

THE PALACES OF MEMORY
A reconstruction of District One, Cape Town,
before and after the Group Areas Act

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A mini-thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Public and Visual History, University of the Western Cape, May 2006.

DECLARATION

I, Michael Ian Weeder, declare that **'The Palaces of Memory: A reconstruction of District One, Cape Town, before and after the Group Areas Act'** 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.

Michael Ian Weeder
10 May 2006



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The promise of this dissertation is located in those distant winter nights of 1980 when a handful of young people met in a study group under the tutelage of Marcus Solomons. This group consisted of Zelda Holtzman, Bonita Bennett, Vernon Petersen, Trevor Oosterwyk and myself. Mitchells Plain would become an assembly point for intellectual and activist energy for those of us who had grown up in the working class areas of Heideveld, Bonteheuwel and, as in my case, Elsies River. Perhaps our parents had been lured to this ‘city by the sea’ by the promotional ads depicting colourful houses with low fences suggesting the possibility of community. The burgeoning liberation consciousness prevailing at that time at the universities of the Western Cape and of Cape Town was expressed in community based activities. These included the student school boycotts of 1980 and support for the consumer boycotts associated with the worker strikes at Fattis & Monis and the Maitland Meat Abattoirs: endless mass meetings, pamphleteering and pre-meeting meetings.

At the beginning of 1981 I left Cape Town for Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape to begin my studies for the priesthood at St Paul’s Seminary. I sought and found a continuation of the comradeship I had experienced in Cape Town through my association with persons such as Phila Nkhayi, Ashwin Desai, Mike Kenyon, Roland White, Robert Mopp and Charles Wessels. The latter two were in high school at the

time and were invaluable in helping me to find my way through some of the more complex political and community terrains of Rhini.

For the first time I found myself in a context where I was in the minority yet felt warmly welcomed wherever I went in the region. In an area so rich and alive with the record of colonial settlement and the related indigenous resistance I began to grapple with an emerging self-awareness of my own place in the collage of the struggle for freedom while being so intimately associated with a religious institution which had been at the core of colonial oppression. There were no immediate answers at hand but the seminary leadership acknowledged that the struggle against apartheid should be paramount on our faith agenda. An expression of that was their commitment to expose us to the diversity of communities in Grahamstown and the surrounding areas. So at a given time we would find ourselves part of pastoral modules in the remote Peddie District under the guidance of Fr Alf Dhlamini or in the sprawling township of Mdantsane or leading worship in the sedate and almost exclusively white parishes in Grahamstown itself. I am indebted to the warden of the seminary, the then Canon Duncan Buchanan, for the wise and humane manner in which he allowed me to explore the difficulties of faith within a commitment to liberation. Likewise Fr Philip le Feuvre provided an open door to his study and the benefit of his own love of South African history. His early work on the use of Afrikaans by the monks of the Society of St John the Evangelist (SSJE) at St Philip's, District Six, was a significant

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I am thankful for the National research Foundation (NRF) for the funding provided through the Visual History Project, based in UWC's History Department. However, I take responsibility for my own conclusions.

I dedicate this thesis to Bonita who has been loving and unstinting in her support. Her insights and our long discussions have helped to shape what otherwise would have remained a good idea. To our children, Chiara, Andile and Khanyisa thank you for your tolerance and the many ways unbeknown to you in which you have inspired the completion of this work. I also want to thank my mother Sarah Francis Weeder who brought me home to Amsterdam Street and whose humanity and questioning spirit encouraged me along the path of curiosity.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACO	Archaeology Contracts Office
APMHO	Archaeology, Palaeontology, Meteorite and heritage Object
CA	Cape Archives
CSRF	Cultural Sites and Resources Forum
DO	Deeds Office
DEIC	Dutch East India Company
DFM	December First Movement
DRC	Dutch Reformed Church
HOPP	Hands Off Prestwich Place <i>ad hoc</i> Committee
LMS	London Missionary Society
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
MOOC	Master of the Orphan Chamber
NHRA	National Heritage Resources Act
NLSA	National Library of SA
NMC	National Monuments Council
PPPC	Prestwich Place Project Committee
SAHRA	South African Heritage Resource Agency
SAMS	South African Missionary Society
SEAST	Plymouth Committee of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade
SSJE	Society of St John the Evangelist
SAR & H	South African Railways and Harbour
SGO	Surveyor General Office
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UCT	University of Cape Town
UWC	University of the Western Cape
VOC	Veren Oostindische Compagnie

INTRODUCTION

The title of this thesis, ‘From the palaces of memory’ is from St Augustine’s autobiography, *Confessions*, “which he wrote at the age of about 43”.¹ This was during the time that he was bishop of Hippo Regis, Bône/Annaba a port-city on the Mediterranean coast of present-day city of Algiers. The world of Augustine, despite the distance of time and differences in cultural milieu, resonates with my own: an experience of religious faith evolving out of the dialectics of conflicting cultures and the politics of imperial hegemony. Augustine was schooled in the rhetorical devices of his time and he refers to how he visits “the fields and vast palaces of memory, where are the treasuries of innumerable images of all kinds of objects brought in by sense-perception”.²

The north-west end of Cape Town is the place of my beginning, of my father before me and that of his father before him, reaching out to beyond the days of slavery. The origins and growth of this world city parallels that of my family and the myriad of others who constituted its formative population. Its stories of conquest and domination, the pursuit of gain and love found – the ebb and flow of human need and triumph are contained in the life experience of the countless thousands who lived and worked in and who were this city. At the heart of this thesis lies my desire to 'own' our personal and public history. The ‘our’ I refer to are the communities who lived from the nineteenth century on in the parts of the city known as *de Waterkant* and District One.

¹ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p 16.

² Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 185

This thesis started off as a biographical discussion on my association with District One. I was able to widen the scope of this thesis as my research brought more information to light with regard to the city's past. The dramatic uncovering of the Prestwich burial ground and subsequent struggles provided the impetus to link the past with contemporary concerns on identity and memory. The narrative of District One is about the topography of the land and people while the archive of the area reflects a history of punishment, settlement, removal and memory. The disinterment of the skeletal remains from the Prestwich burial ground evokes a prior unsettlement and a historical routine of multiple dislocations and separations.

The public domain contains seemingly little information on the history of the dockland area of District One. However, I want to suggest that the area has generated a powerful archaeological and social archive of the city's founding antecedents. This includes the Khoi burials uncovered in Cobern Street, the slave burial ground at Prestwich Street and the denominational and paupers' cemeteries along Somerset Road. These are a register of significant, yet inadequately understood, elements of the making of Cape Town. It is also the nexus of my personal history and I have written this thesis conscious of the tension between myself as an individual and as historian, and the importance of interrogating those early and formative experiences.

My first attempt to look at the story of Amsterdam Street started in 1997 while enrolled in the honours programme of the history department at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). In a class discussion on our chosen research essays Patricia Hayes referred

me to Joëlle Bahloul's *The Architecture of Memory*. When I eventually secured a copy of Bahloul's book I was struck by how her intention as a writer arose from her discussions with her Jewish-Algerian relatives, which had "awakened the idea of the narrative 'excavation' of my own genealogy".³ Bahloul, a native of Algiers, grew up in Paris a member of a diasporic community, alienated from her Maghrebian past, which was anchored in "Dar-Refayil, the multi-family house in which my maternal grandfather's family had lived in Sétif, eastern Algeria".⁴

Through her research Bahloul became aware of the spatial aspects of the memory of an immigrant community. Dar-Refayil became a resource to define this relocated community in opposition to their experience of estrangement in France: "remembrance is built up in the materiality of places and movements". Because of their physical distance from their *lieux de mémoire*, uprooted communities evoke memories of place: "Materialised in the structures of the original house, it allows uprooted people to inscribe their identity in tangible, visible time and space".⁵ Nancy Wood, commenting on France's decolonising process, expressed an awareness that the very fact of Algeria as "an absent site of patrimonial memory – a *non-lieu de mémoire* – remembrance is all the more psychically charged, and runs the risks of succumbing to *nostalgie*, to an enduring melancholia over the traumatic loss of an idealised love object".⁶

³ Joëlle Bahloul, *The Architecture of Memory: A Jewish-Muslim Household in Colonial Algeria, 1937 – 1962* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p 1.

⁴ Joëlle Bahloul, *The Architecture of Memory*, p 1.

⁵ Joëlle Bahloul, *The Architecture of Memory*, p 115.

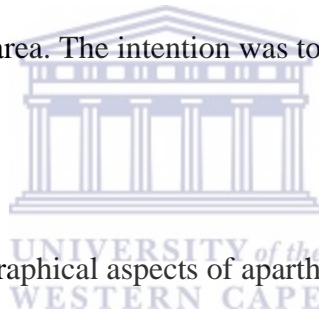
⁶ Nancy Wood, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of Trauma in Post-war Europe* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), p 177.

This applies in varying degrees to those South Africans who have experienced the operation and effects of the Group Areas Act on their lives and the communities in which they lived. In his novel, *Ignorance*, Milan Kundera informs the reader the how the word nostalgia is understood in different European cultures: “The Greek word for “return” is *nostos*. *Algos* means suffering. So nostalgia is the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return”.⁷ The Germans use the word *Sehnsucht* to express their longing for something which is not present “and to something that has never existed”.⁸ It is often stated that apartheid pre-existed in the colonial period of South Africa’s history but was legalised and cast in statute form from 1948 onwards. This understanding acknowledges that prejudice cannot be legislated away and I would suggest that the Group Areas Act had formalised an already existing alienation from the City of Cape Town, as experienced by the black community. A consequence of the colonial project was that oppressed people on the whole were associated with the sub-cultures of city life, of life on the social and legal periphery. Dispossessed communities tend to look back, not necessarily in anger, but with a nostalgic longing for what was. An appreciation of a way of life which, in the re-telling, is reformulated in a manner which validates a certain quality of life ‘then’ which is absent from the present. The stories of ex-residents of District One testify to their desire to speak well of the past, as one would do of the dead. Perhaps nostalgia is a cautionary aspect of remembering in a context in which one has no other capacity but *only* to remember.

⁷ Milan Kundera, *Ignorance* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p 6.

⁸ Milan Kundera, *Ignorance*, p 7.

The first step into the past of my family compelled me to meet up with members of my paternal side of the family, many of whom I had never known or who knew me only as ‘Stanley’s eldest.’ Denise, my father’s niece and the daughter of his only sister, Olive, was as warm and generous as I remembered her as a child. She helped me to negotiate my way to the rest of the extended family and my visits to them were often preceded by an pre-emptive, explanatory phone-call from Denise. But initially, for a period of three years, I could not gather sufficient resolve to call up Denise. So the District One story as the research topic for my honours thesis was postponed and later revived in a limited form in the proposal for my master’s thesis. The idea was to work towards a visual reconstruction of District One, how it developed from empty land west of the city into a mixed business and residential area. The intention was to parallel its story with that of the better-known District Six.



But the individual and autobiographical aspects of apartheid-era forced removals were compelled into the vagary of collective consciousness with the uncovering of the skeletal remains at Prestwich Place. I was fairly disinterested, despite the initial oblique media reference to slavery, until I was invited by Ciraj Rassool - a member of SAHRA’s Permit Committee - to attend a press conference convened by the University of Cape Town (UCT). Standing at the site of the burial ground between mounds of sand, watching as a half-uncovered skeleton was further exposed by the hands of an archaeology student, I became aware of a mixture of sadness and anger at what had been done to communities over time, best symbolised in the present-day bureaucracy’s refuge in the term “unknown

graves”.⁹ All of us standing on the site on that day would find ourselves divided by our response to the remains of the Prestwich dead.

Chapter One argues that the cemeteries of colonial Cape Town served the identity needs of the settlement’s ruling class. Its closure was an expression of British hegemony and its related commercial interests. The access of slaves, their contemporaries and that of their descendants to these burial grounds was part of their struggle for identity. Islam as an alternate reference for the non-Muslim oppressed in relation to the practices of the city’s ruling class is considered here. The closure of the Somerset Road Burial Grounds was an expression of the unmaking of the European nature of Cape Town by different sectors of its population. On the part of the white community it was a tentative disentanglement of ties from their European places of origin. Their settler identity had been in a process of re-definition consequent to the ending of Cape slavery in 1838. White supremacy was a feature of the “the insecurities introduced by emancipation (and which had) heightened race consciousness in the perceptions of the dominant classes”.¹⁰

Carli Coetzee noted that the “public rehearsal of memory” before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) “may be one stage in the process of healing”.¹¹ A crucial component, in terms of slavery, is registering the *pre-scarring* moment of that past. Chapter Two therefore describes the unspeakable acts of terror perpetuated on the

⁹ The contested histories of Cape Town were literally being written in the sand of Prestwich Place. Those doing and overseeing the exhumation were paid by the developer. The workers of the city, the present day equivalents of most of the Prestwich dead, stood along the fence outside commenting among themselves.

¹⁰ Timothy Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the origins of the racial order* (Claremont: David Philip Publishers, 1996), p 126.

¹¹ Sarah Nuttall, ‘Telling ‘free’ stories? Memory and democracy in South African autobiography since 1994’ in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the past: The making of memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp 75; 85.

bodies of slaves. It elaborates on the colonial practice of using human beings as the pedagogical format for instruction in servility and compliance. This facilitated a culture of ownership in which the value of lives was merely in relation to their value as property. This section is about punishment. It details how the use of torture as spectacle rendered the slave body invisible and established the memory of terror within the slave community.

