that public transport should be nationalised, not be profit-driven and that the taxi industry must be integrated into the system.

²⁰ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Tom Dunkley, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 3 May 2006, HCI Foundation.

²¹ Manuscripts and Archives, TOWU: TOWU AGM minutes, 9 April 1989.

²² Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Tom Dunkley, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 3 May 2006, HCI Foundation.

They related how bus drivers (later called ‘One Man Operators’) were the targets of robberies because of the cash they carried, especially on the night shift. They told of how vulnerable drivers were during political protests when buses were stoned and, later, in the feud with the emerging taxi industry, when buses were shot at and drivers were abducted.

They also recounted how the increasing radicalisation of worker politics manifested in the transport industry through the work of the two unions organising in the bus depots. This had led to debates on the structure of the industry, a vision for public transport and strategies and actions to improve working conditions. They put on record a history of a three-month-long strike when they went without pay in order to force GABS to provide bulletproof cabs. In the end, protection measures were put in place but the leaders of the strike were not allowed to return to work. Sixty organisers were effectively dismissed when they were forced to take retrenchment packages. These leaders were blacklisted, making it very difficult for them to find work as drivers thereafter.²³

On 12 May 2010, I had the opportunity to lead an introductory group discussion (herein referred to as the UWC group session or ‘the session’) with more of the pensioners (as opposed to those that had been retrenched) and some senior employees, as part of the Preparatory Project. HCI Foundation arranged and hosted the group session, including transport and a light lunch for the pensioners. At the start of the session, I, as the facilitator, explained the purpose of the discussion as helping the

²³ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Thami Thabatha, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 23 May 2006. Thabatha explains that the strike leaders found that other companies in the transport industry turned them away and none of them found work as drivers.

team that was part of the preparatory work towards a transport museum. I led the group in reading the UWC release form before they all signed it, granting permission for the discussion to be used in the future, possibly for display or broadcast purposes. I also requested specific permission to record the session on video, which was unanimously approved. Finally, I explained that I would prefer to conduct the session as a conversation, not a question and answer session. People were encouraged to speak in English or Afrikaans, depending on their preference. Most of the discussion took place in English.

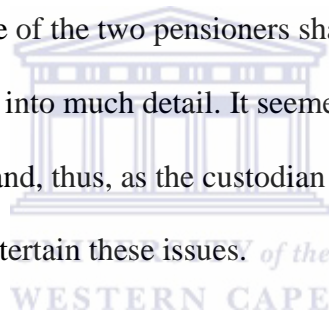
The narrators, invited by HCI Foundation, were also from the group that had attended social gatherings hosted by the Foundation. There were seven people present, at the invitation of HCI Foundation, and there were similarities with the pensioners profiled in the oral history interviews. There were five pensioners among these, two of whom brought their wives along. There were also two senior GABS employees, one of whom is a female. There were no 'white'²⁴ or 'black' pensioners present and those present had last worked as inspectors. One of them was a founder member of TOWU, another was a shop steward (still employed) in the same union. The group included the oldest living former employee, who had previously been interviewed by Carohn Cornell. An obvious difference between the oral history interviews and the focus group was that the informants were in a group conversation this time.

They reinforced a narrative of pride in the company notwithstanding some brief mention of challenges they had faced. Their narrative entailed a nostalgic story of the

²⁴ This term is used to denote a presumed group of people who were classified as 'white' under apartheid legislation.

pioneering days as the first ‘coloured’ bus drivers in a job that was the preserve of men classified as ‘white’ (the relatively privileged racial group under Apartheid rule). Given the racial politics at the time, the pensioners interpreted their appointment as a milestone.²⁵ Furthermore, they felt men in uniform enjoyed more respect in society and they were proud that they had provided an important service to the public. They had served the company long and with loyalty before retiring.

Issues such as the dangers of the job or implementing apartheid on buses were only discussed when I specifically prompted the discussion and the responses were brief and not as descriptive as the rest of the dialogue. Similarly, in the interviews conducted by Carohn Cornell, one of the two pensioners shared something of these issues when asked, but did not go into much detail. It seemed the HCI Foundation’s network excluded certain voices and, thus, as the custodian of the museum project it could be said to be reluctant to entertain these issues.



The Foundation had directed my attention to narrators in its network and encouraged the Project’s contact with them. Thus the Foundation effectively, albeit not explicitly, defined a dominant narrative. Consciously or unconsciously, the pensioners and employees (as opposed to the union activists) shared a silence on matters such as crime and violence, the implementation of apartheid on city buses, the bus boycotts during times of political struggle, the shifts in union politics and the painful strike in which lives were lost.

²⁵ The bus company only began employing ‘coloured’ staff during the 1930s and the numbers of ‘coloured’ staff grew gradually. By 1958 the first ‘black’ staff had been appointed. The first women drivers were employed in 1983.

Repeated absence of the strike in the dominant narrative does not change the fact that it took place and that several narrators did speak about it. What this demands then is recognition of the "collective processes of symbolisation and myth-making" among those interviewed by Carohn Cornell and in the UWC group session.²⁶ While the production of a history of GABS through the experiences of its workers has incorporated forms of oral history over time, it has done so in ways that highlights how oral histories can also be a site for silencing or suppressing history. In this case, association with the strike was negatively reinforced through the forced retrenchment of ringleaders and their subsequent blacklisting.

During the Preparatory Project there was a further attempt to include the voice of the workers in a GABS history. The UWC project leaders prepared a temporary exhibition for the HCI Foundation management board at the end of 2010. The custodians of the museum project chose to remove a video clip from the exhibition, containing extracts from the May meeting that I had video recorded, where a pensioner (also a former chairperson of TOWU) discussed worker issues that the union used to tackle and one of the first women drivers reflected on her experience as a pioneer. The temporary exhibition also did not include any history of the strike and certain components, which were originally included, had to be removed from the exhibition, at the insistence of the HCI Foundation.

Through reviewing existing histories of GABS, this study therefore highlights how the silences that the oral histories produced become part of an 'official discourse'.²⁷ This

²⁶ Alessandro Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History' *History Workshop*, No 12, Autumn 1981, 100.

²⁷ S. Greene, 'Whispers and Silences: Explorations in African Oral History', *Africa Today*, Volume 50, Number 2, (Fall/Winter 2003), 43.

includes a discussion of the way this dominant narrative emerged, through a look at how histories are produced.

In an introductory journal article, Witz and Rassool opine that the production of history is no longer the exclusive domain of academics and that authorship has different configurations. They observe four trends in the making of history: (1) The questioning of the archive as source and its emergence as a site of production; (2) the function of the visual image as more than illustrative but as a narrative itself; (3) the expansion of production sites and producers of history beyond the conventional; and (4) the testing of genre boundaries implicit in the new types of writing. They noted that these trends alluded to a reduced emphasis on viewing sources merely as data. These trends are certainly evident in the making of GABS histories.²⁸

In keeping with the shifting trends described by Witz and Rassool, this work primarily seeks the meanings of the exclusion of the strike history, rather than a narrative of the strike, although a history of the strike will necessarily be included. This study therefore considers oral history as an activity or a process of production, rather than a source, in the making of histories of GABS in anticipation of developing a transport museum. To understand what has happened to the oral histories on the bus drivers' strike, this study raises the questions of how people relate their stories, what is silenced or what is included and what is excluded, by whom and why.²⁹

²⁸ Leslie Witz and Ciraj Rassool, 'Making Histories', *Kronos*: Vol. 34, No. 1, (Nov 2008), 7.

²⁹ Isabel Hofmeyr, 'Reading oral texts: new methodological directions', paper presented at South African Contemporary History Seminar, University of the Western Cape, 3 October 1995, 6.

Issues in the production of history

There is much literature on the discourse of memory and forgetting as aspects of historical production. However, the production of silence in the making of histories appears to be a key issue leading to the exclusion of a history of the strike. David Cohen writes that what people are "called to remember"³⁰ is also a determining factor of the narrative. This directs attention to a more conscious act of recall or exclusion based on various triggers.

In considering the Foundation's actions relating to inclusion or exclusion, Chapter 3 of this study draws on Jacques Depelchin's discussion on the relations between domination and silence and how they influence decisions about what to exclude and include during interviews, and later in displays. It also contemplates Witz and Rassool's concept of "history frictions"³¹ between UWC and HCI Foundation in the creation of the temporary exhibition. History frictions refer to the ongoing disputes in the creation of history requiring "ongoing negotiations where different and competing narratives, claims and priorities come up against each other".³²

The production of oral history narratives

There is no right or wrong way to conduct the oral history production process and there is no authentic, definitive version of the history of GABS. However, different processes will produce different outcomes and the construction of different narratives because the production of history is subjective. Isabel Hofmeyr states it is important to

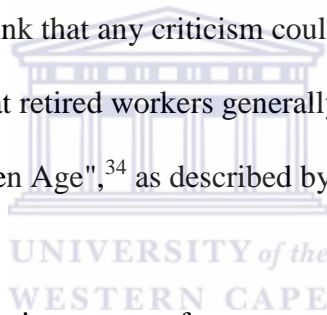
³⁰ D. W. Cohen, *The Combining of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), xiv.

³¹ Witz and Rassool, 'Making Histories', 12.

³² Witz and Rassool, 'Making Histories', 13.

interrogate "the codes and conventions that shape how people speak".³³ This is important for understanding what is being said beyond words or silence.

In the case of the GABS pensioners, there are some who keep in touch and are invited to HCI Foundation functions on occasion. Their transport is arranged and they are treated as guests of honour at these functions. They could perceive this as a privileged position and it is possible that they have made an unspoken assumption that the company would not want them to be critical of it in their reflections. Or, they consider leaving the unpleasanties out as a way to reciprocate the Foundation's hospitality. They remain connected to the company through the pension fund that pays them their pensions and could mistakenly think that any criticism could put their pensions at risk. Another convention at work is that retired workers generally speak of their working life as if "looking back on a Golden Age",³⁴ as described by Carohn Cornell.



In the literature on orality there are important references to the choices made by the narrators regarding what to share and how to say it as they "interpret their own pasts."³⁵ Hofmeyr, for example, notes that *how* people say what they say is of significance and not just what they have to say.³⁶ She cautions that attention should be paid to the fact that the interview is more about what meaning the narrators have since given to events they recall and less about what actually happened.³⁷ Hofmeyr suggests therefore that oral testimony be treated similarly to autobiography or testimony.

³³ Hofmeyr, 'Reading oral texts', 6.

³⁴ C. Houston, telephone conversation with Carohn Cornell, Cape Town, 6 November 2013.

³⁵ R. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound*, 271.

³⁶ Hofmeyr, 'Reading oral texts', 6.

³⁷ Hofmeyr, 'Reading oral texts', 7.

In her work on the siege of Makapansgat, Hofmeyr observed how accounts of defeats vary and, specifically, the way the siege is mentioned (or not mentioned) had to do with the narrator's own perspective of its importance. Hofmeyr describes these as "interregnum narratives".³⁸ She points out three aspects of the oral interview: the interaction that occurs during the interview, the events that are recalled, and the fact that the narrator has changed and the meanings of those recalled events have changed too.

In a critical discussion on the production of history Cohen turns to the story from which his book title, *The Combing of History*, is drawn. It is the story of an Italian woman, Camella Teoli, who hides a scar on her head with the help of her children who comb and tie her hair in a particular way each day. In hiding the scar, she maintains the silence constructed years earlier about a certain experience of collective action and her own bravery. She obtained the scar through a terrible accident at work as a child labourer in a textile mill in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Shortly thereafter, in 1912, the mill was crippled as 20,000 workers went on strike. She later played a crucial role in improving workers' rights for immigrants when she testified at a US Congressional hearing on the working conditions at the mills.

In the years following the strike, companies sought to restrict the employment of immigrants and involvement in the strike was stigmatised and knowledge of it was suppressed. An Italian immigrant, Teoli was vulnerable in the workplace and feared losing her job so she tolerated the victimisation meted out to her subsequently, hid the

³⁸ Hofmeyr, 'Reading oral texts', 135.

scar that "inscribed the history of work upon her scalp"³⁹ and never talked about the incident to protect others from victimisation. The immigrants continued to endure discrimination in the workplace for years to come. It was only in 1980 that the people of Lawrence, Massachusetts, began celebrating this past with Bread and Roses Day, and with this came a re-enactment of Teoli's testimony and the naming of the Camella Teoli Walkway.

Cohen's discussion of historical production is useful in contemplating the role of the pensioners in the production of silence as part of their narratives. They may have had their own and varied reasons for choosing silence and such reasons may even have been privately (collectively) agreed among some of them. One of the pensioners mentioned that they had obtained government permission to start a union in 1969. He said the union dealt with matters like unfair dismissals and bonuses for drivers. Other than that short reference, except for the union activists, the narrators 'combed over' the history of bus apartheid, segregation at work and the struggle for better working conditions.

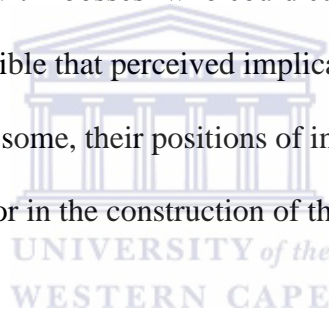
Knowledge of the past (or lack thereof) shaped a certain identity among the workers in relation to industrial action and solidarity. Not knowing about the strike meant that workers in future generations would possibly think of their predecessors as passive, afraid and accepting of their working conditions. This would not be an accurate description. The strike is therefore also a connection to a sense of identity. In his interview, Mr Stewart cites this as a crucial reason to establish a museum:

Our history should be something we can relate to, where we can say safely that we participated in trying to make our lives better.

³⁹ D Cohen, *The Combing of History*, 3.

There were challenges, but there are means to overcome it. And the key component of overcoming it is to say, what is my role? ... So when you stand at the museum, like I do now when I go to the District 6 Museum, I like to say when I see my mother as part of the Tramway Road history, or I read about my grandfather, who I think the instance of his death played a logical part of my political observance or participation.⁴⁰

Sandra Greene's work among the Anlo Ewe people in Ghana is an example of how self-preservation can also lead to silence or acquiescence. She writes that "what once was a matter of public record, had been rendered silent, consigned to the private sphere of family politics".⁴¹ This is interesting in considering the case of the GABS pensioners who receive a company pension. Coming from a generation where workers had few rights, they are familiar with 'bosses' who could cut sources of income in order to exercise power. It is possible that perceived implications for their livelihoods (their pension payments) and, for some, their positions of influence as representatives on the pension board, were a factor in the construction of their narratives.



Greene's study also discusses how political change (among other forms of change) can affect renditions of the past resulting in certain topics being "removed from public discourse".⁴² While she argues that her interviews among the Anlo in Ghana "illustrate the complexities that underpin African oral discourses about the past",⁴³ this could be said about oral discourse anywhere that people tend to withhold information to avoid societal division.

⁴⁰ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Carl Stewart, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 31 October 2006.

⁴¹ See S. Greene, 'Whispers and Silences', 49. When discussion about one's slave origins is banned, the people of Anlo cease discussing it in public or they deny slave ancestry if asked.

⁴² S. Greene, 'Whispers and Silences', 43.

⁴³ Greene writes about silences regarding the role of the 'awoamefia' in Anlo religious practice. She observes how people allow others, those drawn to Western influences, to misrepresent this role in the public discourse because of political expediency. While they keep quiet, they may be seen communicating disagreement with a rolling eye movement or heard doing so in private conversation. See 'Whispers and Silences', 46 – 47.

It is possible that the pensioners (not necessarily as a group) have responded to the ongoing national discourse on nation building in South Africa, by excluding all references to apartheid. Perhaps by their reading of the context, the GABS pensioners consider it inappropriate to dredge up the South African past in a climate where the emphasis is on the promise of the future and forgetting the past. Grele sums this tendency up in saying that "it is inevitable that our questions and answers are infused" with our current day concerns as people "integrate new issues into the past to make sense of their lives".⁴⁴

Alessandro Portelli, alert to tone and symbolic meaning in the narration, posits that the value of oral history lies largely in the creative changes to the narrative that are more a result of the active process of remembering than the preservation of facts. He also agrees that these changes indicate much about the narrators' present contexts and their attempts to make meaning of the past. He observes that the oral history narrator tells us "not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, what they now think they did".⁴⁵ Therefore, the pensioners' conclusion that their time working in a company that actively aided the consolidation of apartheid rule and where they were subjected to segregation was good, and that the company treated them well, "was less the result of imperfect recollection than, ironically, of a creative imagination. It demonstrates that indeed "the tale depends on personal and collective factors".⁴⁶

⁴⁴ R. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound*, 247-248.