Chapter Three scrutinises the legacy of a double consciousness of black people repeatedly dis-located from the city. Here the diaspora facilitates a sense of having lost that which cannot be returned to in the sense that Humpty-Dumpty remained broken beside the wall. At the same time that unfulfilled longing enables the city's exiled community to never be absolutely content with their historic (mis)fortune. The Prestwich burial ground literally and otherwise opens the possibility for remembrance beyond the trauma of Group Areas.

Chapter Four returns to the biographical and localises aspects of the district's past in my private memories of Amsterdam Street and those of my family and their neighbours. It seeks to revisit "a self disunified across history"¹² by incorporating the recalled trauma of the ex-residents of District One into the process of accessing the story of slavery represented by the Prestwich burial ground. This approach views memory as a "medium

¹² Sarah Nuttall, 'Telling 'free' stories?', p 76.

of history” which along with tradition and orality are “arenas negotiating society’s relationships between past and present”.¹³

Throughout this thesis I make use of visual images, especially in Chapter Four where I make extensive use of the personal photographs of ex-residents of District One. The focus is on the message communicated by the photographed image mindful of Stuart Hall’s reference to the ‘cultural capital’ of the body where we “have worked on ourselves as the canvases of representation”.¹⁴ Some are formal studio portraits but most are of people photographed on Amsterdam Street or in the places where they had been moved by the Group Areas Act. These photographs “provide(s) glimpses of reclamation of subjugated bodies and selves”.¹⁵ The custom of collecting photographs which, while it tells us of our need to record personal memories, also serves to open a window on our public past. As in the case of the *cartes-de-visite* of mid-nineteenth century European bourgeoisies, they serve as signs “whose purpose is both the description of an individual and the inscription of social identity”.¹⁶ In this regard Marita Sturken points to the function of the photograph “in the relationship of personal memory, cultural memory, and history precisely because of the ways in which images can move from one realm to the next”.¹⁷

¹³ Gary Minkley and Ciraj Rassool, ‘Orality, memory, and social history in South Africa’, in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the past*, pp 98; 99.

¹⁴ Hudita Nura Mustafa, ‘Portraits of Modernity: Fashioning Selves in Dakarois Popular Photography’ in D. Kaspin (ed), *Images & Empires* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), citing Hall, p. 155.

¹⁵ Hudita Nura Mustafa, citing Hall in ‘Portraits of Modernity’, p. 155.

¹⁶ Hudita Nura Mustafa, citing Hall in ‘Portraits of Modernity’, p. 155.

¹⁶ Jonathan Tagg, *The Burden of Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p. 37.

¹⁷ Marita Sturken, ‘The Image as Memorial: Personal Photographs in Cultural Memory’, in Marianne Hirsch (ed), *The Familial Gaze* (London: University Press of New England, 1999), p 178.

The story of slavery as been well documented and the colonial archives contain substantial information for researchers on the subject. However slavery will be allocated its proper place in South African history when the descendants of slaves are able to claim that aspect of their past with understanding and without reservation. For this, ownership of the freed self is required. I have purposely worked with established sources and information on slavery. But part of the process of the ownership of the slave story involves the interpretation of that past. This is what this thesis has attempted and the struggle around the Prestwich burial ground has significantly influenced my conclusions with regard to the telling of the story of slavery.

The themes of memory and identity are at the fore of this thesis. It is about place and displacement both historical and personal. I focus on Cape Town in a particular way: the manner in which the story of my paternal family is tied up with the history of the city, my place in that story and the local community into which I was born within the scope of the making (and unmaking) of this Atlantic port city. Today I live once more in the city that I had left as a child. I recognise that *how* I remember is informed by the events, which shaped my life. Individual memory as declared by Halbwachs, “is a viewpoint on the collective memory”.¹⁸ Even our most private experiences, when gathered into personal memories, do not exist in isolation but are “always explained by changes occurring in our relationships to various collective milieus”.¹⁹ My concern with the issues of identity and memory is guided by the conviction that one’s *personal redemption* is tied up in the necessary reconfiguring of Cape Town’s history with the narratives of the commonwealth

¹⁸ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), p 48.

¹⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, p 49.

of individuals who sought new beginnings on its streets. The politics of ownership, the demographics of race and class are perennial themes of this story as I reconstruct a section of Cape Town. I will also highlight the lives of persons associated at different time periods from the 1900s who had lived in Amsterdam Street in District One.

Versveld reminds us that in “writing autobiography we are relating about ourselves. In doing this we are locating ourselves in a certain place and time, and that involves telling about other people”.²⁰ Their social or collective memory is a means of accessing and understanding the past.²¹



²⁰ Martin Versfeld, *St Augustine's Confessions and The City of God* (Cape Town: The Carrefour Press, 1990), p. 9.

²¹ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p 1.

CHAPTER ONE
TOPOGRAPHIES OF THE FORGOTTEN:
CAPE TOWN'S NINETEENTH CENTURY CEMETERIES

This particular story of Cape Town's past begins where this life on earth presumably ends, the grave, the last resting place of people who are buried all over the city, and those associated with the officially proclaimed burial grounds which lined the northern boundary of Somerset Road. It is an area spread along the Lion's Rump and the lower slopes of Signal Hill, the shores of Table Bay and from Buitengracht Street almost right up to the Mouille Point Lighthouse. The slave burial ground uncovered in 2003 at Prestwich Street (parallel to Somerset Road) in Green Point is representative of other forgotten burial grounds in the area. It is indicative of the "stories of the past that South Africans are telling...to find a place between public resistance and private healing; and between private resistance and public healing".¹

The contested site predates colonial history and its significance is also in its relation to the Khoi and the value they seemed to have attached to the area in and around Signal Hill. In a moment in the last half of the first millennium BC, the ancestors of the pre-colonial African communities of the Cape, living in "the region where modern Botswana, Zambia, and Angola meet, acquired sheep and, possibly later, cattle, and began to move south into the highlands of central Namibia and into the High Veld and the Cape".² It is

¹ Sarah Nuttall, 'Telling 'free' stories? Memory and democracy in South African autobiography since 1994', in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the past: The making of memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2002), p 75.

² Robert Ross, *A concise history of South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p 7.

the descendants of those ancient first nations peoples, Khoi pastoralists such as the Gorachoqua and the Goringhaiqua, whom Jan van Riebeeck would encounter during his first summer at the Cape.

In 1657 the dire need to be self-sufficient compelled the Dutch East India Company (DEIC) to free some of its employees from their contractual obligations and grant them freehold lands in the Table Valley where they settled a year later. The vicinity of modern day Sea Point and Hout Bay were popular grazing areas for the Khoi³ and a substantial portion of allocated land was uncomfortably in the path of the annual transhumance pattern followed by the Gorachoqua and the Goringhaiqua. These groups annually retraced old and established grazing routes on their return to the peninsula from December on, showing “little respect for the neatly ordered boundaries of Dutch maps”.⁴ This contestation of space contributed to the demise of the Khoi who “were officially excluded from inhabiting the area by the 1676 ‘land sale’”.⁵ A map of 1690 depicts a Khoi village on the periphery of the town, on the slopes of Signal Hill. These huts “were likely to have been temporary structures, characteristic of the pre-colonial pastoralists”.⁶

The descriptions by European travellers of the removal of the Khoi from the Table Valley is framed by “the general optimism of seventeenth century travel books”,⁷ where African and European are depicted as co-existing as equals. A person who “meticulously, but

³ Nigel Worden, Elizabeth van Heyningen, Vivian Bickford-Smith (eds), *Cape Town: The Making of a City* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1998), p 16.

⁴ Nigel Worden et al, p 21.

⁵ Nigel Worden et al, p 66.

⁶ Nigel Worden et al, p 66.

⁷ Nicolaas Vergunst, *Hoerikwaggo: Images of Table Mountain* (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 2000/01), p 22.

prejudicially, recorded the events and customs of every-day life at the settlement”⁸ was Peter Kolb who had lived at the Cape since 1705 for a period of eight years. The full moon marked the inauguration of a new cycle of life for the Cape Khoi and was celebrated with dance and song (see Figure 1).⁹ Kolb’s sketch, made more than fifty years after van Riebeeck’s arrival, faithfully depicts this annual rite of summer solstice. But the image suggests nothing of the context of displacement and the disruption of a lifestyle and of a culture which sought harmony with the seasons.



Figure 1: Kolb’s depiction of Khoi dancers
(Victor de Kock’s *Those in Bondage*)

The ground along the lower slopes of Signal Hill was most likely also a place where those who died during the period from November through to January of the following year, would be buried. The soft sand of the dunes below Signal Hill was conducive to burials and the Khoi custom was to bury the dead within the lived environment, and not to create a separate necropolis. The technical report on the excavation work done at

⁸ Nicolaas Vergunst, *Hoerikwaggo: Images of Table Mountain*, p 24.

⁹ Alan Barnard, *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa: A comparative ethnography of the Khoisan peoples* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p 162.

Prestwich Place, Green Point, stated that unlike “much of the city area, the ground consisted of windblown sands about 1.5m thick that lie on ancient hard gravel and clay layer”. The surface sands were soft enough to be “dug by the naked hand or with simple tools such as spades”.¹⁰

The contested area beyond Somerset Road has a rich visual record and features in many maps, paintings and photographs of the area. The Dutch cemeteries at the foot of Signal Hill are included in a painting of Cape Town done in 1814 from the Castle by James Ewart,¹¹ a Scottish soldier (see Figure 2).

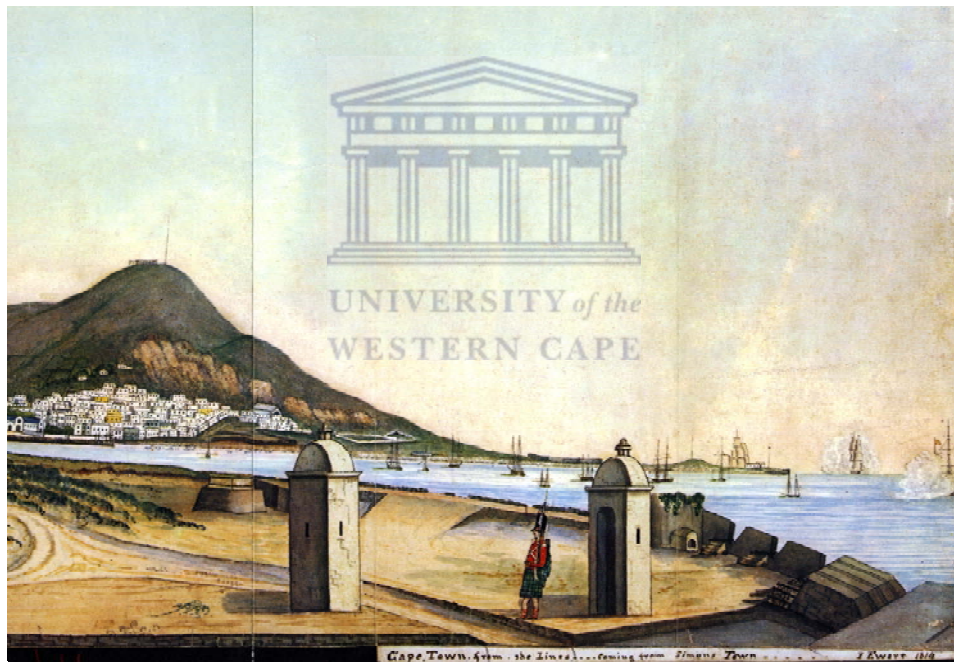


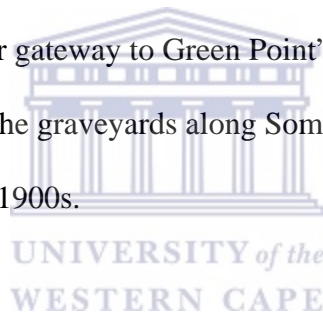
Figure 2: A section of James Ewart’s painting with the burial grounds in the distance (James Ewart, *Journal covering his stay at the Cape of Good Hope, 1811 – 1814*)

¹⁰ Archaeology Contracts Office, ‘Technical Report on Archaeological Excavations at Prestwich Place, Green Point, Cape Town: Appendix D, 11 August 2003’, (Prestwich Place Project Committee Collection, District Six Museum), p 2. Note that the Prestwich Place Project Committee Collection is temporarily housed at the District Six Museum until such time as the people of District One have founded their own memory institution and archive.

¹¹ James Ewart, *Journal covering his stay at the Cape of Good Hope, 1811 – 1814* (Cape Town: C. Struik, Pty Ltd, 1970).

These burial grounds feature in the work of Johannes Schumacher dated roundabout 1776 and is also depicted in Robert Jacob Gordon's panorama of the settlement in 1790.

Antonia Malan notes that Gordon refers to one of these burial grounds as a '*slaaven begraafplaats*' (see Figure 3).¹² Worden *et al*, describe the burial grounds detailed in a map of the settlement as "one for free burghers and one for slaves".¹³ Both cemeteries are enclosed by very thick walls but when the scanned image is magnified then the graves outside the walls become visible and more prominent and is referenced as the '*slawehoven*' (see Figure 4). The first of these burial grounds was opened in 1755 west of the Buitengracht and opposite the present day St Andrew's Presbyterian Church.¹⁴ "Years later, in the nineteenth century", writes Marischal Murray, "tall cypress trees of church and cemeteries formed the sober gateway to Green Point".¹⁵ Arthur Elliot's photographs also provide examples of what the graveyards along Somerset Road looked like before they were removed in the early 1900s.