⁴⁵ A. Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and other stories: form and meaning in oral history* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), 99-100.

⁴⁶ A. Portelli, *Luigi Trastulli*, 101, 103.

Portelli observes that it "takes a much higher emotional investment to admit to oneself that things are wrong"⁴⁷ and that this gives rise to a "uchronic" narrative where the narrator narrates according to a desired order of events. The uchronic form allows the narrator to "transcend" reality as given.⁴⁸ Portelli also writes of a "burgeoning legendary complex"⁴⁹ using examples of his own research to show the result of a deep suppression of a desire for another reality.

This other reality comes forth in the creative telling of a story. Sometimes the same story is told by different people, wherein the events are presented as historically true. He observes that this is more than chance but is the expression of an alternate, desired version. He points to how the story of Luigi Trastulli's death in Terni is sometimes located in a peaceful demonstration, at other times in the guerilla struggle and sometimes it took place in 1953 and not in 1949, when it actually happened.⁵⁰

Depelchin concurs with the notion of silence as fact in itself⁵¹ that refers either to the exclusion of history by the dominant producing power or by choice on the part of those not in control of the historical production process. In agreement with that view and respectful of the pensioners' choice to be silent, this study acknowledges that, through their choices, the pensioners "become not simply objects of study but part of the community of discourse".⁵²

⁴⁷ A. Portelli, *Luigi Trastulli*, 109.

⁴⁸ A. Portelli, *Luigi Trastulli*, 108.

⁴⁹ A. Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', 100.

⁵⁰ A. Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', 100.

⁵¹ A. Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', 100.

⁵² R Grele, *Envelopes of Sound*, 272.

Depelchin also observes that "silences are the product of relations between social forces, or individuals, or groups of individuals, even in the case of autonomous silences".⁵³ He notes that voices that do not serve the purpose of the producer are often ignored in the production of history. He argues, therefore, that critical questions need to be asked of the histories that have been produced: who are the producers, for whom are they producing and why?

Existing bus histories and museum making

Looking back, historical production in the company can be split into three identifiable phases. In the first phase the focus on the objects (the vehicles) was strong. The first publication, *Cape Trams: from horse to diesel 1861-1961*, captured the early history spanning 100 years of trams and trolley buses. In 1861, preparations began for the first tramway line in Cape Town and the first tram company was called Cape Tramways Company. *Cape Trams* traced developments between 1861 and 1961, covering a company history but focusing more on the technology of the tram. It took a technical approach to the history and included engineering drawings, maps, plans and black and white photographic plates.

The second phase is captured in a tenth year anniversary publication, commissioned by the latest owners of Golden Arrow, circa 2002. The publication, *The first ten years, This Wonderful Journey*, represented a break with previous documentary styles in the company which celebrated technological and technical progress. Instead, the narrative contained in *The first ten years* located the company's history firmly within the history

⁵³ J. Depelchin, *Silences in African History. Between the syndromes of discovery and abolition* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki Na Nyota Publishers, 2005), 12.

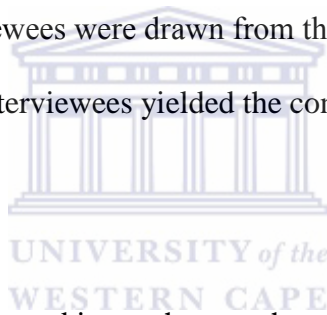
of the unfolding new South African nation. Furthermore, the inside back cover contains five brief oral histories under the title, 'Life on the bus'. The stories are all from passengers, all written in English and one of them seems to have been told to someone else who recorded it in writing. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Two.

The different segments (country, company, social investment, passenger experiences) of the publication each create a meaning of the past and packaged as they were, as one publication, they form a narrative of a company at one with 'the nation'. However, its association is with a new nation, a nation of promise. It makes no association with the troubled nation prior to 1992, and only a small mention is made of any strikes or the existence of trade unions as discussed in this study. While they are remembered in the publication, there is no explanation as to how those who died in the line of duty were killed and very little attention given to the dangers and challenges faced by bus drivers on the job.

The third phase was a response to the decision to establish a museum and it started in 2006 when HCI Foundation commissioned a documentary film, *Roots and Routes*, which captured a history of bus transport based on archival material and excluding oral histories. The film essentially chronicles the emergence of the modern bus from the humble beginnings of the horse-drawn omnibus in the mid-19th century. The documentary genre lends itself well to the exploration of complexities and possible contradictions in the production of the history of transport. However, the discourse of technological and technical progress employed in *Roots and Routes* filters out these

possibilities as it limits the narrative to dates and major events. The film is discussed further in Chapter Two.

This phase also includes an oral history component, indicating a shift from the former emphasis on objects (the tram or the bus) and technological progress. In 2006 HCI Foundation began collecting memorabilia to be used later as artefacts in the museum. Also, as mentioned earlier, the Foundation employed an independent researcher to conduct oral history interviews with those willing to participate. The audiocassette recordings and transcripts of the interviews are held by HCI Foundation. The Foundation maintains contact with some 750 pensioners through hosting social functions during the year. Interviewees were drawn from this pool. The researcher's decision to broaden the pool of interviewees yielded the construction of more than one meaning of the past.



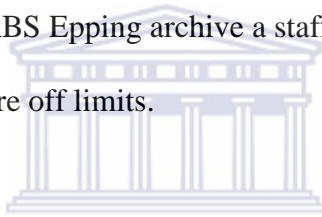
In so doing the researcher was engaged in much more than mere data collection. She created the shape of the histories by seeking out and interviewing others. In allowing herself to ask different, deeper questions of a more sensitive, political nature to the union leaders, she collaborated with them to contest what was to become the dominant narrative.⁵⁴

The involvement of UWC in the Transport Museum Preparatory Project was also part of the third phase in the production of GABS history. During this phase various research papers were produced and the design and conceptualisation of a transport

⁵⁴ J. Fabian, *Remembering the Present: Painting and Popular History in Zaire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 251.

museum was researched, brainstormed, debated and recorded. In this time the Foundation also explored the possibility of a building to house a museum, later settling for a virtual museum.⁵⁵ This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

These phases in the production of a company history (of Golden Arrow Bus Services) and how the strike has been recorded comprise the scope of this study. This work is mainly archive-based. I located two archives, one belonging to the company (part based in Epping and part based at HCI Foundation's office) and one to the Transport and Omnibus Workers Union (TOWU). Access to the two private archives varied. At TOWU I was able to browse their records unattended and find meeting minutes pertaining to the strike. At the GABS Epping archive a staff member accompanied me and certain files in the archive were off limits.



I visited the company's Epping archive a few times in 2010 to familiarise myself with its subject matter and the different types of material available and I made a list of what I saw that could be of use to me, such as surveillance video recordings, photographs, press releases and press clippings. A few drawers were locked and I was told that they were not for public viewing as they were the CEO's property. Most of the visual material was not labelled but filing cabinet drawers of interest to me were those with slides on 'riot and vandalism' and press clippings including 'taxi violence', 'taxi wars clippings 1991' and 'bus strike 1999', since these were the only visible references to worker struggles. After the termination of the Preparatory Project, I tried to confirm

⁵⁵ 'Welcome to the Golden Arrow Bus Services virtual museum', <http://www.goldenarrow150.co.za/>, accessed 25 October 2013.

that I still had access to the archive to pursue my research and unfortunately HCI Foundation has stalled its decision.

At TOWU's archive I read through minutes of the union's meetings, focusing more closely on the 1990s in order to find references to the struggle for occupational safety. The TOWU (Transport and Omnibus Workers' Union) minute books have a break in entries during the period that the strike took place. An entry on 18 August 1992 refers to postponing action until the workers are united. The next entry is on October 1992. It was difficult to find someone at SATAWU with the institutional memory of this period. Those I approached believe that the union has no records of this time.

I also searched the National Library of South Africa's newspaper archives for information on the strike. But very few references to industrial action by bus drivers were captured in the newspapers. However, I found some reports that have proved to be critical in piecing the narrative together chronologically. There are different versions of when this particular strike took place and whether it was a two or three-month strike. Narrators commented often that the many different actions seem merged into one in their memories. One narrator recalls the end of the strike and the announcement of his dismissal as having taken place on or a day before his birthday on 20 August 1992.

However, a newspaper headline on 29 August 1992 reads "Bus workers tell firm: beef up safety"⁵⁶ and on 1 September 1992⁵⁷ a photograph showing broad union support from COSATU and NACTU⁵⁸ (the two umbrella trade union bodies) was carried in

⁵⁶ *Cape Argus* 'Bus workers tell firm: beef up safety' 29 August 1992.

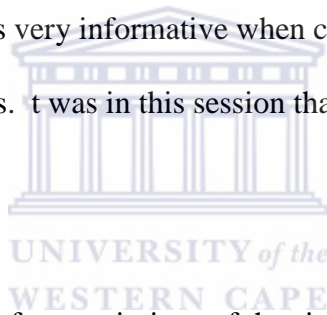
⁵⁷ *Cape Argus* 1 September 1992.

⁵⁸ The National Council of Trade Unions (NACTU) was established in 1986 through a merger between the Council of Unions of South Africa and the Azanian Confederation of Trade Unions. It pledged

the evening paper. The umbrella bodies were supporting the call for the reinstatement of 141 workers dismissed for ignoring the company's ultimatum to return to work.

TOWU is a NACTU affiliate and TGWU (SATAWU) is COSATU-affiliated. I tested my deduction on some of those who had been involved and they agree that August 1992 is the likely date on which that fateful strike began. The date or year helps to contextualise the events that took place but the absence of written evidence on the year does not compromise the strike's impact and its outcomes.

As mentioned earlier on 12 May 2010 I facilitated a group discussion of five pensioners and two current employees, selected by the HCI Foundation and held at its office. This workshop session was very informative when contrasted with the oral histories provided by the unionists. It was in this session that the silences in the narratives struck me.

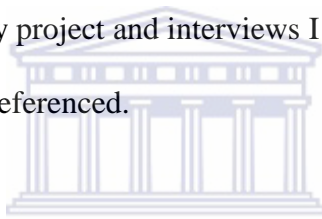


HCI Foundation provided copies of transcriptions of the six interviews done in 2006 with those involved in the strike and retired senior staff of GABS. I obtained the audio recordings of these life history interviews from the Foundation. I also had two telephone conversations with the oral historian who undertook the life history interviews, conversations with someone from HCI Foundation, as well as a leader of the Preparatory Project from UWC. Furthermore, two interviews were conducted, one with another leader of the UWC project and one (conducted telephonically) with the

commitment to a just society led by a united working class. TOWU minutes note a decision to merge with a similar union, Transport and Allied Workers Union, and affiliate to NACTU in December 1989. See 'Our Objectives' <http://www.nactu.org.za/objectives.htm>, accessed 23 October 2013.

designer of the display who worked with the project to "translate the written into a visual"⁵⁹ in the preparation of the exhibition.

Notwithstanding its expressed desire to recover workers' histories through the museum project, HCI would later use the argument of protection of the narrators as reason to exclude certain stories even where permission for use had been obtained at the time of the interview.⁶⁰ The company was reluctant to give me an audience or continued access to its archive. Certainly its silence in my study "carries hints, allusions, references, and opinions that are not contained in the other information".⁶¹ The conclusions made here are based on observations and experiences I had while working on the GABS Preparatory project and interviews I conducted subsequently, and are informed by the theories referenced.



HCI Foundation had given me the interviews on audiocassette and transcripts during the project but since relations changed thereafter, I use pseudonyms throughout this text, even in respect of sources I interviewed independently, except for the UWC project members and the independent researcher.

In the next chapter, I construct a detailed record of the events of the strike of 1992, as compiled from primary and secondary sources. This chronology and account will aid the analysis of how some stories have been silenced in the making of a history of GABS. Thereafter I look at previous history production on GABS, tracing various efforts to produce a company history of GABS, including oral history production

⁵⁹ C. Houston, interview with Jos Thorne, Cape Town, 7 November 2013.

⁶⁰ C. Houston, personal conversation with Nicky Rousseau, 16 November 2013.

⁶¹ Luise White, *Speaking with Vampires Rumor and History in Colonial Africa*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 77.

between 2002 and 2010. I consider closely the efforts through the Preparatory Project, specifically focused on different narratives that emerged. The penultimate chapter on ‘The Politics of Silence’ is the key to this work as it provides an analysis of how silence manifested in the production process, with particular reference to the exhibition that was prepared as part of the Preparatory Project.

Throughout the historical production process choices are made by narrator, translator, researcher, transcriber, curator and author (or owner) of the product about what to exclude and include. This chapter has discussed related issues in that process, with specific reference to silence as part of production. Although the archive is also a site of production and hence open to silences, in this case the story of the strike can be found in the archive. What has emerged from historical production to date, however, represents a tension between the archive and what is highlighted as the dominant narrative. This reflects a tension between those with authorial control over displays and those who have participated in the research, around what is included and what is excluded. The next chapter delves into a particular experience that exists in the GABS archive but remains excluded from its product: the strike of 1992.

CHAPTER ONE: THE STRIKE OF 1992

...it was quite a heavy strike, we never actually recovered from that strike to go back to work and that was about sixty people whom the company said they would not take them back, we happen to be in that group of sixty, we went our different ways, and a lot of us I must say that did not have an experience to fend for themselves, either from working in the organised, protected environment, find it very difficult to operate, some of us lost our wives, and some of our guys became hoboes because of the sense of hopelessness, ja, we had a number of people who never, ever recovered again.¹

This chapter records and discusses a strike that took place among bus drivers in Cape Town between August and October 1992. It draws on interviews, union records and newspaper archives so as to outline a context in which the strike took place, the conditions that led to the decision to strike, incidents and events during the strike and its impact on the workers. The purpose of this chapter is to provide my narrative of the strike as the basis to consider the ways it is remembered and forgotten. My aim is not to provide a definitive history but rather an account to think through when considering the processes of memory formation that are considered in the chapters that follow. The narrative I present is largely based on newspaper articles and the additional interviews Carohn Cornell conducted on her own initiative.

A background to the strike

A way to think about this strike is to consider the issue of occupational safety for bus drivers which many drivers articulated in interviews as the key issue facing them in the late 1980s and early 1990s. According to Carohn Cornell's interview records, bus

¹ Thami Thabatha, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 23 May 2006, Vanguard Estate.

drivers experienced an increasing number of incidents where their personal safety was compromised. They were the targets of robberies because of the cash they carried, especially working on the night shift. There were times when the criminal gained more from robbing the driver of his personal effects than the cash he had collected in bus fares.

From 1977 sedan taxi and later minibus taxis provided a service to the mushrooming informal settlements of the Cape Flats, such as Crossroads, KTC, Windemere, Elsies River, Bishop Lavis, Modderdam and Unibell, where there were no formal roads and thus no bus routes. Commuters generally took taxis between and from these settlements and other Cape Flats areas to the nearest train station or the nearest bus stop. The taxi sector experienced deregulation after 1987 leading to a rise in the number of taxi businesses (particularly black-owned taxis) and intensifying competition within the sector. Competition with buses also increased as mini-bus taxis competed with buses along the same routes. Rivalry with the bus company was also fuelled by state subsidisation of Golden Arrow Bus Services as taxis received no subsidies. Taxi owners united against the bus company's expansion into Khayelitsha, which had been made possible through a government tender.

Business rivalry complicated by politics

Bus drivers caught in the political-cum-taxi conflict had, since the 1980s, also been vulnerable during community (political) protests when buses were targeted in stoning and arson incidents, especially along township routes. Buses were seen by political activists and some community members as symbols of the apartheid government, having been sites of segregation and complicit in enabling segregated residential

areas.² GABS was not only seen to be in the service of the apartheid government, but it was also deriving private benefit, thus angering far-flung communities when it raised bus fares. The ANC's military wing even attacked buses among its operations to sabotage the South African economy.³

Bus drivers and their passengers increasingly came under violent attack by unidentified supporters of the mini-bus taxi industry amid rumours of third force activity. Taxi violence, as it became known, was considered to be manipulated for political gain as taxi associations aligned with different political sides. Researcher Jackie Dugard writes:

The violence that racked informal settlements in the Cape Peninsula between 1990 and 1992 was ostensibly related to commercial competition over routes between two taxi organisations, the Langa, Gugulethu and Nyanga Taxi Association (Lagunya), which represented the more urbanised African operators, and the Western Cape Black Taxi Association (Webta), which represented the more traditional African operators from rural areas. The reality however, was more complex with the taxi conflict providing a springboard for the state-sponsored destabilisation of African communities in a region where there was no Inkatha presence.⁴

She also notes that:

Early on in the conflict, in June 1991, ANC member and Western Cape Civic Committee (WCCC) chair Michael Mapongwana expressed concern that there was a sinister force orchestrating the violence and that attempts were being made to politicise the taxi conflict. On 8 July 1991 Mapongwana was assassinated, three weeks after police had confiscated his gun, claiming it to be illegal. Mapongwana's was the third assassination of prominent ANC community leaders in under a month. ANC Youth League official

² Bus transport made apartheid's separate race-based living areas workable. The bus company was heavily subsidised to ensure that it delivered cheap labour to the city and business districts by day and return workers to their dormitory townships at night.

³ List Of MK Operations - The O'Malley Archives, www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/.../061v02949.htm, accessed, 20 October 2013.

⁴ Jackie Dugard, 'From Low Intensity War to Mafia War: Taxi violence in South Africa (1987 - 2000)', *Violence and Transition Series*, Vol. 4, May 2001, 5.

Zola Ntsoni was killed on 9 June and ten days later ANC activist and taxi-conflict mediator Mziwonke Jack was assassinated.⁵

Later, through his work in monitoring conflict and police brutality, Democratic Party (DP) member of parliament, Jan van Eck, said in a newspaper interview that after first giving the police the "benefit of the doubt", he subsequently "had clear evidence of the police both leading and assisting attackers". The allegations led him to believe that there was "a definite attempt to destabilise the area under the guise of the taxi war".⁶

It would take years before suspected police complicity was confirmed. In 1998 the *Business Day* newspaper reported that 13 policemen had been charged and some found to be covert taxi owners. A senior police official declared that:

Policemen hire out their weapons to be used in hits, if they don't actually perform the hits themselves, and they hire themselves out as bodyguards to senior executives. They further hamper investigative work by stealing dockets or leaking their contents, and warning suspects of impending arrests.⁷

The Goldstone Commission of Inquiry began investigating the taxi violence in January 1992 and the two rival associations began peace talks. However, this did not last and violence flared up in February again. Passengers were killed, and an eight-year-old girl was among those wounded at a Nyanga East bus stop, where police claimed they opened fire to disperse taxi drivers.⁸

⁵ Dugard, 'Taxi violence', 6.

⁶ *City Press*, 15 September 1991 as quoted in Dugard, 'Taxi violence', 7.

⁷ As quoted in Dugard, 'Taxi violence', 26.

⁸ Dugard, 'Taxi violence', 33.

As competition between Golden Arrow Bus Services and mini-bus taxis deepened and became increasingly violent, drivers demanded that their cabs be made bulletproof. The company refused, despite incidents of violence becoming more common during the period of the negotiations around South Africa's transition to democracy. Although the government had released Nelson Mandela and other prisoners and was in talks with the unbanned African National Congress (ANC) and other liberation movements by 1992, were regularly affected by dramatic incidents such as the killing of 46 people in Boipatong in June as a result of ANC/Inkatha Freedom Party conflict and the Bisho massacre on 7 September 1992 (where the Ciskei Defence Force used live ammunition on protestors killing 29 people). Communities were beset by ongoing police intimidation as well as violence and retaliatory attacks among vigilante elements and community defence or street committees who had lost faith in the justice system and were implementing their own prosecution and penalties.⁹ In reaction to the constant breakdown in negotiations and flare ups of third force activities in communities, the ANC started a campaign of 'rolling mass action' consisting of strikes, protests and boycotts to demonstrate its support.¹⁰

Bus drivers found themselves contending with more than stones as hijackings and armed attacks became more common. By 1992 at least four drivers had lost their lives in violence of one or another type. At some point drivers tried to provide security for each other by accompanying drivers who worked the night shift.¹¹ It was then that the unions decided to take stronger action to confront management.

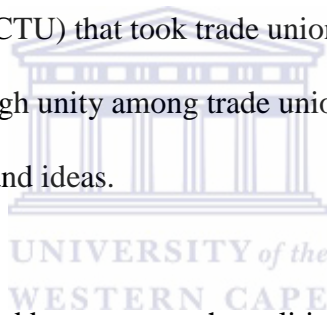
⁹ Many cases have been documented by the TRC, see 'The Truth and Reconciliation Commission', <http://www.justice.gov.za/Trc/report/index.htm>, accessed, 20 October 2013.

¹⁰ 'Frontline', <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/etc/cron.html>, accessed, 20 October 2013.

¹¹ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Tom Dunkley, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 3 May 2006, Mowbray.

The changing shape of union politics: a sign of the times

This decision to be more confrontational was also a result of TGWU's links to the broader worker mobilisation in the early 1980s. In the 1980s there had been a revival and emergence of civil society organisations in all sectors including trade unions, under the mentorship of leaders who had been released from prison or had banning orders lifted and a new layer of emerging leaders. Despite having varied interests, these groups often united in opposition to the manifestations of apartheid at local government or national level. To consolidate this cross-sectoral, inter-organisational unity, the United Democratic Front was formed, followed by two umbrella trade union organisations (COSATU and NACTU) that took trade union activity to a more strategic and powerful level through unity among trade unions, and consolidation of membership numbers, resources and ideas.



The trade unions were also inspired by events on the political front. Confidence increased among activists who now seemed to be challenging injustice in every area. The impact of these developments on TOWU is captured by Carl Stewart in his interview. He described how an 'underground' group, including himself and Thami Thabatha, was working to change the leadership of TOWU and became known as 'the rebels' by the Company and the old guard in TOWU. In 1987 they managed to get the union Chairperson to stand down at an annual general meeting and they then made constitutional changes under a new chairperson that ushered in a 'new' TOWU. He summarised what followed:

Okay, between 1987 and 1992 was a transition period trying to consolidate the union because TOWU then went to join up with NACTU (the National Congress of Trade Unions). TOWU had

also become a more transformed workers' organisation. We were very successful.¹²

What turned out to be a sweetheart union became an aggressive organisation of which workers in general benefited. But little did we know that with the emergence of both organisations being strong, that there will come a point when exactly that type of strength will come together to show a collective, militant force.¹³

Our struggle at the time was worker justice; workers' right to be respected; at the time there were things like pensions that were putrid; there was division in terms of who gets and who don't...¹⁴

While TGWU was not given company recognition they had won space at the negotiation table to represent their members. With TGWU's entry onto the scene, and influenced by the rise of protest action generally in South Africa, the nature of trade union interaction with the company changed and became more radical. The paternalism that seemed to characterise the past shifted as the new TOWU was exposed to the practices of democratic worker participation and shop steward accountability through joint negotiations with TGWU, according to Tom Dunkley.¹⁵ TOWU's Carl Stewart also noted in his interview that "T&G was feeding us. They were teaching us skills that we thought... you know, how to... coupled to your own initiatives. But they did play an integral part in our development."¹⁶

By the early 1990s many TOWU members were also supporters of the Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (PAC) through their association with NACTU and many TGWU

¹² Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Carl Stewart, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 31 October 2006, Observatory.

¹³ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Carl Stewart, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 31 October 2006, Observatory.

¹⁴ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Carl Stewart, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 31 October 2006, Observatory.

¹⁵ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Tom Dunkley, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 31 October 2006, Observatory.

¹⁶ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Carl Stewart, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 31 October 2006, Observatory.

members supported the ANC. The two umbrella bodies had aligned with these movements since their establishment. The ideas of these liberation movements influenced the union members who joined them. They in turn imparted ideology in the unions and became concerned with social issues and not only working conditions.

TGWU membership was concentrated mainly among maintenance and general workers whereas at this time TOWU only catered for inspectors and drivers or OMOs (one man operators) as they later became known. This divide was racialised in the workplace as at that time, most inspectors and drivers were designated 'coloured' while many of the maintenance and depot workers were designated as 'black'¹⁷ under apartheid legislation. However, workers' unity was strengthened over time as the two unions began working together more often.

As TGWU developed a presence in the company, workers debated whether to join it and abandon TOWU or whether to continue working to change TOWU from within. Some realised that TOWU had a solid infrastructure and resources since it was a well-established union. Not all the union activists considered it strategic to work for change from inside TOWU and some of them joined TGWU, mostly those at Arrowgate bus depot was situated off Modderdam Road. Notwithstanding the tensions that were to follow between the two bodies, there were already strong ties between the leading activists that made cooperation possible. Carl Stewart recalls that his relationship with his mentor, Thami Thabatha, took strain because of this.

¹⁷ From the time of coming to power to the 1970s, the National Party government preferred the term 'Bantu'. Thereafter it used 'black' to mean black people excluding 'coloureds' and 'Indians'.

However, once the lives of drivers came under threat through abductions and shootings, the unions worked together to put pressure on the company to improve protection for themselves and passengers, as explained by Barry Links in the group interview conducted by Carohn Cornell:

...the one way of getting rid of the buses was for the drivers to be too scared to go out on the road. So at that stage, our biggest demand was that the drivers should be secure. And at that stage, I think the unity was starting to form. Before that, there was a lot of division between the two unions. But I think that was the start of when the two unions were talking at least one language – that the drivers should be safe you know. We had disagreements in terms of the thickness of glass and where the panelling should be – those type of things. But I think the ultimate thing was that the goal was to get the drivers safe and secure and for the panels to be reinforced. That was what the demand was.¹⁸

The collaboration between the two unions not only brought workers together across the divides of race and class in the depots, it also changed the success rate of their tactics. Until this point, there had been petitions, negotiations and ongoing struggles for better working conditions, including safety measures. Small strikes flared up from time to time but the company did not always respond positively to the pressure.

Thami Thabatha recalls that a march from Arrowgate to Tollgate depot led by himself and the late Ron Manchest in 1989/90 was thwarted by police in Mowbray. The march was to demand wire mesh grills outside the bus windows as protection from the stoning that drivers were now regularly subjected to during political protests. The workers' influence then shifted significantly. Carl Stewart recalls that "management was seeing the tide of militancy growing" since 1990 and when TOWU and TGWU

¹⁸ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Barry Links, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 3 May 2006, Observatory.

combined forces to strike for wire mesh protection the company responded positively within a matter of days.

The management at City Tramways acquired the company through a buyout in July of 1992 and reverted to the name Golden Arrow Bus Services. According to Carl Stewart, the new owners had plans to restructure the company which would have meant job cuts such as had happened that same year when Port Elizabeth Tramways was shut down. This gave impetus to discussions about whether to strike.¹⁹

Some workers had previously been dismissed for demanding that occupational safety be improved and at the time the strike was being discussed, the Boland bus depot was closed down. Faced with violent attacks from different sources, infused with the militancy of their political associations and their new-found strength in unity, leaders of both unions regarded a strike as a way to strengthen their demands for safety measures, to end job losses and agitate for better wages.

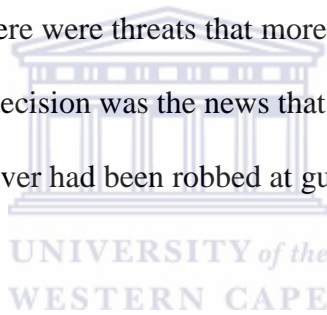
Workers understood that a strike would be on the basis of no work, no pay. This was a difficult decision for many to make, considering their personal financial commitments. Some were nearing retirement and feared jeopardising their pensions. Some of the seniors who joined the strike, therefore only did so for a few weeks. Others were unable to adjust to the new style of politics and took sick leave to avoid making a decision while some continued to work.

¹⁹ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Carl Stewart, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 31 October 2006, Observatory.

The stakes were high, yet the reality was that drivers were being killed on the job. The decision to strike thus represented a huge risk for all of them but they felt they had nothing to lose as they were already in the frontline of a fierce competition between the bus and taxi industries. The taxi violence was, therefore, a critical factor in their decision to strike.

The strike

A number of developments precipitated the decision to strike. Five drivers and four inspectors were kidnapped by unknown men and locked up in a shack in Khayelitsha on 14 August 1992 when GABS refused to pay for damages to minibus taxis as a result of accidents with buses. There were threats that more drivers would be kidnapped. Also influencing the decision was the news that three men were fired on disciplinary grounds and a bus driver had been robbed at gunpoint in Khayelitsha and had lost an eye in the hold-up.



After the shooting and killing of a driver, Raymond or Raman Hansen, while driving a full bus in Khayelitsha, Golden Arrow Bus Services had promised bulletproof cabs. Sometime later the company announced it would be too expensive. Instead they bought life insurance for R100 000. But bus drivers felt "that's not worth anyone's life", and that they were caught in the "cross-fire" of the competition between the company and the taxi sector.²⁰

On 24 August 1992 over 200 drivers from Arrowgate bus depot in Montana Estate embarked on a strike that lasted three months. They demanded the reinstatement of the

²⁰*Cape Argus* 'Bus workers tell firm; beef up safety', 29 August 1992.

three men and safety measures for those working on violence-struck township routes, including protective clothing and bulletproof windscreens. As a result of the decision services were disrupted and the strikers were ordered to leave the depot. The bus company obtained a court order to evict and keep protesting workers off the premises.

In his interview with Carohn Cornell, Thami Thabatha recalls:

The tactics were: stay away but also try and cripple the fleet from Arrowgate. We barricaded the bus companies and the front... buses' wheels were made flat at the depots in order to help paralyse the operation. It was illegal, but I was surprised when the first day the cops never intervened it's only after something like ...forty eight hours that the intervention came in, it came in through a court order I think, to evict us, we were locked out. Before that we'd be going onto the premises barricaded the depot nobody came in, and we stayed inside we stayed overnight quite a big group, it was a peaceful sit-in.²¹

On 28 August management called police who intervened at an 'unauthorized meeting' held at Arrowgate and chased striking workers off the premises.²² Some workers were dismissed for ignoring the court order. TOWU records reflect discussions with lawyers who were fighting for the reinstatement of those fired.²³ The workers responded to the dismissals by blockading the Arrowgate depot and demanding the reinstatement of those dismissed and an end to the retrenchments that started with the closure of the Boland depot.

Activities were not restricted to the bus depot. The strikers found community halls to meet in and also marched in the township of Khayelitsha to highlight their cause and win community support.²⁴ The company released a statement to the press stating that

²¹ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Thami Thabatha, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 23 May 2006, Vanguard Estate.

²² *Cape Argus* 'Busses stoned during march', 28th August 1992.

²³ Manuscripts and Archives, TOWU: TOWU minutes of Special Meeting held on 27 September 1992.

²⁴ *Cape Argus* 'Bus workers tell firm; beef up safety', 29 August 1992.

its workers had been intimidated and the bus service in the Peninsula had been disrupted by strikers. A newspaper carried a report that striking workers who marched along NY1 in Gugulethu stoned buses on the route until police dispersed them.²⁵

Throughout the strike the numbers fluctuated but approximately 400 to 500 workers were still involved by the end of the strike. Only Arrowgate depot covered the routes that were dangerous so other depots did not join the strike. During this period TOWU completed a transformation from a culture of petition to protest, which started when the older generation relinquished leadership in 1987.²⁶

Driven by their desperation, aside from picketing at bus terminals, strikers also used guerrilla tactics to fight for recognition of their rights and of their vulnerability on the job. Buses were damaged as fuel tanks were chopped open, depots were blockaded²⁷ and drivers who chose to work were intimidated. Community and youth leaders also took to intimidating those who chose to work, in supporting the striking workers. A deep bitterness developed between those on strike and those who continued working, as well as those who joined the company as 'scab labour' during the strike.²⁸

²⁵ *Cape Argus* 'Busses stoned during march', 28th August 1992.