Prestwich Street itself runs parallel to Somerset Road in Green Point in a north to south direction from Ebenezer Road across the Buitengracht into the heart of the foreshore section of Cape Town. Colonial period cemeteries had, until the beginning of the twentieth century, lined both sides of Prestwich Street. The ground on which the Prestwich Place buildings had stood is next to the Salesian Institute which in turn had

¹² Antonia Malan, 'Prestwich Place: Exhumation of accidentally Discovered Burial Ground. Public consultation Process, 9 June to August 2006' (Prestwich Place Project Committee Collection, District Six Museum), p 5.

¹³ Listed next to number 37 in the index of a map lodged with the Algemeen Rijksarchief, VEL 838, in Nigel Worden *et al*, *Cape Town: The Making of a City*, p 41.

¹⁴ Marischal Murray, *Under Lion's Head: earlier days at Green Point and Sea Point* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1964), p 24.

¹⁵ Marischal Murray, *Under Lion's Head*, p 6.

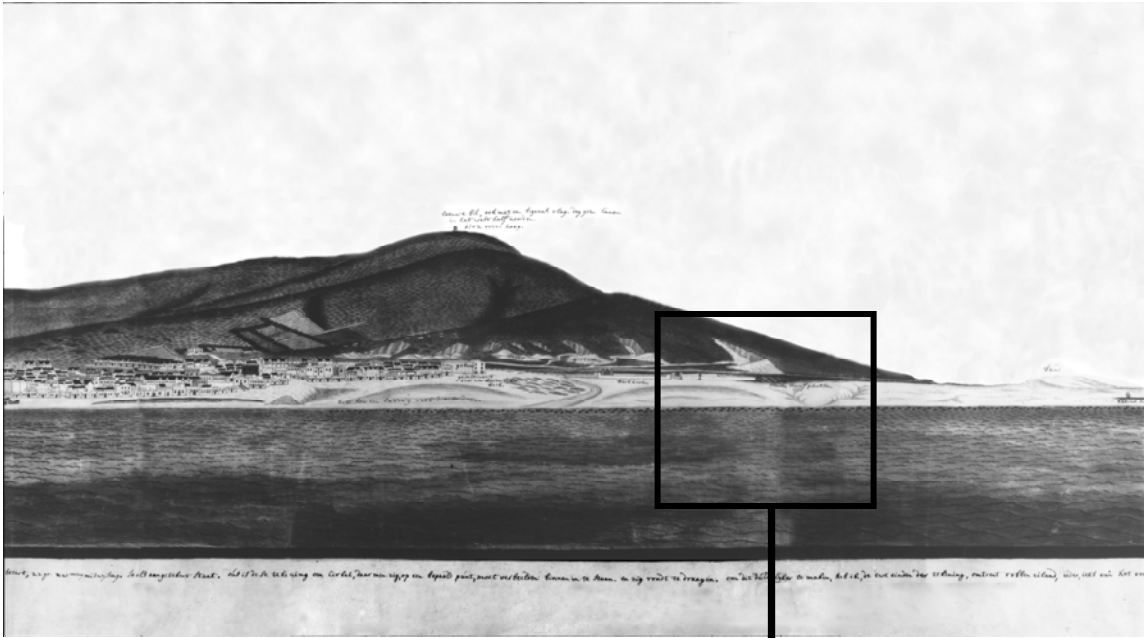


Figure 3: Robert Gordon's Panorama
 (Collection of the Archaeology Contracts Office,
 Department of Archaeology, UCT)

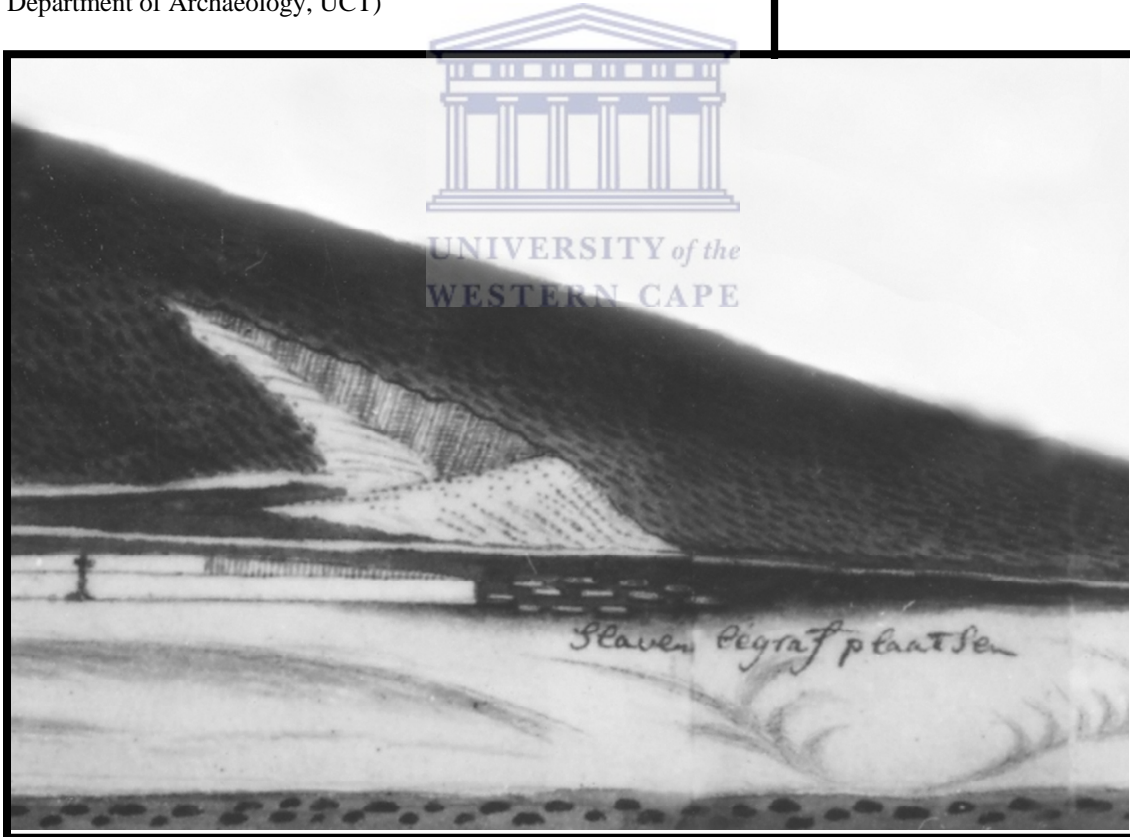


Figure 4: An enlarged view of the '*Slaven begrafplaatsen*' next to the formal burial grounds

been built, or a part of it, on what was the burial ground identified in Gordon's panorama as a 'slaaven begraafplaats'.¹⁶

A report placed before the SAHRA Council in August 2003 referred to a record from the colonial archive which stated that "the land adjacent to the old military cemetery" be designated for the victims of the small pox epidemic.¹⁷ The report concluded that the people who had been buried at Prestwich Place may have been either:

- i) Slaves and paupers;
- ii) All people who were not members of the only established church (DRC), and including paupers and slaves, or;
- iii) Victims of an outbreak of smallpox, some of whom may have been slaves.¹⁸

The reminders of human mortality proliferated from the first quarter of the nineteenth century on as hospitals and more graveyards were established in the vicinity of Somerset Road.¹⁹ These included the establishment of the old Somerset Hospital in 1819 on the corner of Prestwich and Alfred Streets, "the first hospital to serve the needs of Cape Town's civil population".²⁰ A few blocks away, in Waterkant Street, the Merchant Seaman's Hospital was opened in 1821, "for 'Free People of all Descriptions, and Slaves'.²¹ The Anglican Cemetery and the Ebenezer Burial Ground were opened a few years later.²²

¹⁶ Antonia Malan, 'Prestwich Place: Exhumation of accidentally Discovered Burial Ground', p 5.

¹⁷ A Council of Policy proclamation of June 1755 referred to in a submission to a SAHRA Council Meeting, 16-17 August 2003 by the SAHRA Archaeology, Palaeontology, Meteorite and heritage Object (APMHO) Permit Committee, p 4; James Kilcullen, *Salesian Institute, Cape Town: The Beginnings* (Cape Town: Salesian Press), p 33.

¹⁸ SAHRA APMHO Permit Committee, 16-17 Aug. 2003, p 6.

¹⁹ Marischal Murray, *Under Lion's Head*, p 22.

²⁰ Marischal Murray, *Under Lion's Head*, p 21.

²¹ Marischal Murray, *Under Lion's Head*, p 21.

²² Marischal Murray, *Under Lion's Head*, p 22.



Figure 5: The white-washed cemetery walls along Somerset Road
(The National Archives of South Africa Collection)

Up until 1827 Buitengracht Street formed the border of the western end of Cape Town. George Thompson's *'Plan of Cape Town and Environs'* of that year show the developments at that end of the city that included streets such as Rose, Chiappini, Dixon and Hudson.²³ Transfer Deeds held at the offices of the Surveyor General and Deeds Office show that in 1827 land between Somerset Road and the Amsterdam Battery was subdivided and sold for private development. By 1833 buildings had already been erected on the Prestwich Place site and were included in William Snow's Municipal survey of 1861.²⁴ The making of Cape Town in the seventeenth and eighteenth century was essentially the making of a European city. Cape Town's body politic was contoured by the legitimising influence of a European cultural milieu. The cumulative effect on the governed, the construction of the settlement and the nature of authority were compounded year-by-year as the colonial state emerged from a rudimentary half-way

²³ Marischal Murray, *Under Lion's Head*, p 22.

²⁴ Antonia Malan and Stewart Harris (eds), *Archives And Archaeology: Historical Archaeology Research Group Handbook 2, A Guide to Source Material For Researching Colonial Cape Town Households* (University of Cape Town, May 1999), p 14; Antonia Malan, 'Prestwich Place: Exhumation of Accidentally Discovered Burial Ground', p 5.

house serving the needs of mercantile capitalism, to that of a settlement privileged by being the administrative centre of successive Dutch and British colonial regimes. Markers of this growth were the cemeteries along Somerset Road, a visual assertion of dominance on the colonised landscape (see Figure 5). These European places of memory were key to an identity that linked the settler community with their places of origin. The periodic calls to close the burial grounds were signs within the white community of a shifting understanding of their past and a varied experience of the present.

Every formative step in the fortunes of the settlement affected the location and re-location of the interred dead. Within months of his arrival at the Cape in 1652 Jan van Riebeeck had set aside burial space in the Fort. When the *Groote Kerk* of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) was completed in 1703 the remains of those buried at the Castle were exhumed and reinterred along with the rest of the less esteemed Reformed faithful – including “soldiers and sailors, as well as slaves”²⁵ in a graveyard located in the eastern part of the church grounds and which extended into what today is known as Church Square.²⁶ The more privileged members - such as the Governors of the settlement - were buried in the vaults beneath the stone flooring of the church. The number of dead consequent to the 1755 smallpox contributed to the closure of the Groote Kerk graveyard. In that same year the DRC was granted substantial land for burial purposes beyond the settlement’s western boundary, the Buitengracht.

²⁵ Glenda Cox, ‘Coburn Street Burial Ground: Investigating the identity and life histories of the underclass of eighteenth century Cape Town’, M.A. dissertation, the University of Cape Town, 1999, p 68.

²⁶ R.R. Langham-Carter, ‘Cape Town’s first graveyards’, *CABO*, Vol 2, No. 1, June 1973, p 16.

Over a period of less than a hundred years other denominations were allocated less generous, but similar, dispensations. By the early nineteenth century the area between the Buitengracht and the Green Point Common was an extensive necropolis enclosed by white-washed walls, the stones of which were mined from the Quarry on Signal Hill²⁷ (see Figure 6).



Figure 6: A view of St George's Anglican Cemetery with Liddle Street on the right (Source: J.H.R. de Smidt, National Archives of South Africa Collection)

The Somerset Road Burial Grounds were closed on 15 January 1886.²⁸ The debate around the closure was framed by a European understanding of space, the core of which Foucault identified as “the hierarchic ensemble of places”.²⁹ This approach is derived from the medieval distinction between the sacred and the profane. In the seventeenth

²⁷ R.R. Langham-Carter, ‘Cape Town’s first graveyards’, p 19.

²⁸ A proclamation contained in *The Government Gazette*, No 6688, November 1885.

²⁹ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias’. This essay was first published as ‘*Des Espace Autres*’ in the French journal *Architecture/ Mouvement/ Continuïte* in 1984.

(<http://foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroYopia.en.html>), p 2.

century Galileo's assertion that the earth revolved around the sun disrupted the conventional understanding of space as that of being contained, evident in what Foucault refers to the medieval "space of emplacement". Galileo's effort pointed to a "an infinite, and infinitely open space".³⁰ But contemporary space is "still nurtured by the hidden presence of the sacred" as Foucault carefully reminds us in the concept of heterotopias. These are sites in every civilization which are "places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society which are sometimes like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted".³¹

As a society develops its history determines that an existing heterotopia will also function differently as in the matter of "the strange heterotopia of the cemetery".³² Foucault outlines how from the end of the eighteenth century the cemetery in Europe was moved from the sacred grounds of the church, in the "the heart of the city", to its outskirts.³³ In a period when the immortality of the soul and its related resurrection was assumed, little attention was given to the human cadaver and in its place in the earth. The secularisation of European society, and its colonial variant, in "correlation with the individualisation of death and the bourgeois appropriation of the cemetery, there rises an obsession with death as an 'illness.' The dead...bring illnesses to the living, and it is the presence and proximity of the dead right beside the houses, next to the church...it is this proximity that

³⁰ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias', p 2.