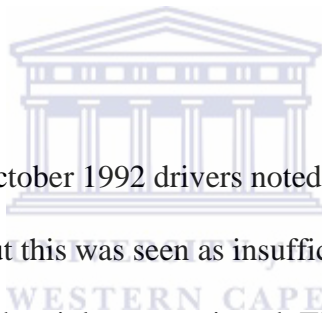
²⁶ Conversation between C Houston and a senior office bearer, Mr Williams, who at the time spearheaded a generational clash between the older men who were used to a relationship of patronage with the company and the new generation of 'black' and 'coloured' men infused with the new politics of resistance growing in the country.

²⁷ *Cape Argus* 'Bus workers tell firm; beef up safety', 29 August 1992.

²⁸ Carl Stewart, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 31 October 2006, Observatory.

Support for the strikers grew and on 1 September 1992 the ANC, COSATU and NACTU led others in a march, supporting the reinstatement of 141 men dismissed for ignoring an ultimatum to return to work.²⁹

On 22 September 1992 the general manager of Golden Arrow Bus Services made a request to the Goldstone Commission to assist police by also investigating the murder of three of its bus drivers in separate attacks in Nyanga and Khayelitsha over the previous week. Unfortunately the commission's brief did not allow them to pursue the investigation.³⁰ There were ongoing casualties among drivers and passengers along township routes yet the company held out and did not meet the demand for bulletproof cabs.



At a special TOWU meeting in October 1992 drivers noted that the company supplied 100 bulletproof vests to drivers but this was seen as insufficient protection. During the strike, as if to amplify the issues, the violence continued. There were drivers (who never went on strike) shot in the townships and one driver was killed on duty.

Eventually no buses went into the townships for the remainder of the strike. Drivers resolved not to work in Nyanga and Khayelitsha until bulletproof bus cabs were provided.³¹

During some of the earlier small strikes a number of union leaders had gained the impression that the company had a close relationship with police. At the TOWU

²⁹ *Cape Argus* 'ANC, COSATU and NACTU support reinstatement', 1 September 1992.

³⁰ 'South African Press Association report 22 September 1992', <http://www.e-tools.co.za/newsbrief/1992/news9209.23>, accessed 20 September 2013.

³¹ 'South African Press Association report 22 September 1992', <http://www.e-tools.co.za/newsbrief/1992/news9209.23>, accessed 20 September 2013.

Annual General Meeting of 1989 the outgoing chairman referred to the "assistance given by the government of the day against the workers." He called for a deepening of the new style of union politics that had emerged in the face of new issues and an onslaught on the workers.³²

Narrators commented on the company's relationship with the police during this period. At the time of the strike, a former riot policeman held office as head of security at GABS and during industrial action riot police would appear on the scene as soon as protest action commenced, prompting suspicion that they had been on standby.

The perception that the company was in cahoots with the apartheid government³³ may have been fuelled by the fact that the company continued to observe apartheid until the early 1990s when the laws softened and by which time there were very few 'white' bus drivers and inspectors remaining on the staff.

Segregation was practiced in the company before apartheid legislation was in place. It only began employing 'coloured' staff during the 1930s. The numbers of 'coloured' staff grew gradually and in the 1950s 'black' staff were permitted too. Certain jobs were linked to racial categories; for example, for most of the company's history, only 'whites' were allowed to be bus inspectors. The first women drivers were only

³² Manuscripts and Archives, TOWU: TOWU minutes of Annual General Meeting held on 9 April 1989.

³³ Political activists and academics considered GABS to be complicit in making and upholding the apartheid city. See Gordon Pirie. 'Virtuous Mobility: Moralising vs measuring geographical mobility in Africa', *Afrika Focus*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2009), p. 21-35 and Steven Robins, 'At the Limits of Spatial Governmentality: A message from the tip of Africa', *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (2002), pp 665-689 among others.

employed in 1983. For a long time the culture in the company was influenced by the 'white' male identities that dominated it. Even when 'coloured' men were employed, they did not have the same privileges as their 'white' counterparts. Carl Stewart remembers when they did not earn the same salaries while Thami Thabatha mentioned that they had separate canteen areas and that these facilities were not of the same standard.

The police were used to drive protesters from the depots and riot policeman abducted Carl Stewart, a leader of the strike, from his home during the strike. He was intimidated and then left in a deserted area. Thami Thabatha related another incident:

...Ronnie who was also an organiser in the '90's also very militant coloured chap who happened to be one of the people who were casualty, he died on the other side of the tunnel, up until this day nobody knows who killed Ronnie...that was our strong belief that he was assassinated.³⁴

...at this stage we were on strike, we were then followed by the Security branch, I was no longer sleeping at home, for some days, all those who were prominent, myself, Jantjies, Grootboom, Teka and Stewart would encounter the problem of having people following us, and not only following us but people coming, seeing strange cars standing in front of our, our houses, and the same car would be standing in Teka's in Belhar.³⁵

As the strike wore on the loss of income while on strike led to many of the men losing their homes and in some cases their wives grew frustrated and left them as family life crushed under the strain.³⁶ This made them vulnerable to the company's offer to end the strike. A mediator facilitated the negotiations, which centred on the company's

³⁴ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Thami Thabatha, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 23 May 2006, Vanguard Estate.

³⁵ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Thami Thabatha, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 23 May 2006, Vanguard Estate

³⁶ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Barry Links, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 3 May 2006, Observatory.

call for an end to the strike, declaring that the strikers would keep their jobs if the ringleaders (as perceived by management) agreed to take a retrenchment package and never return to the company.

We met every day, the shop stewards, including coloured members, rank and file members ... The strike began to weaken because people were now losing their jobs, I lost my car because I was still paying the car, and people bring those problems to the meetings and people would get emotional, and those who were in the meeting would not really want us to entertain those personal problems because it was affecting morale and people had differences and it started to weaken the strike, and management had its spies as usual and that reached management and that is when management decided that look they will take a hard line.³⁷

...we only heard after the strike that management was about to give in ... when our strike was weakened by our own little feuds within our own ranks.³⁸

The decision to end the strike and return to work without the 60 leaders was something that the workers discussed for a few days in a managed, structured process led by the two unions' negotiators. The workers insisted that their demands were reasonable and that the company was being inflexible. The union leaders interviewed said that they believed the company was unwilling to invest further while the future seemed so uncertain. Thami Thabatha observed:

one must also understand at the time Cronje had taken a big stake of the company, because this was an English company, and during that period, that transition the company was now shifting ownership to your Afrikaner, Cronje and all the other people there, and they had paid, or put so much of their own personal monies at stake to buy a stake in the company, I think they were feeling hurt because now their futures were on the line.³⁹

³⁷ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Thami Thabatha, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 23 May 2006 Vanguard Estate.

³⁸ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Thami Thabatha, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 23 May 2006, Vanguard Estate.

Carl Stewart remarked that: "The one interpretation that one of the TOWU people gave was that the new lot had just bought into the company and were terrified of spending more money on anything".⁴⁰ The unions even suggested that only certain buses be bulletproofed and in such a way that the protection could be transferred from one bus to another as required:

...you'd only need about five percent of your fleet with bulletproof, that is what we use to say to them this is not going to cost you like you are saying because you are giving us figures of the whole fleet, and that's an inflated figure, we would say to them you only need to have about thirty to forty buses for the most, guards, and if those buses could be dedicated for the townships and if we are able to take off and put the bulletproof windows and be able to take them off and put them where they are needed, it would work out cheaper. If there any other demands, I do not see it being something significant. That demand [for bulletproof glass] was not won in the end, I think what they did in the end they gave people bulletproof vests. And people will still die, you still had people been shot at with bulletproof vests.⁴¹

Strikers cut their losses and end the strike

A retrenchment package was negotiated although the 60 leaders had no choice and some of the negotiators (union officials) were banned from the depot. These leaders were blacklisted in the industry and some of them bought mini-bus taxis in order to make a living. Most of those retrenched came from TGWU. New, mostly conservative, leaders replaced those who were from TOWU. This disruption in both unions meant that they lost the momentum they had gained through struggle in advancing workers' rights in the company.

⁴⁰ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Carl Stewart, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 31 October 2006, Observatory.

⁴¹ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Thami Thabatha, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 23 May 2006, Vanguard Estate.

The way the strike ended did not leave workers despondent. They understood their failure to achieve all they wanted to because they did not yet have the means to reach their goals. Their first task was to heal the rift between those who had been on strike and the rest. They understood that division would weaken their cause. They resolved not to give up their struggle and union records show that the issues remained alive for years and they continued calling for the scrapping of the blacklist.⁴²

The legacy of the two unions working together on safety issues and demands began during this time. This is an unusual occurrence among unions working in the same industry. A TGWU organiser's opinion was that they helped to transform TOWU:

I think we strongly influenced how TOWU was forced to operate within that collective bargaining process, but we also exposed TOWU membership to a very different style of organising and we worked to unite shop steward leadership around how we negotiate and we... we worked to expose ordinary employees to...members of the two unions to acknowledging, recognising and fighting for the same demands and around the same issues.⁴³

The struggle for bulletproof cabs continued for years and more drivers were injured and killed in that time. Thami Thabatha recalls:

I remember, there was a period when they had a plastic, a kind of a plastic and that plastic was of such poor nature when the sun, the wear and tear of that plastic made it difficult for drivers to see, it was not your bullet proof, like with your fidelity guards, it was different to that, ja, it was a, an inferior quality because it hindered one's eyesight.⁴⁴

⁴² Manuscripts and Archives, TOWU: TOWU minutes of Executive Committee Meeting held on 2 February 1994.

⁴³ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Tom Dunkley, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 3 May 2006, Mowbray.

⁴⁴ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Thami Thabatha, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 23 May 2006, Vanguard Estate.

Workers were substantially traumatised as a result of the violence they experienced during the taxi wars of the 1990s. In taking a stand, the GABS bus drivers sacrificed their wages in a desperate bid for occupational safety. At that time, men in a uniformed job were generally highly regarded in the community. They were very proud of their jobs and so when they were forced to resign they not only faced economic instability but were also reduced to social obscurity as street vendors or unemployed. Some were able to buy a taxi and then, by utilising their driving skills, became part of 'the opposition'.

Inspired by Portelli's observation that "subjectivity is as much the business of history as the more visible facts"⁴⁵ this chapter creates a history of the strike through not only presenting facts, but also through acknowledging what people believe are the facts, as these are both part of the production process. Thus the views expressed about the company's relationship with the police are subjective and may be impossible to prove. In the UWC group session one of the narrators said inspectors based at bus terminuses had to report on marches, the numbers of protestors present and the direction in which they were headed. When asked what the information was used for he said he thought it was to assess whether buses needed to be rerouted although he was once stoned and accused of spying for the police.⁴⁶

The story of the struggle for safe working conditions (and safe travel for passengers) is connected to other stories of working at GABS that have been allowed to be told in the museum. It is also the story of the company's survival in the face of its

⁴⁵ A. Portelli, 'The Peculiarities of Oral History', 100.

⁴⁶ Leon Lawrence, extract from video recording, 12 May 2010.

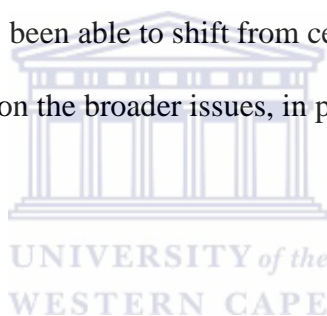
competition. This merits a reflection on GABS historiography with a view to exploring how it has incorporated some stories of different stakeholders into its histories and not others, as discussed in Chapter Two.



CHAPTER TWO: THE MAKING OF GABS: PREVIOUS HISTORICAL PRODUCTION

The challenge is to start contesting the purposes and practices of mobility, considering it in a more visionary way that is more relevant to the times, and to avoid lapsing into diagnoses and interventions centred on maximising mechanised mobility.¹

Since history is a set of processes and procedures of past making (historicising), this chapter returns to the idea of three phases of historicisation as set out in the introduction in considering how GABS histories have unfolded from the earlier technological focus toward the incorporation of life histories in the making of a museum and to what degree it has been able to shift from celebrating mechanical progress to including a reflection on the broader issues, in particular a social history of transport.



Early transport histories in Cape Town

The publication: Cape Trams: from horse to diesel 1861-1961

Long before the decision to establish a museum, historical production was taking place in the bus company. Published in 1961, *Cape Trams: from horse to diesel 1861-1961* was the first publication to capture the company's history. It celebrated 100 years of public transport, tracking the various formations of the company over time and documenting technological changes in bus transportation made during that period.

As a hard copy, the publication has the look of an educational textbook but it unmistakably focuses on the expansion of the business. It contains a listing of all the

¹ Gordon Pirie, 'Virtuous Mobility: Moralising vs measuring geographical mobility in Africa', *Afrika Focus*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (2009), 21-35, 13.

subsidiary companies as well as the company directors and executives in 1961 at the back of the book. It summarises a history of buyouts and expansion of routes over time with charts, tables and route maps that all contribute to a portrayal of the company as established and playing a central role in the life of the cities where it operated (Cape Town, Port Elizabeth). An overview of income and expenditure for 1960 is also included.

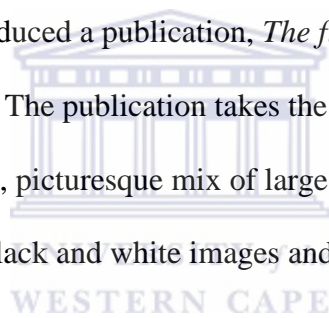
The cover of the book has, in the upper half of the page, a sketch of a horse-drawn carriage travelling down a street with '1861' underneath it and below that an illustration of a diesel double-decker bus with '1961' written below. Inside the book the first image is of the very first horse-drawn tram making its first trip with some of Cape Town's prominent men on board, such as the Postmaster General, newspaper editors and the City Engineer. The foreword is written by the Administrator of the Cape at the time. The back cover carries four illustrations of wheels representing the different eras in public transport, reinforcing the narrative of technological progress.

The inside pages are a combination of text interspersed with glossy pages of black and white photographs. There are portraits of directors and executives of the company and photographs that highlight the company's growth from the humble horse-drawn tram to the electric tram and eventually the modern-day diesel engine bus. Photographs of the machinery in the workshops are also included. This captures the first phase of history making, which essentially marvels at technological progress and celebrates the company's success in a field that was usually the domain of municipal authorities; hence the inclusion of drawings, maps, plans and models of the early vehicles.

Attention is given to the contribution the expanding bus service made to economic growth during the Second World War and the impact of the war on the company's operations and profits. There is also mention of the shift in business that was triggered by changing settlement patterns in Cape Town as a result of the implementation of the Group Areas Act. The publication traces the progression of the company and the expansion of the routes/service over a century and concludes confidently that "its wheels of progress roll forward smoothly and efficiently into the future".²

The publication: The first ten years, This Wonderful Journey

As previously stated, on the occasion of the ten-year anniversary of the company under new ownership, GABS produced a publication, *The first ten years, This Wonderful Journey*, (circa 2002).³ The publication takes the form of a full colour glossy booklet with an interesting, picturesque mix of large full colour landscape photographs, small album-style black and white images and clusters of text.



This publication is a new phase in history making in GABS as it presents the incorporation of workers, passengers, the broader community and a company perspective in a narrative of company success.

The front cover is dominated by a panoramic photograph of a Golden Arrow bus winding its way along a scenic route, up a mountain road with the coast of False Bay in the background. Perhaps this is a metaphor for the title inscribed on the bottom right-hand corner: *The Wonderful Journey*. On the inside front cover, the far left is a

² G. Fraser, *Cape Trams: from horse to diesel 1861-1961*. (Cape Town: Cape Electric Tramways, 1961), 90.