³¹ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p 3.

³² Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p 5.

³³ Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', p 5.

propagates death itself”.³⁴ This process of distancing the dead from the living was repeated in the colonies, albeit decades later.

The uncovered Prestwich Burial Ground formed part of the complex of colonial period cemeteries. More specifically it evolved out of the circumstances of the poor of the settlement. Burials outside the walls of the denominational burial grounds were a feature of the lives of the social underclass of the town. Social circumstances and personal choice had placed them beyond the ambit of organised religion, which, in the case of death provided the conventional route to the graveyard. While there was an official paupers’ burial ground, Wit Sands, between Gallows Hill and Mouille Point, the poor of the city chose to bury their dead outside the formal burial grounds, or were compelled often by their inability to pay the burial fees. One of the causes for these extra-mural burials is the often cited example of the small-pox epidemics of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These epidemics were the cause of the deaths of thousands who were often buried close to where they had literally fallen down and died.³⁵ This would apply most often to the pre-emancipation period when development in the area was mainly confined to the buildings on the slave-holding estate and other residences situated above present-day Somerset Road. The soft sand of the dunes along the Table Bay shoreline and its relative seclusion provided ample opportunity for the surreptitious burial, for example, of dead slaves. Others who were buried in this area included members of crew attached to passing ships who fell ill and died at the Cape. These were carried in procession by soldiers to the dunes, “a place along the Bay outside the town”.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, p 5.

³⁵ Glenda Cox, ‘Cobern Street Burial Ground’, p 71.

The graves were “dug by slaves and the bodies interred”.³⁶ Also, as indicated earlier, it was a place where the Khoi communities buried their dead. The Prestwich Burial Ground speaks less of the dead but more of the history which their lived lives constituted in Cape Town’s formative days. It is a history characterised more by neglect than a conscious forgetting.

In a collection of essays, *Hatful of Tigers*, the Nicaraguan writer, Sergio Ramirez, pays homage to his Argentinean counterpart, Julio Cortázar.³⁷ After the death of Cortázar Ramirez visited his grave in the Montparnasse cemetery in Paris.³⁸ It is a popular site for contemporary pilgrims as many of France's intellectual and artistic elite and other notables are buried there.³⁹ On a cold Sunday afternoon in February 1984 Ramirez and his wife stood before the tombstone of their friend. The Nicaraguan writer recognised that cemeteries were places of memory, where the life of the deceased was remembered. “And one stands here in silence in order to do that”, he recalls of that day, “and you’re going to stock your memory with all these encounters, using this simple method which consists of standing in front of a tomb and remembering”.⁴⁰ This was a fitting gesture to Cortázar who in his life had been conscious of “the neglect of forgetfulness”.⁴¹

³⁶ O. F. Mentzel, *A Geographical and Topographical Description of the Cape of Good Hope, 1785, Part Two* (Cape Town: Jan van Riebeeck Society, 1921), p. 114.

³⁷ Sergio Ramirez, *Hatful of tigers: reflections on art, culture and politics* (Curbstone Press, 1995), pp 8-9.

³⁸ The Cimetière du Montparnasse was established in 1824 in the Montparnasse quarter of Paris, France. The Cimetière des Innocents near Les Halles food market in Paris was closed down in 1786 because it was viewed as a health hazard.

³⁹ © Paris Tours Info, August 24, 2005.

⁴⁰ Sergio Ramirez, *Hatful of tigers*, p. 18.

⁴¹ Sergio Ramirez, *Hatful of tigers*, pp 8-9

In this struggle against forgetfulness, I have frequented the cemeteries in around Cape Town especially during the time I spent looking for the grave of the emancipated slave, Lydia Williams.⁴² My search led me to ask questions about where the city buried its dead before the opening of the Maitland Cemetery.⁴³ In this process I learnt about ‘the Somerset Road Cemeteries’, and eventually, of the Prestwich burial ground. The questions that come to the fore are about what facilitated this forgetfulness, this muting of voices which should have told the story of slavery unto the children’s generation. The uncovering of the Prestwich burial ground raises issues that resonate with the type of recognition bestowed on the colonised body by history. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the welfare of slaves and of others of the colonial underclass was mostly recognised in proportion to the concerns and interests of slave-owners and society at large. The general well-being of slaves was considered in relation to that which enhanced the fiduciary aspect of their lives. Their biological progeny meant an additional source of labour and a possible object to be sold at a later stage for the benefit of the slave owner. Ironically in the early 21st century, professional interests in the exhumed skeletal remains may inadvertently pursue a similar propensity to separate experience from the facts of being. The dead of Prestwich Place were deemed to be archival resources to be forensically mined and interrogated. As the archaeologist who led the disinterment suggested:

We can determine how old people were when they died. Their degree of physical health and we can establish a certain amount about their ethnic

⁴² Lydia Williams was an emancipated slave who lived in Cape Town from 1820 to 1910 and is the subject of my honours thesis, ‘A story to be told’. I also co-produced a film on her life titled ‘A fervent simplicity’.

⁴³ In the 1880s the cemeteries were closed and 15 January 1886 was decreed as the day on which the last burial could take place. From then onwards funeral parties would proceed to the Monument Station and then journey by train to the newly opened Maitland Cemetery ‘at the Seventh Milestone’. The name, ‘Monument Station’ was in reference to its proximity to the statue of Jan van Riebeeck.

origin. We can determine diseases and pick up if people died of smallpox, TB and some cancers. We can see nutritional diseases, nutritional stress, and from muscle attachments, whether people were doing hard labour when they died.⁴⁴

The research on the life of Lydia - where she had been born, the nature of her life, and, finally, her last resting place - have a bearing on the stories attached to Prestwich Place. The reconstructed life of Lydia Williams spans written comments in the *Cowley Evangelist*, the records of the Cape Archives in Roeland Street, her parish church, St Philip's, that of the Cemeteries Board in Wale Street and finally the Burial Register at Gate No 9 at the Maitland Cemetery.⁴⁵ The story of Lydia Williams started off as a footnote in an essay by Vivian Bickford-Smith.⁴⁶ The evidence I had on hand had led me from the Burial Register at St Philip's in Chapel Street, District Six to Maitland Cemetery. The official at Gate 9 and I walked along a row of graves without markers or any other means of specific identity, the topography of the forgotten. Her grave was somewhere beneath the ground ahead of me and to my eye it was empty space surrounded by eucalyptus and fir trees. The official accompanying me set about finding the exact spot where Lydia was buried. He used as his first reference a grave which had a number recorded on the cement demarcation surrounding it. Then he took a specific number of paces northwards, a few paces westward, paused and solemnly breathed "Here it is". The monastic order, the Society of St John the Evangelist (SSJE), had worked in District Six from 1884 on. They had held Lydia in high esteem, sufficient enough to refer

⁴⁴ Tim Hart, archaeologist, *Cape Times* 2 May 2005, p 1.

⁴⁵ Most of the information I sourced about her life I obtained too late to write up in my honours thesis as my research lasted from 1998 to 2003.

⁴⁶ Vivian Bickford-Smith, 'Meanings of Freedom: Social Position and Identity Among Ex-Slaves and Their Descendants in Cape Town, 1875 – 1910' in Nigel Worden and Clifton Crais (eds), *Breaking the Chains: Slavery and its Legacy in the Nineteenth-Century Cape Colony* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994).

to the day on which she commemorated Emancipation Day, December 1, as Lydia's Day. No doubt her grave had once had been marked by a wooden cross with her name on it. But time and the rigour of the changing seasons had weathered away any such sign. Lydia Williams had been buried in council-owned land and because of the increasing need for burial space graves such as Lydia's had been set aside to be re-used. At a parish council meeting in 2002 the congregation of St Philip the Deacon, District Six decided to buy the plot. Their decision formed part of the process of reclaiming a part of the District's history.

The crux of this incident is in the way the cemetery official paced out the location of Lydia's grave. In my hand I had a piece of paper with the serial number of Lydia's grave written on it along with her date of birth and that of the day on which she had died. I knew who preached at her funeral and even knew the name of her mother and her siblings. I had discovered all I need to know about Lydia Williams in relation to the questions I had on hand. Other researchers will approach her life with a different set of questions and we can cross reference our different answers and in so doing enrich our different perspectives. The life of Lydia Williams can be defined in relation to the needs of the living to learn about their past as seen through her celebration of the pivotal event in her life, Emancipation Day. The quantifiable part of Lydia's life affirms her existence but does not necessarily speak to the *why* that informed her cultural practices such as her consistent remembrance of Emancipation Day on 1 December. Until her death in 1910 she held a prayer meeting wherein she recounted her experience of slavery which then culminated in a feast that went on long into the rest of the day.

The closure of the Somerset Road Burial Grounds was the assertion of Cape Town's mercantile elite that the 'heart of the city' had shifted from ancestral ties and religious sentiment to the values embedded in commercial interests. Their intention to "formulate common ideas and strategies, and establish a sense of class solidarity" was signalled as early as 1822 with the formation of the Commercial Exchange and the Good Hope Trade Society three years later.⁴⁷ A feature of the Somerset Road cemeteries were the cypress trees which grew finger-of-God like within its walls. Langham writes that improved travelling conditions in nineteenth century Europe had allowed for easier access to the remote cemeteries which had been relocated from the urban centres to "attractive rural areas" and had been "landscaped as handsome parks with trees and lawns and flower beds".⁴⁸ Similar attempts were made in Cape Town, when, for example, in 1839 the Council of St George's "ordered 130 cypresses from C.M. Villet of Green Point, the leading Cape Florist of the day".⁴⁹ This investment in cypress trees were literal examples of how "the colonial subject must negotiate between two worlds: the recently lost metropolitan home, and the uncoded Otherness of the present".⁵⁰

By the 1830s the Somerset Road Burial Grounds were referred to as "sad, cold, dull, dreary, melancholy places".⁵¹ The oldest colonial graveyard, that of the DRC, received particular mention as "a pathless, dangerous Golgotha".⁵² The dilapidated state of these

⁴⁷ Timothy Keegan, *Colonial South Africa and the origins of the racial order* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1996), p 50.

⁴⁸ R.R. Langham-Carter, 'Cape Town's first graveyards', p 19.

⁴⁹ R.R. Langham-Carter, 'Cape Town's first graveyards', p 19.

⁵⁰ David Bunn, "Our Wattled Cot": Mercantile and domestic Space in Thomas Pringle's African Landscapes' in W.J.J. Mitchell (ed), *Landscape and Power* (Chicago), p 138.

⁵¹ *Cape of Good Hope Literary Gazette*, October 1833, quoted in R.R. Langham-Carter's, 'Cape Town's first graveyards', p 19.

⁵² *South African Commercial Advertiser*, 16 January 1836, quoted by R.R. Langham-Carter's, p 19.

burial grounds became the pretext for its eventual closure after a protracted deliberation of more than fifty years. It was a site where the interests of British capital, in tandem with local government, engaged the political and economic power of the Dutch establishment of nineteenth century Cape Town. An overview of the practice of local government of the time shows how the cause of the city's elite prospered through their proximity to local government and power.

From the inception of the settlement its white residents desired a participatory role in local governance. They had been included in the Burgher Council and later were able to participate in the Committee of the High Court established in 1786 to function as a municipal commission for Cape Town. In 1793 their powers enabled them to appoint two *wykmeesters*, or wardmasters to each of the 23 districts into which the town had been divided. During the first British occupation of the Cape, the Committee was transformed into a six-member Burgher Senate.⁵³ Its demise in 1827 was facilitated by charges of maladministration and corruption and the Colonial administration took over its affairs. The colonists were denied the rights of self-government but their persistent demands in this regard culminated in the municipal government of 1840, “based on previous patterns of local government at the Cape”.⁵⁴

The constitutional aspects of local government ushered in changes which had a significant impact on the economy in particular. The municipal ordinance of 1840

⁵³ Digby Warren, ‘The establishment of Cape Town’s first municipality, 1836 – 1840’, a draft chapter from an M.A. thesis on municipal politics in Cape Town, 1840 – 1854), pp 4-5; Nigel Worden, Elizabeth van Heyningen, Vivian Bickford-Smith (eds), *Cape Town: The making of a city. An illustrated social history* (Claremont: David Philip Publishers, 1998), p 71.

⁵⁴ Digby Warren, ‘The establishment of Cape Town’s first municipality’, p 7.

facilitated political rule in easy alliance with commerce, through a two-tier system of a Board of Wardmasters on one level and the executive authority prevailing in a board of twelve commissioners. The franchise determined that “about one-tenth of the city’s total population qualified as householders and the Board of Commissioners was effectively restricted to wealthy landed proprietors”.⁵⁵ The Almanac of 1850 shows “that the total population of Cape Town in 1848 was given as 22 543, of which 11 074 were males”. Women were disqualified from the definition of householders.⁵⁶ Official sources reveal that in 1847 the number of qualified voters amounted to 2 209.⁵⁷ The disenfranchised householders could have their say in municipal matters through public meetings.⁵⁸ There was a class hierarchy discernable in the occupations of the Wardmasters (of 1842 and 1849) and the commissioners (over the period 1840 – 1854). The former were “petty bourgeois in nature” consisting of “wine merchants, bankers, auctioneers and general agents...the majority... drawn from the ranks of tradesmen, shopkeepers, artisans and craftsmen”.⁵⁹ As for the Board of Commissioners, “...a solid core...was middle class”.⁶⁰ This group “had at its disposal greater wealth, wealth which could be channelled into projects beneficial to its commercial interests – the establishment of banks, the expansion of the steam-ship trade, the development of local tramways and railways”.⁶¹ Local

⁵⁵ Digby Warren, ‘Cape Town’s first municipality’, p 20.