³ Staff responsible for the publication have all left the company and none of the current public relations staff were able to answer questions about it. Comments here are based on observations of the text.

column with a colour photograph of the same scenic road with no bus, just the sun about to set. This image contrasts with the greyscale blurred images spreading across the rest of the inside cover and over to fill page one. The blurred effect suggests movement and mobility and an image of a young mother with a child on her back can be seen as part of this effect. The inside cover text establishes an entwined history with two paragraphs titled *Our Journey as a Country* and *Our Journey as a Company*:

Our Journey as a Country

The South African journey to freedom and democracy is a story marked by both heart-rending episodes and positive developments that oddly enough, result in a feeling of comfortable hope in the future. Once the pariah state of the world, South Africa commands respect and draws admiration from the international community due to its amazing achievements of its people under trying circumstances. Although our journey has been a tough one, it has been empowering because we are all better equipped to deal with the road ahead

Our Journey as a Company

In many respects Golden Arrow's journey has resembled a bus ride. Sometimes it has been quite bumpy, but mostly it has been smooth. At times the bus may have threatened to break down. At other times it may not have been certain that the bus would actually complete the trip. Despite all these elements, a great deal has been learned through that experience. It is on the basis of this experience that continuing the journey into the future will provide opportunities to show what we have come to know of the complex field of moving people surely, swiftly and safety.

The back cover has the bus coming back along the same route, this time travelling downhill and there is an inscription that reads "looking ahead to the next ten years".

These cover photographs were probably taken at the time of day known in photography as the golden hour (around sunrise or sunset), and they have a warm, softly lit quality. This, combined with the celebratory content of the text and a few photographs of Nelson Mandela all contribute to a feel-good effect for the publication.

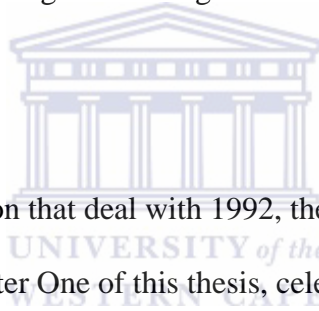
Each year between 1992 and 2002 (eleven years in total) is featured on a two-page spread. A landscape photograph of Cape Town stretching from the left to the right page dominates each spread. On the left-hand page of each spread, at the far left is a column with a timeline of seemingly noteworthy events on the nation's calendar for that year, and a box at the top containing a signature image in the form of a colour photograph of a newsworthy event. Four of the eleven signature images are of Nelson Mandela. The text narrates what are deemed to be landmark national events, political milestones and social developments for each year.

A small block of text, accompanied by another colour photograph, fills the bottom of the left-hand side of each page. The accompanying text summarises the year in the bus company's operation or a development in its social investment arm, the Golden Arrow Foundation. The accompanying photographs are generally of workers at the workshop or delivering services. The year is printed boldly beneath this image and a theme for the year such as 'Strides of Development', 'Regaining what was lost' and 'Implementing Transformation'.

On the right-hand page, below the centrespread are four to five small black and white photographs. These are images of workers or company officials or special occasions such as award ceremonies, retirement announcements, meetings with dignitaries, special projects or charity work. Each image is accompanied by a short explanatory paragraph. These images and the focus on charity work contribute significantly to making this a people-centred account of the company's history, of its workers and of its interaction with the broader community. This is also established at the outset on the first page with a dedication to the staff, especially those killed in the line of duty:

This book is dedicated to all those fine men and women who have served the communities of greater Cape Town as members of the Golden Arrow Bus Services team. It is especially a tribute to those who paid the supreme sacrifice of their lives while performing their normal duties.⁴

This approach is followed through in the photo album-styled images and the content used in the accompanying descriptions. It is reinforced further in the publication when the names of twenty six people who were killed in the line of duty are listed, followed by a listing of all the staff who worked at the company since 1992, including those no longer there. However, as discussed in Chapter Two of this work, Carl Stewart, Thami Thabatha and others (interviewed by Carohn Cornell and blacklisted by the company) and the men they mentioned as having died during the taxi wars are not included in the list.



The pages in the GABS publication that deal with 1992, the year of the strike for safety which is discussed in Chapter One of this thesis, celebrate the achievements of staff members and the revival of Multimech, which was the section of Golden Arrow serving the City Council and the National Defence Force. The theme for the year was "Time for a new direction". In its summary reflection of the company's year it states:

We note with pride that Golden Arrow was born at the time when the country was taking a new shape and direction for the first time in its history. In a departure from tradition, people became the focal point of every activity in society.⁵

There is only a small reference to the turmoil that had unfolded at GABS as the text continued:

The stoning of some of our buses and the abduction of some of our staff worsened our problems. However, the company, through the

⁴Golden Arrow Bus Services (Pty) Ltd, *The first ten years, This Wonderful Journey* (c2002), 1.

⁵ The first ten years, 2.

application of sound business principles, managed to weather the storm.⁶

This in the year where, after repeatedly requesting protection, hundreds of drivers sacrificed wages (and risked their jobs) to get the company to make it safer for them to work. As already mentioned, during the violence four bus drivers were killed during shootings and by the end of the strike many of its leaders had lost their jobs at GABS.⁷

The year 2000 is themed as ‘A Phenomenal Spirit’ and it includes a paragraph discussing the taxi violence that had continued to plague the company. While it acknowledges the death of four men on duty, the focus is on how operations were hampered by the violence:

A year remembered with a deep sense of sorrow and spirit of mourning. For four months the company and commuters watched helplessly as members of taxi groups wreaked havoc on the bus transport operations of Cape Town. Four members of staff lost their lives in brutal attacks on the company’s buses and bus operations in parts of the city were severely disrupted due to the refusal by taxi operators to allow bus operations in the townships. The violence only ended after decisive action by the authorities.⁸

In the black and white photo album there is a photograph capturing a community protest against the violence and also one of passengers who were forced to walk as a result of the attacks on buses. It reads:

Bus Attacks: Thousands of commuters were left stranded as Golden Arrow buses; the drivers and passengers became targets of a hitman hired by misguided elements in the minibus taxi industry. Many walked long distances before catching their buses outside Khayelitsha on the N2.⁹

⁶ *The first ten years*, 2.

⁷ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Barry Links, extract from oral history transcription, interviewed by Carohn Cornell, 3 May 2006, Observatory.

⁸ *The first ten years*, 18.

⁹ *The first ten years*, 19.

The last two pages are an effort to include the stories of passengers in a section called ‘Life on the Bus’, set against a double page landscape aerial photograph of the twinkling lights of Cape Town overlooking Table Bay at night – a charming scene. Some stories are as short as one paragraph; the longest is four paragraphs in length. Based on a reading of these histories, it is possible that people were asked to share their fondest or funniest memory of travelling by bus particularly in honour of the ten-year celebration. An example follows:

One day, a day I will never forget in my entire life. I was travelling by bus with my boyfriend; we were coming from Cape Town to Mitchells Plain. It was a very hot day. Without knowing we suddenly saw the driver on his feet, screaming, apparently he saw a big snake was lying on the road. The driver swerved the bus out of the road, everyone was moving up and down in the bus because of the way the driver was driving. Some of the passengers were laughing at him, others were angry saying he is a coward. We are still together, we will never forget that incident and Golden Arrow will always be in our memories for another coming ten years.¹⁰

Notwithstanding these pages, there is very little focus on the voices of passengers. The publication does acknowledge the turbulent years without diminishing the narrative of progress. This is a significant step and is a departure from the company history depicted in the first publication. Perhaps the tone would have been negatively affected if these issues were covered in more detail but it is limited given the concept of a ‘wonderful’ journey of the emerging company alongside the discourse of an emerging rainbow nation.

The documentary film: Roots and Routes

In 2006 the first product to emerge after a decision was made to establish a museum, ushering in the third phase of historicisation, was the documentary film *Roots and*

¹⁰ *The first ten years*, 28.

Routes. The twenty minute film relies heavily on archival material, including old film footage, but also includes recently shot video footage. The film relies on a ‘voice of god’ narrator to drive a discourse of progress, similar to the narrative of the publications that predate it. The filmmaker, Mark van Wijk, takes a linear, progressive, chronological approach to the history of public road transport in Cape Town.

With an array of images showing a range of (mainly bus) transport from the early days till the present, it is a visual delight for the transport enthusiast. Through a selection of archival illustrations and photographs and some video clips, the filmmaker traces the story of the development of public transport from the wagon through to double-decker buses, with the emphasis on Golden Arrow Bus Services and its predecessors. The use of colour is kept simple – the archival footage is all in black and white or sepia and more recent footage is treated with full colour. Music is used to convey mood: the scenes of modern-day Cape Town are accompanied by urban musical sounds while the older images are musically associated with a 1920s dramatic film score.

Roots and Routes starts with archival footage of early Cape Town depicting a street scene in black and white. The details are not clear in the scene which is quickly followed by the title of the film followed by the words "The Story of Public Road Transport in Cape Town". Thus the film opens with the promise to delve into the history of public transport and the narrator explains that by looking at the past we will understand the present state of public transport and will be able to deal with challenges in order to build a brighter future. However, the film then proceeds to deal with bus transport in particular. Although it refers briefly to other modes of transport,

bus transport never surrenders its position as the main champion of public transport against all odds, including during World War Two. The filmmaker does not justify this emphasis, nor consider the fact that in the same year as the formation of the first bus company, the first steam-powered locomotive began operating (1862), or that in 1930, the law limited the bus route, rendering the service as a rail feeder.¹¹ There is mention of the bus becoming a rail feeder and also of the growing and expanding taxi industry but this is very limited.

Technological advancement from the early days is celebrated with a host of images that demonstrate progress from antiquity to the modern-day machine. The filmmaker uses long shots, making it difficult to appreciate any interesting details on the trams, omnibuses or other means of transport. After a run through of various dates in the history of bus transport, without addressing the politics of bus transport in any way, the film briefly raises some challenges faced by the industry when the film was made (2006).

While the film pays attention to the history (roots) of the bus transport system, it fails to explore in any depth the travel destinations (routes) and how its connections to government or other modes of transport helped to shape it. Similarly, the impact of transport workers and passengers are absent. As such it is an uncritical look at the role of public transport, the functions of mobility and the company itself.

In the film, the narrator refers briefly to the implementation of apartheid on buses by saying it merely affected the "efficiency of services" after 1948. In further

¹¹ 'Welcome to Metrorail', <http://www.metrorail.co.za/About.html>, accessed on 20 May 2010.

commentary, the narrator mentions that the Group Areas Act led to the relocation of 'black', 'coloured' and 'Indian' people from the city to the outskirts of Cape Town. Later the narrator disingenuously refers to the expansion of the bus company's routes into apartheid ghettos as "Golden Arrow extended their services in response to the demand". The narrator fails to mention that the bus company received substantial subsidies from the government and profited from apartheid's creation of a new market of commuters. In *Roots and Routes* the narrator states that "the segregation of buses was enforced" – failing to point out that the enforcers were the GABS staff themselves. It is this relationship with the government that later led to buses being targeted by activists during the freedom struggle as the bus company and its employees were seen as allied with the state. Buses were stoned and sometimes razed to the ground in acts of sabotage and several bus boycotts occurred as defiant acts against the state. With the voices of workers and passengers silent, the film uses no other device to capture this history. The film provides a simplified chronology that charts the increasing success for the bus company and does not dwell on any events in history that interrupted that trajectory, despite disruptions being typical of any company's journey to success.

It concludes with another comment alluding to the challenges facing the management of public transport in the years ahead but is silent on the continued lack of an integrated public transport system. The result is that the film lacks the "theoretically provocative, empirically rich, and perhaps even more politically effective"¹²

¹² Colin Divall and George Revill, 'Cultures of transport: Representations, practice and technology', *Transport History*, Vol. 26, No. 1 (2005), 101.

historiography that is needed in documenting public transport or a company's history in Cape Town.

The Oral History interviews

As mentioned in the introduction, in 2006 an oral history programme commenced and seven oral histories interviews were completed by an independent researcher, Carohn Cornell, for HCI Foundation. Among these were pensioners' narratives that provide an idea of the values that were emphasised (honesty, hard work, loyalty) in previous generations while the unionists' narratives reflect a change in what was emphasised (rights, fairness, equality).

The pensioners felt fortunate to have had steady jobs and stable incomes while other men suffered shut downs and short time in the factories. On the other hand, unionist Thami Thabatha, in his interview, mentioned he had been unable to find stable employment since his dismissal.¹³ He and one of the active union leaders interviewed expressed unresolved emotions regarding the dismissal of all the strike leaders at the time.

The interview carried out by Carohn Cornell with a former COSATU official addressed union politics and the challenges of organising transport workers in the early 1980s. He commented on the impact of the strike related dismissals as follows:

...the dismissal of the sixty is an important phase in what unfolded because it really was a massive erosion of worker leadership and experience that was just taken out of Golden Arrow.¹⁴

¹³ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Thami Thabatha, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 23 May 2006, Vanguard Estate.

¹⁴ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Tom Dunkley, extract from oral history transcription, interviewed by Carohn Cornell, 3 May 2006, Mowbray.

Different historiographies were emerging (or not) because, as Grele points out, the interview process is more than data collection but the "creation of a history through the intervention of the researcher".¹⁵ Carohn Cornell unapologetically sought to recover a labour history so she asked certain questions and sought out the people she knew would want to talk about it as additional informants. This was a natural process that usually happened in her work. She would combine her networks and knowledge with what the client provided to achieve the intended goal.¹⁶ Because of this intervention what surfaced was more than a company history. Her interviews produced life histories, a social history and a labour history.

The UWC group session

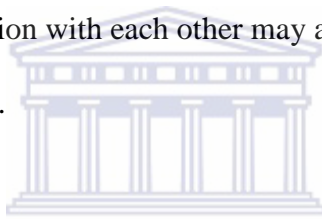
As mentioned in the introduction, HCI Foundation hosted a discussion between UWC and a selected group on 12 May 2010. This was part of the activities of the UWC Transport Museum Preparatory Project that came about to further the Foundation's plans for a transport museum. Hopes for a relaxed, open interaction were probably compromised somewhat because the group was gathered around a large boardroom table (a formal setting), with a band of four UWC researchers (Jade Gibson, Dmitri Abrahams, Heather Wares and myself as facilitator) on one side, an HCI representative at the head, presiding over the session, and a video camera operator (who I had brought along) in the background. The oral history interviews carried out by Cornell were held at locations preferred by the narrators whereas the focus group session was held at HCI Foundation's boardroom. This was possibly the first time

¹⁵ R. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound*, 253.

¹⁶ C. Houston, telephone conversation with Carohn Cornell, Cape Town, 4 October 2010.

some of the pensioners would speak about the company in a space directly associated with it. Nevertheless, the circulation of old photographs and back copies of *Tollgate*, the staff newsletter, at the focus group helped to relax participants.

To mitigate the situation, the camera operator had been briefed not to interfere with proceedings, and to maintain a fly-on-the wall stance, zooming in from the group onto the face of whoever speaks, from a reasonable distance rather than having the camera in their faces. There was also a time constraint in that the pensioners would be transported back to their homes after lunch. These were factors influencing the level of responsiveness, openness and the silences during the session. The fact that three of the pensioners had a long connection with each other may also have influenced what was said and what was left unsaid.



The HCI Foundation's representative invited everyone to introduce themselves and one after the other they spoke, slipping into an official tone, stating (in similar fashion) their names, where they resided, when employment had started and their retirement dates and occupations at Golden Arrow Bus Services. Thereafter, each person was given a chance to speak about their time at GABS and occasionally I or another member of the Preparatory Project would ask a probing question. The information shared by the different speakers were all according to a similar structure: how and when they came to be working at the company, their different occupations or promotions at GABS, duration of each position held, when they retired or intended to retire. The HCI Foundation representative then invited everyone to share their highlights of their time at GABS. This signalled the sharing of pleasant, nostalgic memories among the narrators.

Photographs, borrowed from the HCI Foundation's collection, were later circulated in the hope of generating additional narratives. Each person in the group could choose a selection of *Tollgate* publications, organised by year. They were asked to find an image that meant something to them and to share its meaning with us. The images helped to create a more informal tone to our conversation. People spontaneously spoke of their experiences, not waiting to be prompted by a question. Due to time constraints, we worked very little with the images, but these were encouraging results.

As the session progressed, the pensioners (one of these pensioners had also been previously interviewed by Carohn Cornell) provided a company history, including the evolution of bus routes, bus types, the introduction of drivers of colour and, later, the introduction of women as drivers. While they enjoyed the opportunity to recall memories, they avoided sensitive issues, except for the woman who offered memories of what it was like for the first women drivers. Although their time at the company spanned the period from the 1930s through to just before the strike of 1992 (except for two who were still employed), the group had, until this point, omitted talk of any strikes, the robberies and stoning during the 1980s, the challenges of implementing segregation on the bus and inequalities at work. The absence of any reflections on these experiences was strikingly common among them and so I specifically asked about it. It was then that varied narratives, of a personal nature found voice.

One narrator had long ago been a chairperson of TOWU. He mentioned some instances of cases where he represented workers and saved their jobs and noted they had been involved in wage negotiations as well. He did so as an elaboration on his

achievements and also in response to a question I had asked a previous speaker about the kinds of issues the union tackled. He also mentioned that he did 'sick visits' in the evening, which were surprise visits (carried out on behalf of management) to confirm that employees on sick leave were indeed sick. A retired 'coloured' worker recalled that he had the job of taking bus drivers' measurements for the supply of uniforms. His supervisor had complained that he was far too cheerful and instructed him to no longer make eye contact with white bus drivers or make small talk with them when they came for fittings.¹⁷

In answer to some pointed questions, some narrators shed light on their own involvement in bus apartheid, recalling that they would drive a bus for 'whites only' and have to refuse entry to any 'black' people. They said they saw the implementation of segregation as a case of the company abiding by the law and that passengers understood bus apartheid in the same light. It is uncertain if they were motivated by fear of losing their jobs or their loyalty to GABS in implementing apartheid on buses themselves. A former bus inspector among the group then recalled finding his own, pregnant 'coloured' wife seated in the 'whites only' section of the bus one day. He contemplated enforcing the law (she was supposed to sit upstairs) but then, realising that the passengers around her thought she was 'white', he spared her the trouble of heaving her body up the stairs in the moving bus and allowed her to stay seated.¹⁸

Since the pensioners responded when asked about these awkward issues, the original act of omission was probably not a case of forgetting, but rather of filtering what to

¹⁷ C. Houston, Mackie Arnold, extract from UWC group session with pensioners and retiring GABS employees, 12 May 2010, Cape Town.

¹⁸ C. Houston, Leon Lawrence, extract from UWC group session with pensioners and retiring GABS employees, 12 May 2010, Cape Town.

share. In other words, opting to be silent had more to do with the present - with the "narration and interaction that occurs there."¹⁹ The video camera, the HCI Foundation representative and the idea of putting all this on record, out in the open, could have been factors that made the group reluctant to volunteer these experiences.

Various factors contribute to these happy narratives of a time that was oppressive (considering bus apartheid and their working conditions) such as personal pride, limited expectations, the mediation of class conflict through personal relationships and conscious manipulation by management. The situation could be likened to Portelli's reflection on the miners of Harlan County (a coal mining company town in Kentucky) where workers living in a compound, isolated from others, did not see themselves as exploited and thus had a "harmonious description of the social environment in which such dramatic conflicts took place." He contrasts this with the way Italian workers who were critical of their situation advanced an image of 'militant pride,' having been somewhat exposed to class struggle.²⁰

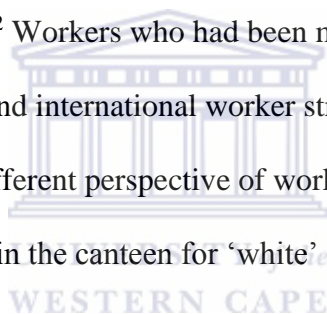
Much like Harlan County coal miners, the bus drivers found themselves in isolation with no "opportunity to assess their conditions on a universal standard".²¹ Those designated as 'coloureds' saw themselves as having been privileged to don the company's uniform since 1930, when they were first permitted to hold jobs as bus drivers in the company. As they reflected during the UWC session, their sense of pride was strong and they saw themselves as fortunate to have made the grade in spite of apartheid.

¹⁹ Hofmeyr, 'Reading oral texts', 7.

²⁰ A. Portelli, *Luigi Trastulli*, 202.

²¹ A. Portelli, *Luigi Trastulli*, 203.

The *Tollgate* company newsletter seemed to regularly feature group photographs of family members who worked for the company. Upon seeing some of these family photographs, the pensioners reminisced of a family business, similar in tone to some of what Leah Stevens' (wife of a pensioner) told Carohn Cornell. Although they were respected by their communities as men in uniform, they had the humiliation of implementing apartheid on the buses themselves. Somehow they had to make sense of the family-friendly company, on the one hand, and the company where all employees were not equal. As in Portelli's observation, these workers tended to feel "there is something personally demeaning – rather than collectively legitimising – in appearing to be or to have been exploited".²² Workers who had been made aware of their exploitative working conditions and international worker struggles (through the new wave in union politics), gave a different perspective of working at the company (they said they were not allowed to eat in the canteen for 'white' employees, for example).²³



Rather than deal with the pain of their reality, the pensioners narrated a different personal or collective history, one that perhaps expressed their hidden desire to be treated as equals in the workplace.²⁴ This could be a result of the inner debate that a narrator experiences about whether to remain agreeable in their narrative (often when people raise the negative they preface it with 'I don't want to speak out of turn, but') or to make the emotional effort to speak about the negative.²⁵ Apartheid is one of the negative experiences that was generally left unspoken.

²²A. Portelli, *Luigi Trastulli*, 202.

²³ Carl Stewart related the exposure that contributed to his awakening to Carohn Cornell and in conversation with me, Fred Williams told of the unequal treatment of workers on the basis of race categorisation. Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Carl Stewart, extract from oral history transcript, interviewed by Carohn Cornell on 31 October 2006. Fred Williams, personal conversation, 20 September 2011.

²⁴ A. Portelli, *Luigi Trastulli*, 102.

²⁵A. Portelli, *Luigi Trastulli*, 113

In selecting participants for the oral histories as well as the group session, attention should have been given to the need for a diversity of employees/pensioners to reflect different eras in the company, the different trade unions that operated there and, given that apartheid legislation had a real impact on the company's employment conditions, the fact that GABS employed employees from different designated groups in a particular way. The HCI Foundation had shaped the production of history through its definition and selection of who fitted the category 'pensioner' for the group interview with us. Nonetheless, the UWC group session highlighted the possibilities of a richer narrative that came from the varied memories that were briefly discussed there.

150 years of service: the virtual museum and the play

Despite the earlier publication celebrating the company's 'birth' in 1992, with no references to the previous 131 years of operations and innovations, GABS celebrated 150 years in 2011.

To mark this occasion HCI Foundation launched a *virtual museum* in 2011 as part of the celebrations.²⁶ It has a timeline capturing developments in the company and a significant number of photographs of various bus types that have come and gone with time. The site invites visitors to share their own memories of using buses and trains yet it does not share any of the stories already in the archive. It also includes a memorial for those who died in the line of duty. Names of the dead start from 1992 and continue until 2001. As in the *Ten Years* publication, it does not mention any of

²⁶ Golden Arrow Bus Services', <http://www.goldenarrow150.co.za>, accessed on 25 October 2013.

the men associated with the story of the strike as told by the unionists to Carohn Cornell.

New Africa Theatre was commissioned by HCI Foundation to mount the play, *Caboose*, as part of GABS' 150-year celebration in October 2011. The plot reflects a bus caught literally in the crossfire between angry protestors and the state and also references the competition with the taxi industry and its associated violence. The unfolding story is anecdotal, centering on the lives of the passengers on the bus. This is an important shift in emphasis to giving the passengers' narrative a platform.

As a result of generally focusing on a narrow company history, opportunities to draw in transport users as narrators in ways that are useful in museum making have been missed in the making of GABS histories. Referring to a process of enquiry, Divall stresses the importance of exploring the production process of transport together with its use.²⁷ The bus is an object with history and its history connects with life experience. The question of 'use' raises the question of users, the passengers. A remarkable instance where the voice of the passenger came out strongly in the past was in protest against bus apartheid.²⁸ Considering how vociferous the resistance was, the treatment of the formative practice of apartheid in the lives of passengers, is notably absent from GABS histories.

The experience of travel is instructive in people's understanding of the city. Central to this experience are the practices of visibility associated with bus transport. Divall

²⁷ Divall and Reville, 'Cultures of Transport', 106.

²⁸ Pirie, 'Bus apartheid', 64.

states that transport has historically been subject to the "interests of social groups and individuals" and is "heavily informed by and informing, power".²⁹

What did the passengers learn in the wake of the Group Areas Act when they travelled from the ghettos to their workplaces in the city? What did they come to understand as they observed the barren landscapes become more developed the closer their bus came to the city centre? How did bus apartheid affect relationships between 'black' and 'white' people? These are insights that have yet to be drawn on in telling the history of public transport in Cape Town.

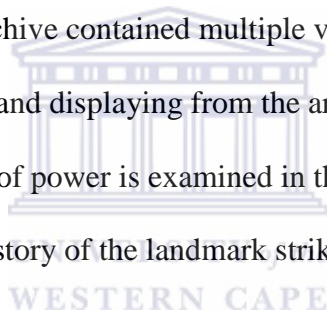
The earlier histories of GABS discussed in this chapter are essentially products that narrate progress made by the company. With company progress as the impetus for the products, it was unlikely that issues of contestation and the perspectives of workers or passengers would be incorporated. By its very nature a company narrative of progress would not sit well with inclusions of worker and passenger narratives that were not nostalgic.

The publications and the film were clearly conceptualised to be celebratory in tone. While the *Ten Years* publication was promising in the sense that it represented efforts to be more inclusive of workers and passengers, the documentary bowed to the narrative of technological progress, revolving around innovation in the company. The oral history interviews started on shaky ground with the limited selection of participants but in the end definitely broadened the range of stories. The interviews and the UWC group session were important moments, although limited, of including

²⁹ Divall and Revill, 'Cultures of Transport', 101.

workers' narratives in the archive. The issue is whether they would be used for exhibition purposes, and whether they would be an impetus for more voices to be included. Considering the most recent initiative (the virtual museum), it is clear that care has been taken to ensure a narrative of progress prevails. Narratives that incorporate mistakes and lessons learnt, contestation and compromise would have provided a richer understanding of mobility and the lack of it at the same time. This experience is one instance where transport's role and meaning shaped the workers and passengers' identities and the city. This is an aspect of history that remains obscure.

Ultimately decision-making over what to use in the production of history rested with HCI Foundation. Now that the archive contained multiple voices, what kind of decisions were made in selecting and displaying from the archive as company history making continued? This exercise of power is examined in the next chapter with a view to tracking what happened to the story of the landmark strike of 1992 in the Preparatory Project.



CHAPTER THREE: THE POLITICS OF SILENCE

We must know the basis of selection. We must know why one event was left out and why another was included. We must bring that gap to consciousness.¹

This chapter analyses how silence has been produced through choices that have been made or omitted in the historicisation of Golden Arrow Bus Services, particularly through the Museum Preparatory Project that was run in conjunction with the UWC History Department between late 2009 and November 2010. While there are no clear reasons why certain themes were silenced, the chapter presents an understanding of how it came to be so in the preparation of a temporary exhibition.

Museum Preparatory Project

The temporary exhibition was part of the bigger Museum Preparatory Project. . Commissioned and funded by HCI Foundation, the project was initiated by Ciraj Rassool, head of the University of the Western Cape's History Department. History lecturer, Nicky Rousseau, was the project coordinator and Leslie Witz later joined the project team. The team also included two post-doctoral fellows (one from the Cities in Transition Project), Jade Gibson and Anis Daraghma, as well as Museum and Heritage Studies student, Heather Wares, two History Honours students (Asaniel Mavugara and Dmitri Abrahams) and myself, an MA student (and also filmmaker).

¹ R. Grele, *Envelopes of Sound*, 266.

The project team was driven by the notion of museum making as a process, rather than a case of finding a building, developing a collection and putting up a display. To this end, this mix of scholars researched, developed or acquired a collection of relevant literature, examples of museological policies, interview recordings and transcripts, photographs and other documentation on existing transport museums and museums with a transport focus that was to be handed to the HCI Foundation. In exchange the students received bursaries through the project.

Leslie Witz believes that, in choosing to work with UWC, the Foundation signed up to a process, a different kind of making a museum.² This is echoed in the words of the anonymous source from the Foundation who said:

In relation to identifying a professional methodology and model, the range and depth of UWC expertise in both the transport and museum arenas provided compelling grounds for the partnership.³

She noted that:

The Foundation was hoping to clarify a way of proceeding with this large-scale project, both in terms of identifying a professional methodology and model, and developing potential partnerships. The joint agreement for the HCIF/UWC partnership cites the following outcomes – all of which were achieved:

- Research – serve as research base
- Core collection – assess and progress work
- Conservation – inform re standards and systems
- Student Training – utilise five graduate students to increase knowledge and skills base (this included bursaries)
- Academic Colloquium – prepare, plan and host
- Mobile installation – prepare four-panel installation (delivered early on request)
- Museum governance and best practice – make proposals
- Museum Working Group – plan and make proposals for the initiation of a working group⁴

² C. Houston, interview with L. Witz, Kenilworth, 16 December 2012.

³ Anonymous, personal communication, 14 July 2013.

⁴ Anonymous, personal communication, 14 July 2013.

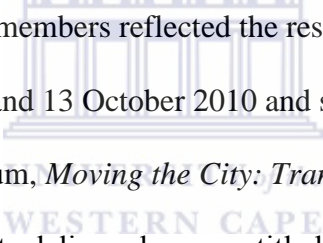
However, Witz recalls that tensions arose as the project unfolded as there was a strong emphasis on the idea of having a building to house a collection and display panels, whereas the view of the Preparatory Project was that a museum does not only happen when there is a building. HCI Foundation already had a museum making process underway: they had a collection and an archive. They remained anxious about a building however and in a parallel initiative, the Foundation had commissioned a company, Makeka Design Lab, to work on finding a building.⁵

The Preparatory Project hosted a public lecture by international specialist Professor Colin Divall from the University of York as well as South African expert, Professor Gordon Pirie as respondent, on 18 August 2010 at the District Six Museum. This was part of a two-day programme called *Moving the City: Transport, Mobility and the Making of a Museum 1*. They made invaluable inputs on new frameworks and modern ideas of representing a history of transport.

The following day, a workshop was held to explore the concept of the proposed museum. Colin Divall, Ali Hlongwane of Museum Africa, and Emilia Potenza of the Apartheid Museum reflected on their specific museums. The events were attended by HCI Foundation and practitioners from other museums. Inputs were also made by post-doctoral fellows, Jade Gibson and Anis Daraghma, who had visited several museums around South Africa to see what lessons could be learnt in the making of a modern museum.

⁵ C. Houston, interview with L. Witz, Kenilworth, 16 December 2012.

The general argument emanating from inputs by experts and practitioners concurred with the project team's thinking toward linking issues of mobility in the urban development context to the history of transport, as well as a history of transport that went beyond an artefact-based narrative to linking with a history of the city and its people. Furthermore, students used the two company archives as a basis for new research that was presented at a symposium as well. Issues researched included the bus as a symbol of modernisation; gender, advertising and the bus; the apartheid bus; changes to passenger bus routes between 1950 and 1970; oral histories and memories of ex-GABS employees. This work was later to be reflected in the exhibition panels that were initially prepared for HCI Foundation.



Papers from various project team members reflected the research that had been their focus during a symposium on 12 and 13 October 2010 and several discussants offered critical feedback. At the Symposium, *Moving the City: Transport, Mobility and the Making of a Museum 2*, Leslie Witz delivered a paper titled 'A nineteenth century mail coach, a fifteenth century sailing ship and a bus crash: re-thinking collection and display in transport museums.' Jade Gibson's paper was titled 'Moving the Museum,' Anis Daraghma considered 'The ideology of mobility', Asaniel Mavugara and Heather Wares dealt with the archive and material culture while I and Dmitri Abrahams looked at oral history.