⁵⁶ Digby Warren, ‘Cape Town’s first municipality’, p 21.

⁵⁷ GH 28/41, Montagu-Smith, 3 December, 1847, cited by Digby Warren, ‘The establishment of Cape Town’s first municipality’, p 21.

⁵⁸ The best example being the series of public meetings held from the end of 1848 on to protest against the British government’s intention to ship out convicts to the Cape.

⁵⁹ Digby Warren, ‘Cape Town’s first municipality’, pp 36-37.

⁶⁰ Digby Warren, ‘Cape Town’s first municipality’, pp 36-37.

⁶¹ Digby Warren, ‘Cape Town’s first municipality’, pp 36-37.

government allowed for a measure of social mobility, evident in the period between 1840 and 1854, as 12 of the 56 commissioners began their political careers as wardmasters.⁶²

In 1875 the Select Committee Report On The Cemeteries Bill was tabled before Parliament.⁶³ The preamble of the Bill stated that the burial grounds and public cemeteries “are by reason of long usage dangerously and indecently overcrowded, and have become injurious to public health, and for sanitary reasons be closed”.⁶⁴ The hearings of 1875 were intensely informed by the small-pox epidemic of 1858. In October 1858 the Colonial Secretary, R.W. Rawson, had informed the chairperson of the Municipality of Cape Town of existing concerns about the state of the city’s burial grounds. The intervention of the colonial state in matters of a civic nature provides us with an occasion to follow up on Stoler’s directive regarding the documents contained in the colonial archive, namely, to “turn to the social and political conditions that produced those documents”.⁶⁵ Rawson was concerned primarily, it would appear, with the small-pox epidemic which had devastated the city, killing 2 000 Capetonians out of a total population of only twenty-four thousand.⁶⁶ He expressed concern about “the great increase in the mortality of the town caused by the prevailing epidemics”. He was also alert to the evolving business interests in the Somerset Road part of town in the form of

⁶² Digby Warren, ‘Cape Town’s first municipality’, pp 36-37.

⁶³ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee appointed to consider and report on the Cemeteries Bill’ (Cape Town: Saul Solomon & Co., Steam Printing Office, 1875).

⁶⁴ *The Cape of Good Hope Government Gazette*, April 16, 1875.

⁶⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form’, in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michelle Pickover, Graeme Reid and Razia Saleh (eds), *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2002), p. 85.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic pride and racial prejudice in Victorian Cape Town* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001), p.100.

“the anticipated erection of public buildings, and to the extension of trade in the direction of the existing cemeteries consequent upon the projected erection of a breakwater”.⁶⁷

These were the political basis - along with related fiduciary concerns - on which the Colonial Secretary, R.W. Rawson, called upon the municipality to attend to the matter of the burial grounds, as “serious evils and public inconveniences may soon arise, if not some grave disaster, imperilling the whole town and surrounding country”.⁶⁸ A Special Committee found for reasons of “health and safety of the inhabitants” that no further burials should take place at the Somerset Road Cemeteries “and that a general cemetery should be established in a more eligible situation, and under proper regulations”.⁶⁹ A report of the General Committee dated 23 November 1874, noted that “up to the present time the Government have not adopted any measures in regard to this subject”. The committee restated the findings of the Special Committee of 1858 and those of a subsequent committee appointed in December 1873 and which formulated their report in June 1874. These reports formed the basis of a resolution dated 22 July 1874 wherein Council stated that the cemeteries should be closed “after due provision shall have been made for internments in some other suitable locality...but as it is a question of such magnitude as to call for distinct legislative enactment, they would recommend that the papers be forwarded to the Government with an intimation to that effect”.⁷⁰ The closure of the cemeteries however occurred only twelve years later.

⁶⁷ Rawson W. Rawson, in a letter dated 28 October, 1858 to the Chairperson of the Municipality of Cape Town, tabled as Appendix A in the report of the Cemeteries Bill Select Committee.

⁶⁸ Rawson W. Rawson, Cape of Good Hope, Appendix A, p i.

⁶⁹ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Special Committee on Cemeteries’, in the report of the Cemeteries Bill Select Committee, Appendix B, December 21, 1858, p iii.

⁷⁰ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the General Committee’, Appendix H, 23 November, 1874, p xxiii.

The members of the DRC, owners of the oldest burial ground on Somerset Road, were the most prolific in their protests against the closure of the burial grounds. The Muslim community was equally spirited and were lauded for their sanitary burial practice. This was in contrast to the DRC whose above-ground vaults were deemed to be particularly offensive. The more political objections came from members of the Town Council and others who identified themselves in a petition to the House of Assembly as “Inhabitants of Cape Town”.⁷¹ They contested, *inter alia*, the process of public consultation on such an important matter.⁷² Neither were the cemeteries as overcrowded as stated in the preamble.⁷³ The resources and capacity of the Council to administer the cemeteries were called into question.⁷⁴ It was also noted that “many congregations, religious denominations and private individuals and families, hold and possessed clear and undisputed rights, titles and transfers of almost the whole of the graveyard, burial places and vaults in the cemeteries of this City”.⁷⁵ This was especially true of the DRC whose grounds had been procured during the time that it was the colonial state at prayer. On the other hand, the Muslim community, reminded the Venerable Archdeacon Lightfoot, “had come to Cape Town against their will. They had been brought for the benefit of Christians”.⁷⁶ The DRC parishioners who stood before the committee, as in the person of the Hon. W.A.J de Smidt, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) and church elder, were of the opinion that the their burial ground was not full. De Smidt referred to a practice whereby the cemetery was divided into sections. Once a section had been filled it

⁷¹ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Special Committee’, Appendix L.

⁷² Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Special Committee’, Appendix L, paragraph 2.

⁷³ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Special Committee’, Appendix L, paragraph 6.

⁷⁴ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Special Committee’, Appendix L, paragraph 7.

⁷⁵ ‘Report of the Special Committee’, Appendix L, paragraph 8.

⁷⁶ Archdeacon Lightfoot quoted in the *Cape Argus*, 27 February 1884 and cited in Elizabeth B. van Heyningen, ‘Public Health And Society in Cape Town 1880 – 1910’, Ph. D dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1989, p 187.

would not be used for twelve years. At the end of the stipulated period “other corpses are put on the top of them”.⁷⁷ This view was in contrast to the testimony provided by Archdeacon Lightfoot who declared the cemetery of the Dutch Reformed Church as “certainly the worst of all”.⁷⁸ Mr Francis Goodliffe, a merchant and a Town Councillor who supported the bill expressed the view that there “was a bad odour...in all the cemeteries”. He had been aware “of the presence of miasma everywhere”.⁷⁹

Goodliffe was of the opinion that the tombs in the DRC burial ground “were in a very bad condition”. He then made specific references to the attachment to place which had a bearing on the attitude of the DRC faith community to their dead and less to the manner of their internment. He commented on the dilapidated state of the tombs which did not inspire him “with a belief in that respect for ancestry which we hear so much about”.⁸⁰ The Dutch community of Cape Town had witnessed the British usurpation of the hegemony of rule which for so long had been comfortably theirs. David Bunn distinguishes between how the British Settlers and Xhosa communities memorialise their dead during the colonial period in the eastern Cape. The British practice of the 1820s was to present their graves “as visible signifiers within an architectural discourse of headstones”. We can conclude that the Dutch of that time were guided by a similar sensibility. “Most Xhosa graves”, on the other hand, “were not obvious landscape features”.⁸¹ The sepulchres of one group

⁷⁷ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee on the Cemeteries Bill’, p 141, paragraph 1248.

⁷⁸ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 58, paragraph 455.

⁷⁹ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 35, paragraph 264.

⁸⁰ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 36, paragraph 268.

⁸¹ David Bunn, ‘The Sleep of the Brave: Graves as Sites and Signs in the Colonial Eastern Cape’ in P. S. Landau and Deborah D. Kaspin (eds), *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p 66.

is seen as the visible, symbolic axis of a landscape circuit, in turn associated with the property-owning sensibilities of English settlers, in the other, it is part of an invisible field of symbolic force, exerting a grid of charged influence over the asymmetrically gendered lifeways of neighbouring communities.⁸²

For the Xhosa the act of burying someone was part of the process of an individual becoming part of the collective memory. “The semiology of abandonment – ruined huts, overgrown gravesites, broken pots, and selective avoidance of the grave site”, an apparent sign of neglect was, in contrast “an important means by which the dead, as a metaphysical force, passed out of the material world, into the memory of the community”.⁸³ This description of seeming neglect is applicable to the Somerset Road Burial Grounds, the paupers’ burial ground known as of Wit Sand and the network of Prestwich Street Burial Grounds associated with the city’s social underclass. The Dutch of the latter part of nineteenth century Cape Town had been removed from the centre of colonial power. They were observed “to be clinging to a spot within the Municipality” which Goodliffe dismissed as “a prejudice which should be got over”.⁸⁴ The heterotopia of the Dutch cemeteries functioned in relation to their need to remember themselves in a particular manner. Unlike the Xhosa of the 1820s, the deliberate neglect of the nineteenth century DRC graveyards was not a celebratory inauguration of the ancestors. In the recasting of their identity the Dutch attached a value to the graves of their forebears in a manner which addressed their need to remember the days when colonial Cape Town was exclusively and hegemonically theirs.

⁸² David Bunn, ‘The Sleep of the Brave’, p 67.

⁸³ David Bunn, ‘The Sleep of the Brave’, p 70.

⁸⁴ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 37, paragraph 273.

At the Special Committee Hearing of 1875 persons deemed to have a specialist knowledge of the conditions of the Somerset Road cemeteries were called upon to provide evidence to assist the committee in its deliberations. What emerged from these submissions was that Cape Town was awash with human bones. A Town Councillor, Mr G. G. Prins stated that if he dug six feet in his own ground he would discover bones. He lived on Somerset Road about 300 yards away from the Roman Catholic burial ground in the direction the English Cemetery.⁸⁵ He also informed the committee that Caledon Square had once been a cemetery “and not long ago bones could be seen lying on the surface”.⁸⁶ Prof. V. Forbes in reference to Sparrman’s account of the Dutch burial ground notes that Peter Kolb had made mention of a cemetery for slaves between the castle and Table Mountain in the early part of the eighteenth century.⁸⁷ The Hon. W.A.J. de Smidt, a member of the Legislative Council and an Elder of the Dutch Reformed Church spoke of how it was almost inevitable to disturb bones. When the church “was first erected, there was a burial ground around the building. That has not been used for a 150 years; but there were vaults inside the church, which were used up to 1837”.⁸⁸ He also recalled when a drain was being erected in Bureau Street how an entire skeleton was found: “Bones will come out if the place has been once used as a burial-ground, and you can’t prevent it”.⁸⁹ Mr R.L. Keeve, sexton of the DRC declared that there were bones all over

⁸⁵ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 107, paragraphs 878 & 880.

⁸⁶ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 117, paragraph 995.

⁸⁷ Anders Sparrman, *A voyage to the Cape of Good Hope towards the Antarctic Polar Circle round the world and to the country of the Hottentots and the Caffres from the year 1772 – 1776* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1975), p 49, fn 25.

⁸⁸ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 141, paragraph 1249.

⁸⁹ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 142, paragraph 1249.

the town, recounting how when alterations were being done at the Post Office, human bones were uncovered.⁹⁰

The word “cemetery” has the capacity to evoke pastoral scenes as in Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poem: “The cemetery is an open space among the ruins, / covered in winter with violets and daisies. / It might make one in love with death, / to think that one should be buried in so sweet a place”.⁹¹ Sadly this was not the description that one could associate with the Somerset Road cemeteries of nineteenth century Cape Town.

Appearing before the Select Committee on the Cemeteries Bill, Dr Ebdon, chairman of the Medical Board of the Colony, spoke in favour of the bill. He based his support on the fact that the gravediggers inevitably would “disturb the remains of two or three bodies” when digging graves. Further to this was the smell “from the graveyard being so bad as to make the air of the streets in their vicinity absolutely offensive”.⁹² He attributed the source of the smell to the vaults which housed the wooden coffins above ground. This view was also held by Charles Rees, the City Engineer, who observed “that generally the tombs and vaults are not sufficiently closed and sealed to prevent the escape of the noxious gases”.⁹³

The small-pox epidemic of 1858 that had struck the town seventeen years before the hearings was a consistent reference in the proceedings. Reference to it would often surface in relation to the Muslim community. Ebdon was of the view that those living in

⁹⁰ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 174, paragraph 1549.

⁹¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, from the poem, ‘Adonais’ in *The concise Oxford dictionary of quotations*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p 303:2.

⁹² Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 5, paragraph 16.

⁹³ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 20, paragraph 135..

close proximity to the cemeteries were affected more than most by the small-pox, citing the area known as Sebastopol as having had a very high mortality. The houses were small and occupied mainly by the poor. The chairperson of the hearing enquired whether “there were not more Malays residing in that neighbourhood than in any other part of the town?”⁹⁴ The inference was that Muslims were culpable in matters of hygiene and deliberate perpetrators in the spreading of the epidemic, a charge that would surface during the Cemeteries Uprising a few years later. Ebden contradicted the view implied in the question and replied that there “are not such strong objections to the Malay burial grounds as there are that to the Dutch Reformed Church”. He favoured the Muslim way of burying their dead as they “have a far more sensible method of sepulchre”. He spoke of the Muslim practice of wrapping the deceased in a cloth and placing it directly into the earth, in contrast with that of the “the Dutch Reform Church people (who) place the body in a wooden shell, and, instead of burying it, leave it on the surface of the earth, in many instances”.⁹⁵ The question concerning Muslims came up shortly thereafter and Ebden’s answer revealed that he had been “here on sick leave from India” during the small-pox in 1858.⁹⁶ The assumption is that during his stay in India he had acquired seemingly favourable insight into the way of Islam. Later he further qualified his view on Muslims and their possible objection to the closure of their burial grounds by replying, “I know something of the Malays; and I do not believe that their prejudices are so strong that they would offer any difficulty”.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 5, paragraph 20.