In combining three seemingly disparate events in his paper, Leslie Witz presents a critical look at representation in transport heritage, especially where it has revolved around a fascination with the transport artefact. Witz analyses the use of the mail coach at Outeniqua Transport Museum (which was central to the Jan van Riebeeck

centenary festival in 1952) and the caravel at the Dias museum (which was used in the Dias Festival of 1988) in historical production. Furthermore, he juxtaposes these with a set of photographs of a bus crash that happened on the same day as the Dias Festival but was filed in the Dias Museum archives. Reflecting on the fascination with the artefact or the technology, he encourages the idea that one must think of relations of power in the historiography of these artefacts. He argues that transport museums

are not merely to be institutions of collecting and displaying technologies in or without a variety of contexts, but sites that make history and reflect upon the pasts of those, including themselves, who have been implicated in producing, circulating and sustaining certain types of history.⁶

In Mavugara's paper he argues for a deeper and broader interpretation and utilisation of the GABS archive, in particular, its visual material. To demonstrate this he explored 'the realms of fashion, pornography, and advertising' and also how power dynamics associated with these worlds are manifested through photography.⁷ Through this exploration he encouraged the idea of the bus as part of many other aspects of life and thus the idea that images can elucidate a broader transport history. At another point in the paper he uses images from the GABS archive, of graffiti with a political message, to make the point that the images provide "the history of a bus company as well as the history of Apartheid".⁸ This paper and the images later became a central part of the temporary exhibition.

⁶ L. Witz, 'A nineteenth century mail coach, a fifteenth century sailing ship and a bus crash: re-thinking collection and display in transport museums', paper presented at *Transport Heritage Symposium: Visions of Mobility*, held at University of the Western Cape, 12, 13 October 2010, 21.

⁷ A. Mavugara, 'The Archive, Visual Images and Power', paper presented at *Transport Heritage Symposium: Visions of Mobility*, held at University of the Western Cape, 12, 13 October 2010, 2.

⁸ A. Mavugara, 'The Archive, Visual Images and Power', 28.

In similar vein, Abrahams' paper on bus apartheid draws on bus history (the role of the bus in particular) to focus on the formation of racial identity. He demonstrates through his discussion of oral history interviews that he conducted that different narratives are possible in recalling any particular issue. In this case he shares the story of a person who always took care not to sit next to a person (classified as) of another race when he boarded a bus because of the law. However, Abrahams makes the point that there were those who did not observe the law. Their narratives would be different on the issue of bus apartheid. Abrahams' paper presented a different take on bus history contending that "the bus came to be seen as another space of separation from your fellow countrymen".⁹ This paper also informed the temporary exhibition's content. Daraghma considers the different meanings of the term 'mobility' and how a focus on mobility can have many perspectives. He looks at how 'mobility' is interpreted and represented in eleven museums across South Africa. He argues that the ideology of mobility, and hence transport heritage, is skewed on the basis of race and class. He therefore argues that "a comprehensive presentation of SA's mobilities has to deal with the past, present and future of transport systems" and "the history of people who used and constructed those transport systems".¹⁰

Picking up on new trends in museum making, Heather Wares spells out two options in her paper: a company history or a history of lives, or perhaps a combination. She explores the means to create a community around the existing collection and some potential areas of contestation that could result. She draws attention to the exclusion of, or selective inclusion, of workers' voices and argues that attention must be given to

⁹ D. Abrahams, 'The Apartheid body and the Bus', paper presented at *Transport Heritage Symposium: Visions of Mobility*, held at University of the Western Cape, 12, 13 October 2010, 4.

¹⁰ A. Daraghma, 'South Africa's Mobilities', paper presented at *Transport Heritage Symposium: Visions of Mobility*, held at University of the Western Cape, 12, 13 October 2010, 1.

what happens to workers' stories once they have been recorded. She concludes that the tendency is toward "a dominant notion of a company history which looks to use social history as a way of giving authority to its preferred history".¹¹

My paper began to explore the GABS historiography that is developed in this study. It emphasises the production of oral history and concludes that multiple narratives could benefit the proposed transport museum as they would promote ownership among the oral history interviewees through inclusivity and would appeal to a wider range of visitors.¹²

Jade Gibson's paper gives an overview of the features of other transport museums in South Africa and calls for a creative approach to exhibitions based also on modern theories of the transport museum as a tool for the integration of the city and for thinking about the city and its future. She argues that "the museum itself can become a vehicle for more cohesion, less division and a means to link the spatialised (and still implicitly racialised) body back into the city, not in a separate 'no-go' zone or a highly protected 'security complex' or 'City Development District' of relative spatial isolation."¹³ Again the argument is made that the museum could be operating and impacting in different spheres such as healing the divisions caused by spatial divisions or city planning and development.

¹¹ H. Wares, 'The question of constructing an argument around how to construct a community around artefacts', paper presented at *Transport Heritage Symposium: Visions of Mobility*, held at University of the Western Cape, 12, 13 October 2010, 20.

¹² C. Houston, 'Oral History and the making of Golden Arrow Bus Services', paper presented at *Transport Heritage Symposium: Visions of Mobility*, held at University of the Western Cape, 12, 13 October 2010, 21.

¹³ Jade Gibson, 'Moving the museum: A creative rethinking for a transport/mobility museum in Cape Town through absences, presences and possibilities in current museum exhibitions', unpublished paper, 9.

Gibson observes that the transport-themed museums were focused on objects and it is in other broader themed museums such as District Six Museum, Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, the Workers' Museum or Museum Africa, that have elements of transport histories, where attention is given to the social history of transport. For example, at the James Hall Museum of Transport she found that the focus was on various types of vehicles, contained in five different halls, although there had also been involvement in a once-off social history project. She also noted their use of moving objects and interactive tools to make the visitor's experience more interesting. The James Hall Museum is a museum for transport enthusiasts, similar to the Outeniqua Transport Museum, which boasts a steam locomotive and various rail and road-bound vehicles of yesteryear. Commenting on displays at Outeniqua Transport Museum, Gibson describes these objects as separate from people's lives and experiences such as segregation on trains. She states, "the museum became a historical piece, severed from the present, an artefact of history rather than a representation of society".¹⁴

This was an important note of caution for the proposed transport museum. Further highlighting the problematic result of such representations, Gibson writes:

In relation to the 'act of looking' and representation within the museum context, the image of what was described as a 'typical slave ship' at the Slave Lodge suggests the Dias Museum image of a ship – displayed as an object in itself, of colonial celebration, travel and discovery, detached from the history of exploitation and slavery that followed it. An image of slaves being led in chains after capture at the Slave Lodge also depicts a different perspective to that of the Maritime Museum's story of maritime transportation, or maps of trade and discovery at the Dias Museum. The map depicting ship routes where slaves were taken to Cape Town on display in the Slave Lodge, can be compared to the map of Spice

¹⁴ J. Gibson, 'Moving the museum: A creative rethinking for a transport/mobility museum', 22.

Routes in the Dias Museum – two maps intrinsically related but existing within different contexts of interpretation.¹⁵

Gibson's paper explores one of the central questions for the Project: "can such a museum extend to multiple lenses on the past, present and future, be plural, discursive and contradictory?"¹⁶ She concludes that:

...the museum as a created artwork (whether virtual, a building, a series of buildings, or a transport vehicle), may operate on many levels to assimilate transport vehicle histories, social realities in the past and present, the city, conceptualisations of identity, and thus community, challenging community issues of belonging and 'not-belonging' by looking at the very networks that constructed these divides, in which transport and mobility as a theme becomes a tool for a space of artistic re-imagination...¹⁷

These events gave HCI Foundation its first real opportunity to engage with the research undertaken by the students. While there was appreciation for the work done, the then CEO of the Foundation, Virginia Engel, expressed concern that too much time had been spent on debating the scope of the museum without a concrete model emerging. The friction that surfaced then, grew as the Museum Project's work proceeded, bringing to the fore the differences between the HCI Foundation representatives and the project team. One of the project leaders summed it up as follows: "We wanted it to focus on Cape Town and mobility in Cape Town. I think they wanted it to be about the pensioners and the bus."¹⁸ An anonymous source at HCI Foundation agreed that these differences were mainly about the multi-narrative approach and that this became evident when it came down to the practical aspects.¹⁹

¹⁵ J. Gibson, 'Moving the museum: A creative rethinking for a transport/mobility museum', 23.

¹⁶ J. Gibson, 'Moving the museum: A creative rethinking for a transport/mobility museum', 30.

¹⁷ J. Gibson, 'Moving the museum: A creative rethinking for a transport/mobility museum', 31.

¹⁸ C. Houston, interview with L. Witz, Kenilworth, 16 December 2012.

¹⁹ Anonymous, personal communication, 14 July 2013.

The temporary exhibition

As mentioned in the introduction, a temporary exhibition was prepared at the end of 2010 in preparation for a discussion with the HCI Foundation's Board of Trustees. The purpose of the temporary exhibition was to demonstrate to the Trustees what the university thought were the possibilities for a museum, utilising the research that had been undertaken. The exhibition also provided an opportunity for the Preparatory Project to show how different aspects of the research that had been produced could be used in displays.

Through the knowledge generated by students involved in the Preparatory Project, several additional histories had emerged. These were based on primary research, and the use of the archive, which included the oral history interviews conducted by Carohn Cornell. None of these were presented as a dominant narrative in the exhibition. They were the fruits of the diverse interests that the students had and together they constituted multiple narratives.

The themes of the panels were 1) Moving the city: the bus and the modern city; 2) Conducting race: bus apartheid; and 3) Out of service: a double panel on memories of GABS pensioners as well as commuters. These were to be displayed on four panels.

One of the project leaders explains:

Although the themes chosen were historical, it should be noted that they specifically aim to open critical thinking and discussion on present-day issues, whether it be questions of service, how identities are constructed, or how histories of transport differentially shape the city and our capacity to be mobile.²⁰

²⁰ Nicky Rousseau, Museum Preparatory Project, University of the Western Cape, Third & Final report to HCI Foundation (November 2010).

The panels were freestanding, portable display boards containing a combination of photographs and text and one was designed to include audio-visual equipment (for the viewing of a DVD clip of the UWC group session). A designer, Jos Thorne, was brought onto the team to "synthesise, present and illustrate the research findings"²¹ alongside those involved with the research. With a tight deadline (the panels had to be ready for presentation to the HCI Foundation's Board of Trustees within two weeks) and a limited budget, the designer recalls there was not much time to play with design options but she was satisfied with the way the panels visually represented the knowledge.

In *Designing Histories*, Jos Thorne explained that interview extracts signal many things in exhibitions:

They are regarded as both image and artefact, and are placed as objects among others, forming relationships and reflecting new meanings. Like photographs, the text extracts represent the presence of community in affirmation and support of the exhibition and the museum.²²

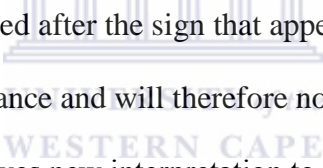
The panels had given attention to elements of transport history that were silent in previous historical productions, such as a direct voice for the experiences of workers and that of passengers (using letters of complaint received by GABS), and it also dealt with segregation and the theme of mobility and the city.

Each panel has carefully selected sections made up of an image or images and text that demonstrate how different narratives can be brought together under one theme. The *Moving the city* panel draws on the bigger story of transport history in relation to the

²¹ C. Houston, telephone interview with J. Thorne, 7 November 2013.

²² J.Thorne, 'Designing Histories', 146.

developing city. It takes up the history of transport from the 1960s when the city's infrastructure was expanding. For example, the freeways were built to accommodate the growing number of cars being used. This text is surrounded by images of the bus depot at Klipfontein Road and the one at Arrowgate as well as another image of a row of double-decker buses in a GABS yard. It also discusses the company's efforts to promote the use of buses through allowing them to be used in a fashion shoot (or shoots). Three images from the GABS archive of women posing on stationery buses were used in this section. The images are a wonderfully rich source of information for visitors and photography students and they lend a sense of glamour to a bus ride. Another section highlights the onset of formal segregation in the city and there is also a story about how this impacted on the location of the company's depots.



The *Out of Service* panel was named after the sign that appears on a bus when it is returning to the depot for maintenance and will therefore not be picking up passengers. However, the panel gives new interpretation to the 'out of service' concept through reflecting stories from the company's complaints file. It also had an extract from Thami Thabatha's interview and the DVD. The panel's introductory text indicates that it was not trying to present a negative picture:

There are fewer stories recorded of those who were happy and satisfied. As they did not have cause to complain they would not contact Golden Arrow. Their stories are sometimes reported in company newsletters and through surveys but more often their voices are unheard.²³

It also concludes that:

Most of those interviewed are now pensioners who once worked for Golden Arrow. Some of them have told their stories many

²³ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Out of Service Exhibition Panel, HCI Foundation Temporary Exhibition, (November 2010).

times before to friends and colleagues. In all interviews things are left out, others added, certain events and people are emphasised and others are downplayed.²⁴

The *Conducting Race* panel deals with the different forms of segregation on the bus from 1959 until 1979 when, "without any major announcement from government, the bus apartheid practice came to an end in Cape Town".²⁵

Frictions around process and vision: address, ignore, suppress?

In putting the exhibition together, the project leaders sought to incorporate extracts from the research undertaken. It was at this point that the issue of control over the production process was to manifest in what Witz and Rassool refer to as 'history frictions' inspired by Karp, Kratz *et al*'s concept of 'museum frictions'.²⁶ The latter coined the term to capture the set of processes and interactions that can occur when varied perspectives and agendas of different stakeholders converge in the production and exhibition processes.²⁷ History frictions thus refer to the ongoing disputes in the creation of history requiring "ongoing negotiations where different and competing narratives, claims and priorities come up against each other"?²⁸

HCI Foundation asked to see the material that was selected for the panels before they were finalised. The project leaders were not expecting this. Nicky Rousseau explains that the university's practice is to leave authorial control with the writers (the students and the leaders of the Preparatory Project at UWC in this case). However this had not

²⁴ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Out of Service Exhibition Panel

²⁵ Manuscripts and Archives, HCI Foundation: Conducting Race Exhibition Panel, HCI Foundation Temporary Exhibition, (November 2010).

²⁶ Witz and Rassool, 'Making Histories', 12.

²⁷ Ivan Karp and Corinne A. Kratz, 'Museum Frictions: Public culture/global transformations', in I Karp et al, *Museum Frictions*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 2.

²⁸ Witz and Rassool, 'Making Histories', 13.

been clarified with HCI Foundation at the beginning of the project.²⁹ After some discussion, they decided to show the Foundation museum project managers what the exhibition would look like. They showed them the exhibition script and the visuals. The DVD that was going to be included in the exhibition followed later.³⁰

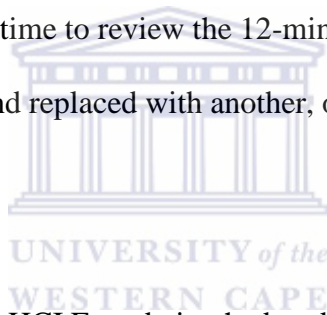
According to Leslie Witz this was when tensions became evident around what HCI regarded as ‘correct’ history. A discussion (mainly on email) ensued around the content and he recalls that there were two major issues: the use of Carohn Cornell’s interviews specifically that with Thami Thabatha, and the use of a DVD extracted from the video-recorded UWC group session that I had produced. The DVD included a description of the kind of issues the TOWU shop stewards of the old guard had to deal with, the experience of the woman driver in the time when woman drivers were a novelty and a sad yet funny story told by the staff member who used to measure others for their uniforms. In the selected oral history transcription extract for the exhibition Thami Thabatha explained how he came to be the first ‘black’ person involved in TOWU and why they went on strike in the 1990s, how some drivers were killed during this time, and how the strikers blockaded the depot during strikes.

Witz recalls that it seemed as if the exhibition would be abandoned, until HCI Foundation saw the design mock-ups produced by the designer. Negotiations continued and from the feedback received, it was clear that the Foundation wanted a company history with the addition of positive recollections from pensioners. Feedback from HCI on the *Out of Service* exhibition panel, in particular, was not

²⁹ Nicky Rousseau, personal conversation, 16 November 2013.