⁹⁵ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 6, paragraph 21.

⁹⁶ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 6, paragraph 25.

⁹⁷ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, pp 9-10, paragraph 56.

Earlier on he had countered the accusation “that during the prevalence of the small-pox there were more Malays living in the neighbourhood of the cemeteries than elsewhere”. He argued that he “put the Malays out of consideration” and in comparison to “the mortality of a class of people in one locality with the same style of people in another locality”. He added that Muslims had “suffered largely, because they had not employed vaccination”.⁹⁸ He returned to the matter of the vaccination and pointed to a willingness to compromise within the Muslim community. He reminded the committee that even though Muslims were regarded as being prejudiced against vaccination yet “when small-pox was prevalent the women were quite willing to have their children vaccinated, although it was contrary to the laws of Mahomed”.⁹⁹

At the same hearing, the secretary to the Town Council, a Johannes A. Rood, described Wit Sand,¹⁰⁰ as a place where the poor who had no church affiliation were buried.¹⁰¹ The absence of walls enabled the animals to roam about freely. Cattle, he said, “depasture there and dogs roam about. The carcasses of animals, and in some instances, the corpses of human beings, have been disinterred there”.¹⁰² Rees, the City engineer, described the place in most fearsome terms: “It is quite unenclosed and is free to anybody, and is also a burial place for dead horses”. He expressed the forlorn hope that “that the number of dogs to be seen near this place do not feast on human bodies”. It was a place “ruined, miserable and wretched”.¹⁰³ Peter Coates says that this particular burial ground was

⁹⁸ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 6, paragraph 26.

⁹⁹ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 10, paragraph 56.

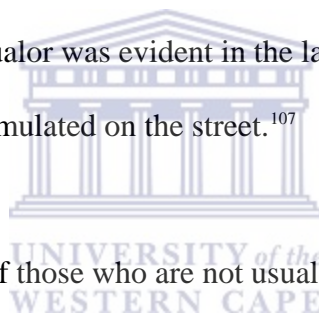
¹⁰⁰ A paupers burial ground situated behind Gallows Hill, along the northern side of Somerset Road, past the ‘new’ Somerset Hospital, up to Mouille Point.

¹⁰¹ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 17, paragraph 113.

¹⁰² Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 17, paragraph 114.

¹⁰³ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 22, paragraph 144.

called ‘Sebastopol’ after the southern Russian port-city of that name.¹⁰⁴ During the Crimean War, Sebastopol surrendered after a lengthy siege, and the victorious troops entered the fallen city to the sight of bodies strewn everywhere. Sebastopol was also identified as a residential part of Cape Town. Nigel Worden *et al* highlight how speculation on the property market in the city from the 1830s on proved to be very lucrative for builders such as the Wicht family.¹⁰⁵ In the pre-1861 *laissez faire* period of town planning, with the profit motive at a premium, there “was the rapid development on the fringe of the town, where property speculators built with little regard for hygiene or quality”.¹⁰⁶ Sebastopol was one of these areas “nicknamed in reference to the notorious London tenements”. It consisted of a row of over-crowded two-storied houses at the lower end of Bree Street. Its squalor was evident in the lack of water and sanitation and the uncollected refuse that accumulated on the street.¹⁰⁷



The burial grounds also speak of those who are not usually referred to as part of the history of the city. These are Africans from other parts of Africa who arrived in Cape Town either as migrant labour or as economic refugees from the Eastern Cape. At the hearing there was a specific reference to Angolans. In his testimony, Charles Rees recalled that Canon Lightfoot was his companion on a tour of the burial-grounds: “The Rev. Canon Lightfoot, who accompanied me, told me that there was once a place enclosed there by a peculiar tribe of black people; but that it has latterly been unenclosed

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Peter Coates on 26 July 2005. Mr Oates is the author of *Trackless Trams*.

¹⁰⁵ J.A.H. Wicht, a merchant and businessman, was a Municipal Commissioner from 1844 – 1854. Cited in Digby Warren, ‘The establishment of Cape Town’s first municipality, 1836 – 1840’ (A draft chapter from his M.A. thesis on municipal politics in Cape Town, 1840 – 1854).

¹⁰⁶ Nigel Worden *et al*, p 170.

¹⁰⁷ Nigel Worden *et al.*, p 170.

and neglected”.¹⁰⁸ He was unable to say how the area had been selected for a burial place. Nor had he known for how long it had been such except that it had been so “for very many years. Long before the memory of the gentleman who went with me”.¹⁰⁹ Fr Lightfoot had begun his ministry in the city in 1858, and according to Rees the burial ground for the “peculiar tribe of black people” was then already in existence. Francis G. Goodliffe, a merchant in Cape Town, shared the sentiments of his fellow witness with regard to Wit Sand, as “an open space at the back of Somerset Hospital...an open common in which anybody or anything is buried, without order, right, privilege, or inspection”.¹¹⁰ He also referred to the “peculiar tribe of black people”. He differentiated between graves that were “mixed in the most indiscriminate manner” and a portion within Wit Sand, “the burial place of the Angola tribe of Negroes, who had a place which was once kept in a decent state of repair”.¹¹¹ There was a time in Cape Town’s past when its population included a community of Angolans, or their descendants, whose awareness of their origins was expressed in the care of the graves of their compatriots. Indeed, Angolans were part of the Cape since early colonial times. Ross writes that “some 174 slaves were landed from the Dutch East Indiaman, the ‘*Amersfoort*’ at the Cape in 1658”. They were Angolans who “had been captured from the Portuguese off the coast of Brazil”.¹¹²

The business interests of some surfaced on occasion through the questions asked: “Do you think that considering the vicinity of the burial grounds to the Docks, and the

¹⁰⁸ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 22, paragraph 149.

¹⁰⁹ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 22, paragraph 151.

¹¹⁰ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 33, paragraph 256.

¹¹¹ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 33, paragraph 256.

¹¹² Robert Ross, *Cape of Torments*, p 11.

probable extension of the town in that direction, the present situation is eligible?”

Goodliffe the merchant gave an obtuse response: “I think that one at Green Point Common would be better; but I think it very objectionable to remove your grave-yards beyond the reach of the poor”.¹¹³ Goodliffe was forthright in his support of the Bill and was of the opinion that “the further you can take the dead from the living the better; it will be beneficial to the living and will certainly do the dead no harm”.¹¹⁴ He referred to a practice in England, which the city would later adopt, which was that of a funeral train.

What was amplified throughout many of the testimonies was the extent to which significant parts of Cape Town had been places of burial. Pieter Ulrich Leibbrandt, town resident and a member of the Town Council objected to the idea that the governance of the proposed new cemetery be in the hands of the Town Council. He believed that the civic authorities had been unable to “look after the bones in their own streets”. He also told the committee that he could take them to a place where there were human bones lying outside a cemetery. Leibbrandt referred to an occasion when he had taken the secretary of the council “to that part which is at the corner of the ground belonging Scotch Church”. This was opposite the old Somerset Hospital. “The secretary”, he said “saw it before me in the embankment. He scratched the sand and took out a human skull”.¹¹⁵ The area he describes seems to be in the vicinity of present-day Prestwich Street. They proceeded onto an area “behind the Dutch Reformed burial ground”. This had also been a burial ground as “the whole of the field near the spot has been used as a

¹¹³ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 18, paragraph 120.

¹¹⁴ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 37, paragraph 273.

¹¹⁵ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 79, paragraph 612

burial ground, and these things are often found there”. Leibbrandt has also been informed that human bones were often found scattered in Prestwich-square.¹¹⁶

Mr Leibbrandt stood firm on the view that matters should not be left in the hands of the Council. He queried whether politicians of a future dispensation may “come into office and say, “We have a lot of ground lying dead there,” and then go to Parliament and bring another Bill to sell the ground?” He considered the Bill “as only the thin end of the wedge”. He was of the opinion that the burial grounds would eventually be closed and later sold because “the majority of the Council at the present time are people who are not interested personally in the present Cape Town burial places”.¹¹⁷ One concludes from his surname that Leibbrandt was of Dutch descent and his fellow councillors who are in the majority, are not, because, as he said, “They have come from other parts of the world”.¹¹⁸

The biomedical control of the colonised body

The treatment meted out to the Muslim community, before and during the 1882 smallpox epidemic of that election year, without a doubt influenced their response to the closure of the burial grounds four years later. David Arnold’s account of the Indian plague epidemic of 1896 and his related analysis of that event provides a comparative insight into an earlier response of Cape Town’s Muslim communities’ to the smallpox epidemics. The Indian plague, as in its Cape equivalent, had rendered the colonised body visible “as a site of conflict between colonial power and indigenous politics”.¹¹⁹ At first

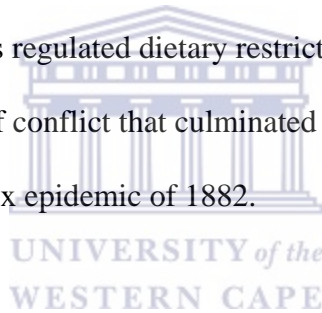
¹¹⁶ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 79, paragraph 613.

¹¹⁷ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, p 79, paragraph 613.

¹¹⁸ Cape of Good Hope, ‘Report of the Select Committee’, pp 80-81, paragraph 622.

¹¹⁹ David Arnold, ‘Perspectives on the Indian Plague, 1896 – 1900’, in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p 392.

the state attempted to limit the spread of the plague by exercising some form of administrative control over the body which was in turn countered by the concealment of any signs of being infected. The British health authorities driven by a sense of urgency bypassed their Hindu and Muslim counterparts by treating the body "...as a secular object, not as sacred territory, as an individual entity, not as an element integral to a wider community".¹²⁰ The approach of western medicine in this context with its invasive scrutiny of the body subjected it to "its physical touch, an intrusion of the greater concern to a society in which touch connoted possession or pollution".¹²¹ Further to this approach was the Foucaultian identified seclusion of the infected body into hospitals, which "offered better opportunities for isolation, observation and control".¹²² Plague hospitals, its penal-like segregation and its regulated dietary restrictions clashed with Islamic dietary laws and became sites of conflict that culminated in the resistance against the medical response to the smallpox epidemic of 1882.



Cape Muslims had resisted conventional western methods to counter the effects of the epidemic believing it to be divinely inflicted. They appealed to the Creator in their communal prayer meetings, and, given their tenuous place in Cape society, to the goodwill of the colonial authorities. The expeditious manner in which the city's medical authorities determined victims to be buried evoked a fear in the Muslim community that they would be buried without the presence of an imam and the accompanying ablution

¹²⁰ David Arnold, 'Perspectives on the Indian Plague', p 396.

¹²¹ David Arnold, 'Perspectives on the Indian Plague', p 396.

¹²² David Arnold, 'Perspectives on the Indian Plague', p 397.

and burial rites.¹²³ Burial rites for the Muslim, observed Achmat Davids, provided “a sense of equality and dignity, which they were denied in the society around them, for, irrespective of social standing, the final ritual and dignity afforded the dead was one of the strongholds that Islam had over Christianity at the Cape”.¹²⁴ Resistance was covert as Muslims suppressed information about the effects of the small-pox on those in their midst. The cost of their protest was measured in a high rate of death.

The uprising of the Muslim community around the closure of their cemeteries occurred within a context of increasing suspicion of Islam by the dominant classes. The English-language press by the 1880s had become a source of vitriolic slander against the Muslim community. Bickford-Smith identified “the strength of Malay ethnicity, and its apparent and real opposition to English values and hegemony”¹²⁵ as a key factor in the vilification of the community. Muslim ‘independence’ was perceived in their religious and entrepreneurial practice which accorded “some sense of self-ownership, of escape from master-class surveillance”.¹²⁶ The familiar racism of a prior era, according to Bickford-Smith, was reaffirmed as the British incorporated the racist discourse of a “previous Dutch, ex-master class” in its stereotyping of the Muslim community”.¹²⁷

Within this context the confiscation of bottles of holy water from pilgrims returning from Mecca not only expressed the sanitary anxieties of the medical authorities, but, that

¹²³ Achmat Davids, ‘My religion is superior to the Law’, cited in Yusuf da Costa and Achmat Davids (eds), *Pages from Cape Muslim History* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter, 1994), p. 65.

¹²⁴ Achmat Davids, ‘My religion is superior to the Law’, p. 65.

¹²⁵ Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1995), p 72.

¹²⁶ Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice*, p 73.

¹²⁷ Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice*, p 73.

action along with the impended removal of cemeteries beyond the town's municipal boundaries by central government heightened the fears of an already insecure community.¹²⁸ The leadership of the Muslim community reflected the elite aspirations of their Christian and other class peers. But because of their distance from the sites of political power, I suggest that their resistance was an expression also of the political desire of other subaltern groups who are never heard of except through the practices of the white and black elite who purported to speak for, or ignore, them.