³⁰ C. Houston, interview with L. Witz, Kenilworth, 16 December 2012.

complimentary. This panel addressed passenger complaints, and worker complaints and experiences and included a space for a monitor to play the DVD. Nicky Rousseau mentions that an HCI Foundation representative raised a concern in email correspondence that the content of this panel was too negative and should also include stories of how people's lost property was returned and feature the workers' values of discipline, respect, honesty, neatness and punctuality. During the to and fro around this panel the members of the team that was finalising the exhibition (Nicky Rousseau, Leslie Witz, Jade Gibson and Jos Thorne) explored the possibility of cutting from the video clip but they were never told exactly what the problem was. It was difficult to break through the reluctance confronting them. In 2013 an anonymous source from the Foundation said they had not had time to review the 12-minute DVD beforehand. Therefore it had to be excluded and replaced with another, older DVD that the Foundation had in its possession.



The UWC team was also told that HCI Foundation had to decide on the content of the panels because it had "to be comfortable with what is quoted".³¹ Key questions were emerging in the process of exhibition making: what should be emphasised in the narrative (too negative, too positive); what should be prioritised by HCI Foundation in the short space of time before the deadline (maybe it was important to have viewed the DVD in the interest of including workers' voices); who should have the final say and whose view should carry more weight – the designer, the researcher, the project leader, the HCI Foundation, or a combination?

³¹ Nicky Rousseau, personal conversation, 16 November 2013.

At some point the team was told that the exhibition would not be presented to the Board of Trustees meeting. Nicky Rousseau then tried to put these museum frictions into perspective in a letter to the HCI Foundation, to which she received no reply:

The panels try to demonstrate how one may then take aspects of this research and develop them into exhibitionary forms. But it's important to remember that each panel is just a fragment that is only suggestive of a wider theme that could be pursued in a future museum. So they are not in any way end points, but rather the start of opening up issues and themes for discussion. For example, if the pensioners were to encounter the 'Complaints' or the 'Conducting race' panels, they may well object or reject these representations, but we would see that as opening the possibility of a deeper encounter – one that would not, we would hope, produce a 'consensus history' but would bring new dimensions into view raising further questions to be pursued either through discussion, interviews or research. In short, this is what we would see as the museum of process in action. In terms of this, I guess we could regard the uneasiness and debate we've been having over the past few days as part of these very transactions!³²

These are not unusual issues to contend with in the process of museum making. Reflecting on the process Jos Thorne notes that, in her experience, "histories in museums are conceptualised and choreographed through engaging the limits and possibilities of visualising new and different pasts".³³

This could have been an exciting moment of friction for an emerging museum because the outcome could have brought the themes more to life and enhanced their meaning and relevance. However, as frictions became tangible, those with decision-making power at the Foundation effectively censored the exhibition, short-circuiting an opportunity to find a way to allow different narratives to rest freely alongside or to contest each other. This is the unexciting possible outcome of friction, that a display is less interesting than it could have been, appealing to a smaller audience and telling a

³² Nicky Rousseau, extract from letter to HCI Foundation, 18 November 2010.

³³ Thorne, 'Designing Histories', 158.

limiting story (in this case, as a result of the authorial control exercised by HCI Foundation).

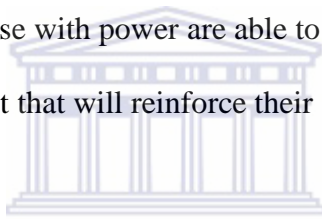
In the end, the exhibition was presented to the Board of Trustees at a special meeting, the Cape Town Bus Museum Project breakfast meeting, held on 30 November 2010. The Preparatory Project was represented by Nicky Rousseau, Ciraj Rassool, Leslie Witz and Jos Thorne. This appeared to be a definitive meeting in the museum making process since decisions were to be made about a museum building as well as the next steps in implementation, including the possibility of an advisory group. Three presentations were made to steer the discussions. First, the Foundation's then-CEO, Virginia Engel, gave an overview of the "old bus history" and highlighted activities that needed to be considered, such as the formation of a governing body for the museum. This was followed by an input by Ciraj Rassool on the museum as a process and a report on the work done in the Preparatory Project. The third presentation, by Ganesh Sabapathee of Makeka Design Lab, provided feedback on a due diligence exercise on a possible museum building. Leslie Witz recalls that there was a lot of discussion around the need for a building, indicating that the Foundation was still tied to the idea of a museum as a building.

Authorial control divides the producing partners of GABS history

Rousseau recalls that Board members did not raise any problems with the content. In fact she had asked very specific questions to test the Board's attitude to a critical narrative and they were certainly open to it. The HCI Board chairperson, Johnny Copelyn, said that the HCI Board would not dictate content in the envisaged museum. Since they were not seeking authorial control, this meant that all the authorial issues

were emanating from the HCI Foundation staff that had been driving the making of the museum.

The production of multiple narratives has the potential to extend a sense of ownership of the museum project among narrators and their communities and yield possibilities for a hybrid museum display, acknowledging the experiences of a broader range of GABS pensioners that would, in turn, resonate with a wider spectrum of visitors. HCI Foundation has avoided the challenge of confronting and working with the existing nuances and tensions, or allowing those directly engaged in historical production to do so. Jacques Depelchin's statement that historical production is "shaped by relations of power" bears resonance here. Those with power are able to ignore, delay or omit making decisions to obtain a result that will reinforce their superiority.³⁴

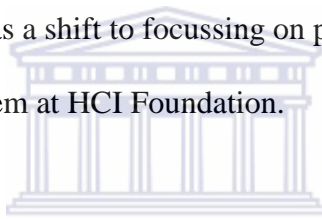


The oral history project seemed to come to a halt because the head of the Foundation was away on extended leave. This seemed innocent enough but later when Carohn Cornell tried to revive the project with her, there was no support to do so. Nicky Rousseau wrote a letter to try to contextualise the tensions that were manifesting within the norm of collaborative, dynamic production. She did not receive a response to her letter and later the Preparatory Project was stopped because the CEO of the Foundation was away for a long time again. I was never given an answer to my request for access to the archive after the project ended and the Foundation did not reply to my request for an interview.

³⁴ Depelchin, *Silences in African History*, 2-13.

Viewed individually, each of these moments could very well be seen as nothing more than silences constructed by institutional oversight. But when considered together with the exclusion of certain former employees from social gatherings and the museum project activities and the deliberate removal of certain content from the temporary exhibition, it is clear that the story of the strike of 1992 was being deliberately silenced.

In 2011, the HCI Foundation decided not to continue the Preparatory Project. It was unclear what the reasons were at the time but it could be said that the frictions around the exhibition contributed significantly.³⁵ The anonymous source explained the reason for stopping the museum project as a shift to focussing on preservation of the collection due to a capacity problem at HCI Foundation.



As outlined above, HCI Foundation failed to communicate decisions that would have expedited the museum making process during the Museum Preparatory Project phase. The reason for this remains unclear but, whether intentional or not, the exercise of HCI Foundation's controlling power over historical production contributed more to silence than any aspect of the research process. Whatever the reason for ending the museum project, what is certain is that, through deliberate or inadvertent exclusion and decision by those with authorial control, the story of the strike has been silenced.

The HCI Foundation is the social investment arm of a company and so it has a responsibility to protect the company image. It would seem likely that the Foundation regarded the display content in question as detrimental to that image and to the image

³⁵ Nicky Rousseau, personal conversation, 16 November 2013.

of the companies owned by HCI. Golden Arrow Bus Services was an aggressive capitalist enterprise that monopolised public transport for much of its 150-year history whereas Hosken Consolidated Investments had its origins in the trade union movement and was created to ensure SACTWU members' welfare. It may be that there was a degree of discomfort in the climate of 2011, at a time when workers' rights were highly regarded in South Africa, with being associated with a period of industrial action inspired by workers' concern for occupational safety. Such discomfort, among the former trade unionists at the helm of HCI and the Foundation, might well have been extreme, given the callousness and union-bashing tactics of management at the time when a number of drivers had been attacked and killed on duty.



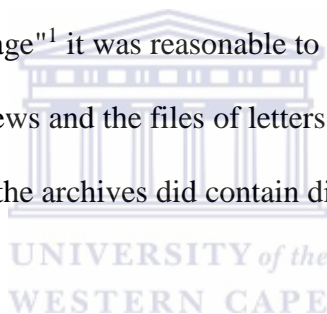
Another scenario is that risk management considerations drove the story of the strike underground once more. HCI Holdings is an investment company and as such would be sensitive to liability. Family of the deceased men may have been compensated ('looked after') at the time, but there has been no corporate accountability and the exhibition was surfacing at a time when there was already a well-publicised lawsuit under way where asbestos workers were demanding reparations from international corporations.

While the motivation for silencing the strike may never emerge, these possible scenarios may be inferred from the circumstances that prevailed when the decision was taken.

CONCLUSION

This work has traced an event in history and how narrations of it have emerged and have also been suppressed. The analysis of historical production associated with the history of Golden Arrow Bus Services has revealed that HCI Foundation exercised control in the museum making process to minimise references to certain negative experiences of workers in a history of transport entwined with a broader history of the development of a city.

Given HCI Foundation's desire to "depict and make public knowledge the various aspects of our rich transport heritage"¹ it was reasonable to expect that their archives (including the oral history interviews and the files of letters of complaint) would be used to support this especially as the archives did contain different narrative threads.



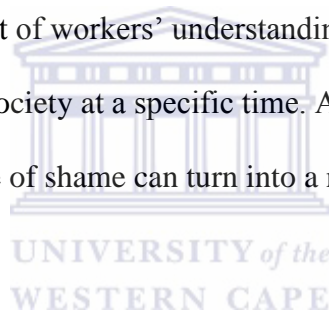
However, it emerged that HCI Foundation wanted a particular story to be told and it therefore took control of the content with the Preparatory Project. Contestations always occur in the production of history and different factors influence the outcome. The museum initiative belonged to HCI Foundation and the university (through the Preparatory Project) was thus seen as a service provider to the Foundation. There would be no point in the university producing a history that the client did not want and would not use and therefore it sought repeatedly to negotiate to find a suitable solution. Suggestions were made by the Foundation on panel texts and what to add to the DVD clip but, as the anonymous source observed:

¹ Virginia Engel, Open letter written by HCI Foundation in 2006 to introduce the oral history project that took place before UWC was commissioned.

The multiple narratives approach taken by ‘new’ museums, and advocated by UWC is intrinsically challenging, and this was an interesting experience of how working on a practical level can expose the finer details of unease around this approach.²

This was HCI Foundation’s exhibition and they wanted the company history as previously represented with some pensioners’ recollections added.

The self-censorship discussed in Chapter Two resonates with Greene’s observations in Ghana of how the whispered and unspoken narratives of the past reflect tensions in contemporary society.³ In South Africa these tensions, or the fear of retribution, may be real or perceived and may not necessarily be based on direct instructions by the company. However, it is the result of workers’ understanding of how to be and what is acceptable at the company or in society at a specific time. As Cohen’s work shows, this can change so that a narrative of shame can turn into a narrative of commemoration.



The narrator chooses what to share and what to silence, and judges when the context requires that they change the way they retell or what they tell, as Hofmeyr and Greene have reported. Hofmeyr, in her work on the siege of Makapansgat, observed how accounts of defeats vary and, specifically, that the way the siege is mentioned (or not mentioned) had to do with the narrator’s own perspective of its importance. Hofmeyr describes these as "interregnum narratives".⁴

The ‘pensioners’ opted to talk about the family company, end of year gatherings and

² Anonymous, personal communication, 14 July 2013.

³ S. Greene, 'Whispers and Silences', 46.

⁴ I. Hofmeyr, *"We spend our years as a tale that is told": Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom*, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press), 1994, 135.

friendly encounters with "old man" Pasvolsky. This is evidence of Portelli's point that "the tale depends on personal and collective factors". The pensioners' conclusion that their time working in a company that actively aided the consolidation of apartheid rule was good and that the company treated them well "was less the result of imperfect recollection than, ironically, of a creative imagination".⁵

I respect the dignity that they find in silences. However, in the case of the strike of 1992, the workers who were killed cannot speak and those who were dismissed have spoken willingly in some of the interviews. They were not silenced but, as detailed in Chapter Three, their voices have been muted through a silence imposed during historical production.



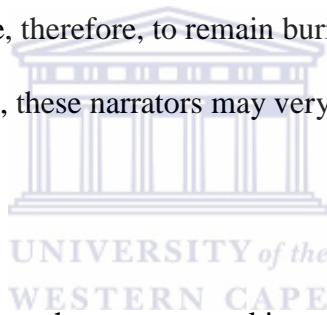
The HCI Foundation is the social investment arm of a holding company made possible by the investment of workers' union membership fees and run by former union strategists. It is ironic to find then that a worker history of solidarity, cemented across the barriers of race, across competing unions and at a time when taking a stand could cost a job, and where lives were lost, was being suppressed. The meeting (Cape Town Bus Museum Project breakfast meeting) held on 30 November 2010 in Cape Town confirmed an approach to the museum whereby it would be independently managed by a professional team who would not be required to shy away from the past or from contestations because the Board was open to this approach. The Board also expressed support for a museum with a broader mobility/transport theme.⁶ None of this has been

⁵ A. Portelli, *Luigi Trastulli*, 101, 103.

⁶ Nicky Rousseau, personal conversation, 16 November 2013.

implemented since by the Foundation staff and the virtual museum it produced next perpetuated the old bus history.⁷

I was not given access to the GABS archive after the Project ended and I could only obtain an interview with a Foundation staff member on condition of anonymity. A senior employee and TOWU office bearer about to retire got cold feet after agreeing to an interview with me – he said he did not want to jeopardise his pension. Based on how the company wanted the archive used, and considering what testimonies they were willing to add to the collection,⁸ it would appear that the strike was not a honourable act and should be silenced. Although some narrators have shared memories of the strike, these were, therefore, to remain buried in the archive. Notwithstanding their testimonies, these narrators may very well also be silent on other aspects of the strike.



Silence has been a thread throughout the museum making process: the pensioners were reticent about how apartheid impacted on their working lives, while the custodians of the museum effectively silenced some stories of workplace struggles, and other stories that they perceived were negative in the making of the temporary exhibition.

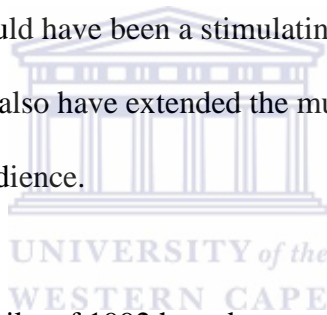
The case of the Transport Museum Preparatory Project, demonstrates clearly how the production process lends itself to intervention and to reinterpretation of the archive or the collection. The Preparatory Project revisited the oral history interviews and

⁷ 'Golden Arrow Bus Services', <http://www.goldenarrow150.co.za>, accessed on 25 October 2013.

⁸ It seems Carohn Cornell's research was stopped by the company once she started interviewing blacklisted former staff that had been fired for leading the strike.

selected extracts for display. It also looked into the files of letters received by GABS over the years and made a selection for display, and of course it opted to exclude various other archived material. In Portelli's introduction to *The Death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories* he describes the nature of oral history as unfinished – "an inexhaustible work in progress" exists in "the present and an ever-changing past". It is also here, in the making of the museum, that the ever-changing past⁹ can be manipulated to silence or to promote certain groups, events or stories.

Ironically, a more complex rendering of the company history and one that was free of the need to draw parallels with the nation's history would have contributed much to the creation of a museum that would have been a stimulating, transactional space for debate and contestation. It would also have extended the museum beyond a company history, appealing to a broader audience.



Attempts to tell the story of the strike of 1992 have been suppressed through the selection and exclusion of narrators when Carohn Cornell was assigned in 2006, and soon thereafter, when the oral history interviews were stopped after only seven were done. Later, in 2010, the story was censored again when it could have been included in the temporary exhibition. This silence is the result of frictions, negotiations and compromises. However, these are not static scenarios and this is not the end of history making around Golden Arrow Bus Services. A case in point is the theatrical production, *Caboose*, on the occasion of GABS 150-year celebration in October 2011. The story centers on the experiences of passengers. This is an important shift in emphasis to giving the passengers' narrative a platform. It suggests that in future

⁹ A. Portelli, *Luigi Trastulli*, vii.

different outcomes may be possible in different circumstances. It is conceivable that the silences around the strike of 1992 may be broken and perhaps new silences created, when narrations of the past are revisited. For now the story has stalled at the intersection of censorship, authorship and power.



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