The death and consequent burial of the child of Amaldien Rhode, a Woodstock fisherman on Sunday 17 January 1886, days after the 15 January closure of all of the city's cemeteries, activated massive Muslim defiance. On that day 3 000 Muslim mourners "walked along Sir Lowry Road, through Darling and Shortmarket Streets on their way to the Tanu Baru Cemetery at the top of Longmarket Street".¹²⁹ The Muslim-led response of the city's poor to the closure of the Somerset Road Burial Grounds was comprehensively analysed by Elizabeth van Heyningen in her doctoral thesis.¹³⁰ She points to Bickford-Smith's linkage of the revolt to the Carnival and its association with Emancipation Day of 1 December and the Cape tradition of *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* on 2 January.¹³¹ It would appear that the riots were not limited to the Muslim community as later on that same day a crowd "of the noisiest hobbledehoyes, mostly – almost to a lad, coloured" marched on

¹²⁸ Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice*, pp 73-4; Elizabeth B. van Heyningen, 'Public Health And Society in Cape Town 1880 – 1910', Ph. D dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1989, pp 167-8.

¹²⁹ Achmat Davids, *The history of the Tanu Baru* (Cape Town: The Committee for the Preservation of the Tanu Baru, 1985), pp 109-110.

¹³⁰ Elizabeth B. van Heyningen, 'Public Health And Society in Cape Town'.

¹³¹ Bickford-Smith cited in Elizabeth B. van Heyningen, 'Public Health And Society in Cape Town', p 211.

the DRC cemetery, forcing the gates open.¹³² The majority of Cape Town's Muslim community were poor and lived in neighbourhoods where they shared the harsh realities of urban life with the rest of the city's underclass. In the absence of organised bodies speaking directly to the needs of the poor and the working class of the city, Islam provided the inspirational focus to which the underside of the city could respond out of a shared experience of oppression.

The dismantling of the Somerset Road Burial Grounds - colonial European places of memory - had problematised established divisions based on shared class and racial interests. Reformed Christians and the Muslim community had been animated by their understandings of their different collective identities. The DRC was able to express its dissatisfaction by direct political representation unlike the Muslim community who had no channel for their grievances. Yet on the issue of the burial grounds they were united around a common purpose, albeit with essential differences. Muslims were concerned about the means of burial. They desired to continue to carry their dead as opposed to using vehicular means. The DRC stressed their legal custodianship of the vaults of prominent families. The battle lines between these two representative groups were not dissolved but were realigned to meet opposing needs.

The struggle associated with the Prestwich Burial Grounds emerged in similar issues of identity but in a manner which allowed for the consideration by all the citizens of Cape Town. In the following chapter I explore the impact of state sanctioned torture on the slave-descended community.

¹³² Elizabeth B. van Heyningen, 'Public Health And Society in Cape Town', p 205.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DISPLAY AND DISPLACEMENT OF THE COLONISED BODY

Slavery has been referred to as a pathology which “broke the world in half” and European merchants trading in human lives were severely affected by that which afforded them the status of gods, and as part of the consequence, “it made them crazy”.¹ Europe re-invented itself and forcibly imprinted its image on the New World at a tremendous costs to indigenous communities: “While a great deal of the unspeakable violence instrumental to this creation may have been officially forgotten”, the consequences cannot be ignored “one of which is that the unspeakable cannot be rendered forever inexpressible: the most persistent mode of forgetting is memory imperfectly deferred”.²

The uncovering of the graves at Prestwich Place registers the voicing of the stories of bodies displaced and exiled mainly from the Indian Ocean world inclusive of the area between the east coast of Africa and the Asian sub-continent.

This chapter attempts to register the unspeakable exerted on the colonised body. It does so by focussing on the nature of spectacle and surveillance under both Dutch and British regimes at the Cape. The story of the Prestwich Cemetery and that of the slaves who were buried there is at the heart of the history of the City of Cape Town. The topographic exile of the cemetery – that is its location outside the official walled-in cemeteries, its eventual layering over and subsequent uncovering largely for economic gain - is representative of

¹ Paul Gilroy, *Small Acts* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1993), p 178.

² Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: circum-Atlantic performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p 4.

the story of slavery itself. There is a continuum of displacement at work in the manner in which much of the markers of slavery have either been obliterated, or its associated past understated and its representation so decontextualised that it might as well not have existed at all. Marcus Wood's detailed reading of the visual images of slavery establishes an ignorance at work with regard to the *looking* aspect of slavery: "Slavery is now a subject generating an enormous number and variety of publications. Books on slavery are profligate in their deployment of imagery. Pictures are used on covers, and frequently in gatherings within the text, subordinate to a written text".³ His description is equally applicable to South Africa where in most cases "quoted imagery (that is to say, reproduced imagery)" is seldom subjected "to the sorts of close reading or technical and theoretical analysis which are applied to quotations from written sources."⁴

Until June 2003 Prestwich Place had been a clutter of old buildings bounded by Prestwich, West, Schiebe and Alfred Streets in Green Point. In the 1820s this property was part of land which had been sub-divided and sold. Houses and businesses "were built on top of the unmarked graves, now conveniently forgotten".⁵ At the end of May 2003, a developer, Ari Efstathiou, who had bought the property at an auction, embarked on the process of clearing the site.⁶ When human skeletal remains were uncovered in the first week of June 2003, the Archaeology Contracts Office (ACO) of the University of Cape

³ Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual representations of slavery in England and America 1780 – 1865* (New York: Routledge, 2000), p 6.

⁴ Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory*, p 6.

⁵ Antonia Malan, 'Why are we digging up our cemeteries? Historical background to burial grounds in Green Point, Cape Town', in Jacqui Friedling (ed), *Yes, dead men do tell tales!!!* (Cape Town: Savage Printing. The year is not indicated).

⁶ Private conversation with Ari Efstathiou, 14 October 2005.

Town (UCT) was contracted by the developer to follow through on the legal requirement⁷ after the South African Heritage resources Agency (SAHRA) had been informed of archaeological disinterment. The archaeologists of the ACO anticipated that the site would “yield over 1 000 skeletons” making it “the largest number of skeletons ever recovered from a single burial ground in South Africa”.⁸ Because of previous work done in the area,⁹ historical archaeologists were able to state that there “is a well-established body of previous historical research that has been carried out in the Green Point area”. Along with this information “there is a large collection of original and facsimile maps, photographs and drawing in the National Archives, National Library of SA, and in the historical map collection at the City Council”.¹⁰

Despite the acknowledged significance of the Prestwich Burial grounds the archives were silent about a site recognised as being part “of a large area of formal and informal burial grounds on the edge of colonial Cape Town, originating in pre-VOC and continuing until the present”.¹¹ Why this silence and why is the affected slave descended community so wonderously ignorant of this aspect of their heritage? The answer is considered in relation to the slave body and its place and eventual displacement from the colonised landscape, the effect of torture and the related matter of surveillance on memory through bureaucratic documentation.

⁷ These are stipulated in the *National Heritage Resources Act* (25 of 1999).

⁸ Antonia Malan, ‘Update, Prestwich Place: Exhumation of Accidentally Discovered Burial Ground. Public Consultation Process: 9 June to 9 August 2003’, (Prestwich Place Project Committee Collection, District Six Museum), p 4.

⁹ These include Cobern Street in 1994/5 and Marina residential (V&A Waterfront) in 2000, in Antonia Malan, ‘Update, Prestwich Place: Exhumation of Accidentally Discovered Burial Ground’, p 5.

¹⁰ Antonia Malan, ‘Update, Prestwich Place: Exhumation of Accidentally Discovered Burial Ground’, p 5.

¹¹ Antonia Malan, ‘Update, Prestwich Place: Exhumation of Accidentally Discovered Burial Ground’, p 5.

In a report to the South African Heritage and Resources Agency (SAHRA) Council meeting in August 2003 an observation was made that there were “indications that the site may be a burial ground for slaves or for victims of an outbreak of smallpox in the 1700s”.¹² This was a reference to the recorded bouts of smallpox at the Cape during this period, and subsequently. Numbered amongst the victims of the epidemics were first generation slaves. These men, women and children along with the Khoi who had lived in the region and those who arrived on these shores as immigrants, have been represented by officialdom according to their varying experiences of South Africa’s history. Their lives were characterised by surveillance. An item on the slaver’s cargo inventory or the ship’s passenger list recorded their subsidised passage from Europe. The *Pasbrief* was a letter allowing a slave permission to travel between one farm and another.

Each encounter of the slave body along the way of the various hierarchies of colonial incarceration was a distance away from its first beginnings. From the moment of capture slaves were catalogued into a system of knowledge which, for example, recorded origin in relation to port of departure and not by place of birth. On their arrival at the settlement at the Cape slaves were arbitrarily given “facetious and classical or biblical names”. Shell suggests that a “slave trader, after selling a particularly large lot of slaves from the quayside in Cape Town, and having exhausted his imagination and classical learning, reeled off, as their own, the names of the months, in order of the slaves’ appearance on

¹² SAHRA APMHO (Archaeology, Palaeontology, Meteorite and Heritage Object) Permit Committee’s Submission to SAHRA Council Meeting, ‘Prestwich Place Burial Ground, Green Point, Western Cape Province, 16-17 August 2003’, p 2.

the auction block”.¹³ They were registered, classified and stereotyped by the bureaucracies of colonialism, and later, by that of apartheid. They were inducted into a format of knowledge which reduced the essence of their identity to that of a serial number and documentary. Disruption, alienation from the familiar of culture and the gradual, albeit haphazard, erasure of self-awareness were the precursors to conformity to the colonial identity template for the subjugated.

Colonial domination was not conclusively accomplished by military prowess or an effective administration. Its rule was sustained by an irregular array of forces animated by a singular consciousness, that of European supremacy particularly apparent in the systemic use of terror. In his study in terror and healing Michael Taussig comments on how, in a relatively small period of time, subjugated Indians and Africans “became compliant to the reason of a small number of white Christians”.¹⁴ Central to this process was the use of terror, “which as well as being a physiological state is also a social one whose special features allow it to serve as the mediator *par excellence* of colonial hegemony: the space of death where the Indian, African, and white gave birth to a New world”.¹⁵ Michel Foucault identifies a period of transition in the history of repression as “the moment where it became understood that it was more efficient and profitable in terms of the economy of power to place people under surveillance than to subject them to some exemplary penalty”.¹⁶ He concludes that by the end of the eighteenth and the

¹³ Robert C.-H. Shell, *Children of Bondage: A social history of the slave society at the Cape of Good Hope, 1652 – 1838* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1997), p 241.

¹⁴ Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A study in terror and healing* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1987), p 5.

¹⁵ Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man*, p 5.

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972 – 77* (Pantheon Books, 1980), p 38.

beginning of the nineteenth century the sun was setting on “the gloomy festival of punishment”.¹⁷ The spectacle of punishment was replaced by “the certainty of being punished”. This Foucaultian moment ensures that “the apportioning of blame is redistributed”. The excessive and protracted violence meant that “in punishment-as-spectacle a confused horror spread from the scaffold; it enveloped both executioner and condemned”. The unpredictable consequence of systemic slaughter was that it “often turned the legal violence of the executioner into shame”.¹⁸ At the Cape the method of spectacle and punishment continued long after Europe had reverted to other means of punishment.

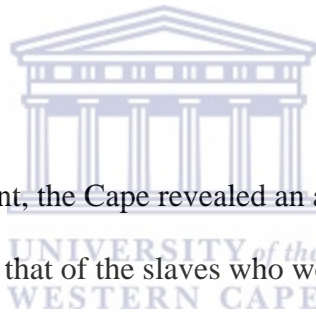
This has shaped a cultural memory and an inheritance which “can determine to a large extent the way in which an event is remembered and retold, and may even lead one to respond as though one remembered what one did not in fact experience”.¹⁹ Susan J. Brison retells the biblical narrative contained in the *Book of the Judges* 19: 26-28 about a Levite and his wife. The couple had received hospitality from an old man in a rural village along their route from Bethlehem. During the course of the evening some men of the village surrounded the house and demanded that the Levite surrender himself to their desire to sodomise him. The Levite flung his wife out of the house where she was raped “all night till the morning”. The Levite returned home with the body of his wife, which he cut into twelve pieces and then sent to the tribes of Israel as a message. From the mid-seventeenth century on at the Dutch-occupied Cape, the colonised body has served a

¹⁷ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment, the birth of the Prison* (London: Penguin Books, 1977), p 8.

¹⁸ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, p 9.

¹⁹ Susan J. Brison, ‘Trauma Narratives’ in Mieke Bal, Jonathan Crewe and Leo Spitzer (eds), *Acts of Memory: cultural recall in the present* (London: University Press of New England, 1999), p 47.

similar semiotic purpose, “used as someone else’s language”.²⁰ The power of the colonisers was literally inscribed on the bodies of slaves by the branding of runaway slaves; or by hanging from the gallows; or by the various ingenious means of public torture. The Slave Code regulated the visibility (and invisibility) of slaves by the stipulation of a curfew. The *pasbrief* determined their movement. The effects on slaves would have been similar to the experience of the survivor of trauma: “a shattering of assumptions, a severing of past, present, and future, a disruption of memory”.²¹ This was the start of a process of forced forgetting whereby the past was “sedimented in the body”.²² The sites in Cape Town associated with the cruel intimacy of the torture of the colonised body merits revisiting to ascertain how “habitual memory, the past...is amassed in the body”.²³



Since its inception as a settlement, the Cape revealed an ambiguous disposition to the bodies of the poor, especially to that of the slaves who were often of substantial economic worth to their owners. In 1831, Commissioner John Thomas Bigge noted, “slave property is incorporated more or less with inheritance, marriage portion or territorial acquisition, and may be said to constitute the chief value of each”.²⁴ Slave bodies served as collateral “and the sum of money sourced in this way amounted in the year 1823 to twelve million three hundred and seventy five thousand guilder and the number of slaves pledged to four thousand and eighty nine”.²⁵ Yet while the slave body was an item of fiscal value, the

²⁰ Susan J. Brison, *Trauma Narratives*, p 47.

²¹ Susan J. Brison, *Trauma Narratives*, p 47.

²² Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, p. 72.

²³ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, p. 72.

²⁴ J. T. Bigge cited in C. Pama, *Regency Cape Town* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1975), p. 48.

²⁵ J. T. Bigge cited in C. Pama, *Regency Cape Town*, p. 48.

management of a slave-based economy utilised the gruesome concept of punishment as a spectacle. Wood argues that “the kind of large scale institutions controlling and timetabling human behaviour which Foucault sees as typifying late-eighteenth-century post-Enlightenment and utilitarian arrangements of Western societies, are already in place within the economies of the slave plantations from the seventeenth century”.²⁶ This critique of Foucault is as applicable to the Cape as it was to the sugar plantations of Brazil and French San Domingo where “the slave codes, and the operations of large plantations, combined logic and efficiency with barbaric violence, and a display of power which was focussed upon the public torture of the body of the slave”.²⁷

The Tulbagh Code of 1754 reflects how the presence of slaves was monitored and regulated. For instance “Slaves were not to sing, whistle or make any other sound at night”. The purpose of the loud whistle was thought to “entice other slaves from their master’s homes”. In the seventeenth century slaves were “banned from public assemblies in groups of 3, 4 or more in the streets or anywhere else. VOC law enforcement officials had standing instructions to disperse any crowd of slaves of 3 or more [1696].²⁸ Slave women were prohibited from wearing “coloured silk or hoop skirts, fine lace, or any decoration on their hats, or earrings made of gems or imitation gems [1765]”. In 1819 Watchmen in Cape Town were required “not to allow any slaves to be in the streets during their watch, unless they be provided with a lighted lamp and Pass from their master or mistress”.²⁹

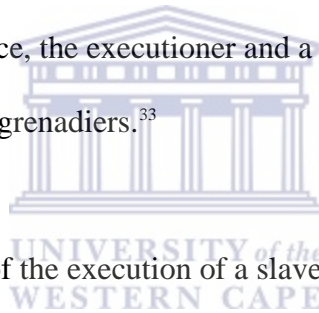
²⁶ Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory*, p 230.

²⁷ Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory*, p 230.

²⁸ Iziko Museums of Cape Town website: www.museums.org.za/iziko/slavery/slavery_work.html

²⁹ *Cape Almanac and Directory for 1819* (Cape Town: Government Printing Office), p 70.

The judicial due process in seventeenth and eighteenth century Cape Town stipulated “that no one shall be executed or condemned unless he personally confesses to the crime of which he is accused”.³⁰ The desired confession was facilitated by the stringent use of various means of torture which included the *strappado* – “a device for pulling up the victim to a certain height and then letting him fall so that his bones would be fractured”.³¹ On the day of execution the condemned persons were escorted from the dungeons in the Castle to the Governor’s residence. Here the Secretary to the Court of Justice would declare the sentence from the *Kat*, the balcony overlooking the Castle courtyard, after which the gathering would slowly proceed to the place of execution.³² The retinue consisted of a battalion of ninety-nine men – some armed with muskets others with pikes – members of the Court of Justice, the executioner and a military of guard consisting of a sergeant, a corporal and twelve grenadiers.³³



De Kock provides an example of the execution of a slave found guilty of murder. Stripped naked the man was tied to a cross at *Justitie Plaats*. Using red-hot pincers, the executioner tore bits of flesh off the slave’s body, after a while his right hand was hacked off and flung into his face. Then the man was quartered and the “mutilated portions of his body were finally dragged through the streets of the town to the outside place of

³⁰ C. 424, p 661, *Inkomende Brieven*, Batavia, 27 Nov. 1699 cited in Victor De Cock, *Those In Bondage: An account of the life of the slave at the Cape in the days of the Dutch East India Company* (Cape Town: Howard B. Timmins, 1950), p 146.

³¹ Victor De Cock, *Those In Bondage*, pp 146-7.

³² This was *Justitie Plaats* (Justice Square). This elevated piece of land was enclosed by a high wall with an entrance at the one end with steps leading up from street level onto the higher ground of the gallows. The *Plaats* was in the vicinity of the Leerdam Bastion of the Castle, on the corner of Keizersgracht (now Darling St) and Buitenkant Street.

³³ Victor De Cock, *Those In Bondage*. Public executions were abolished by an act of parliament in 1869, pp 163; 166.

execution”. When it was deemed that the onlookers were suitably edified the head of the man was placed atop a pole “while his hand was nailed to the bottom”.³⁴

Robert Ross details some of the systemic violence inflicted on slaves when they transgressed the penal code during the reign of the VOC:

Slaves convicted of theft were likely to be hanged.
Those who had murdered other slaves or Khoi Khoi would be broken on a wheel, with the ‘coup de grace’.
Killing a white would elicit the same punishment without the coup de grace, and in particularly violent cases tearing eight pieces of the unfortunate slave’s flesh away with red-hot pincers would precede this.
When the victim was the slave’s own master, even this was not enough.
The condemned would be impaled on a stake driven up his anus and left to die.³⁵

The punishment was in relation to the offence and the visual enactment of the sentence contained an inherent reference to the crime. The desired merit of analogous punishments “was that the spectacle of its application immediately evoked its cause - thereby giving it immediate legitimacy”. The lingering effect in popular consciousness determined “that the perpetration of the crime would also bring to mind the eventual punishment for it - intensifying the latter’s dissuasive power.”³⁶

Seventeenth century justice at the Cape abrogated nature itself to instruct the populace in the consequences of dissent by hanging individuals from the boughs of trees.³⁷ But the

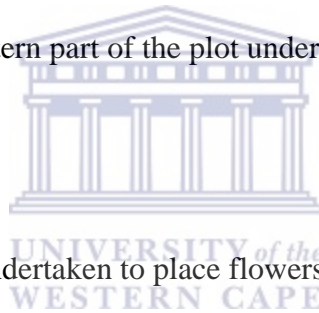
³⁴ Victor De Cock, *Those In Bondage*, p 177.

³⁵ Robert Ross, *Cape of Torments, slavery and resistance in South Africa* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p 2.

³⁶ Jacques-Alain Miller cited in ‘From the Empire of the Gaze to the Society of the Spectacle: Foucault and Debord’; Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: A denigration of vision in 20th century French thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p 382.

³⁷ President Nelson Mandela, in his inaugurate speech in May 1995, invoked the images of the jacaranda and mimosa trees as he called upon his audience to counter the divisive legacy of the past – and in this case

tree in what is today Spin Street was one where slaves were displayed for the interested buyer. Its place in history is marked by a round cement memorial which identified it as the site where slaves were once auctioned. The inscription in English and Afrikaans simply states that this was where the slave tree stood. The bilingual reference locates the memorial to the period of apartheid and explains its meagre presence on the traffic island in the road linking Plein Street with Adderley. It merely acknowledges that slavery was part of South Africa's history. There is nothing else to draw the attention of those walking by to what had happened at this site more than three hundred years ago. This is in contrast to the prominent placement of the statue of Jan Hendrik Hofmeyer that guards Church Square on the eastern side of Spin Street. Ironically, soldiers and sailors "as well as slaves were buried in the eastern part of the plot underneath what is now Church Square".³⁸



Every year since 1996 I have undertaken to place flowers at the site of the slave tree on 1 December, Emancipation Day. I tend only to remember after that day has passed. A journalist had interviewed me at the site about the December First Movement (DFM), a social project of the mid-1990s committed to re-imagining Cape Town's slave legacy. The caption to the sketch used in the article read: 'Place of weeping: An 1831 illustration shows slave trading at the Cape' (see Figure 7). The slaves on the auctioneers' block are in the centre of the illustration but they are almost invisible as they are coloured into the background of lush, savannah-like vegetation. Their bodies are embraced by nature

the hanging trees of colonial Cape Town – by acknowledging their inheritance of the land and its beauty as a basis for a shared citizenship.

³⁸ Glenda Cox, 'Cobern Street Burial Ground: Investigating the identity and life histories of the underclass of eighteenth century Cape Town', M.A. dissertation, the University of Cape Town, 1999, p 68.

which hides their facial features and the sketch renders visible only that which is of interest to potential buyers, the condition of their bodies. The bidders are attentive to the extolled beneficial characteristics of the persons on display.



Figure 7: The old slave tree
(*Mail & Guardian*, Nov. 29 to Dec. 5 1996)

The journalist, Mike Nicol, was particularly interested in my own memory of the slave tree.³⁹ I told him that my mother had pointed out the site to me when I was about nine years old. I learnt that bad things had happened to people at that place. I wonder now if she had said “people” or did she perhaps say “our people”. Maybe remembering that possible incident today I would have liked her to be so inclusive of our slave ancestors by claiming them with the possessive pronoun “our”. A further complication to my memory is that I am not so sure now that it was the slave tree we had passed when she commented on slavery. It is more likely that my mother could have had referred to the Castle as it was on the route we would often take on our way back from visiting family friends in District Six, to the railway station opposite the Grand Parade.

It is another tree that seems to be more remembered than the one that once shaded the nefarious activities of slave traders in Spin Street. A Swedish Botanist, Anders Sparrman, writing in 1772 refers to “two other gibbets erected within sight of the town, viz. one on each side of it”.⁴⁰ One was situated at the entrance to the harbour in the vicinity of Somerset Road and Ebenezer Road, the other beyond the Castle, near Salt River.⁴¹ Sparrman regarded these gallows as the largest that he had ever seen and which “was indeed of itself a sufficiently wide door to eternity”.⁴²

³⁹ Mike Nicol, ‘Shadows of the old slave tree’, in the *Mail & Guardian*, Nov. 29 to Dec. 5 1996, pp 14-15.

⁴⁰ Anders Sparrman, *A voyage to the Cape of Good Hope towards the Antarctic polar circle round the world and to the country of the Hottentots and the Caffres from the year 1772 – 1776*, (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1975), p. 49.

⁴¹ C. P. Thunberg, *Travels at the Cape of Good Hope, 1772 – 1775*, (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 1986), p. 153.

⁴² Anders Sparrman, *A voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, p. 86.

The SAHRA library contains a file dedicated to the slave tree in question with correspondence dating back to 1958. The gallows “near Salt River where slaves and Khoi were hung” is remembered in different ways. In the accounts of officialdom it is referred to as the ‘Treaty Tree’ in the vicinity of Spring Street and Albert Road in Woodstock, “an ancient tree of the milkwood type”. It is a long held view in certain quarters that it was under this tree “that there was signed the immediate armistice which preceded the capitulation of the Batavian garrison to the British expeditionary force on 10 January 1806 after the Battle of Blouberg”.⁴³ The text of the treaty locates the tree as being ‘near’ (in the English version) and ‘bij’ (in the Dutch) Fort Knokke. The ‘Treaty Tree’ was proclaimed a national monument in May 1967. The inscription on the bronze plaque records that the armistice between the British and the Dutch had been signed in the vicinity in 1806. However another source mentions “that the tree served as a gallows where offenders were executed”.⁴⁴ In 1958, a correspondent to the Historical Monuments Commission expressed his concern over the state of the Treaty Tree.⁴⁵ Apparently, during a break in their school’s programme “coloured children from a school nearby, (would) swarm through the wire fence surrounding the tree, climb up it, and attach ropes to make swings”. An ancient gallows became a playground prop for laughing children who hung from it for a more pleasant purpose. It was feared however that an already fragile tree “with the weight of children swinging on it, may collapse altogether”. Their Principal should be asked “to tell the children of the interesting historical significance of the tree,

⁴³ *Standard Encyclopaedia of South Africa*, Vol. 10, 1970 (A photocopy of page 624 is filed in the ‘Treaty Tree’ file, SAHRA Library, Harrington Str., Cape Town).

⁴⁴ N. Esterhuyse, J. van Breitenbach and H. Sohnge, Briza, *Remarkable trees of South Africa* (A photocopy of page 163 is filed in the ‘Treaty Tree’ file, SAHRA Library).

⁴⁵ R. E. Overbeek De Smidt, 10 April, 1958 (‘Treaty Tree’ file, SAHRA Library).

and to place it out of bounds”.⁴⁶ This complainant was aligned on the side of the account that evokes the memory of the Treaty Tree. Of course the tree under discussion might have been both the gallows and the place where the treaty between the two colonial powers had been signed.

In July 2004 on a visit to the site I met Alphonzo Smith, a twenty-three old living in the vicinity, and asked him what he knew of the tree. He told me that people had been hanged from its branches. He pointed to the blank spaces where the National Monuments Council (NMC) information crests had been affixed. But it was the oral tradition which he evoked as he referred to the ‘slave tree’. He spoke of how at night the ghosts of the slaves could be heard galloping by on horses, the bells of the carriages ringing in the dark. Alphonzo said that he had lived all of his life in Woodstock and that was the story that he had heard about the tree. Earlier in that year, over Sunday morning tea in St Bartholomew’s parish hall, a parishioner Cynthia Michaels, told me of the slave tree in Woodstock. I told her then that the slave tree was in Spin Street in Cape Town. Others in the company supported Mrs Michaels. What role did desire play in my personal recollection and why would Michaels remember the tree in Treaty Street and less so the one in Spin Street?

The story of Luigi Trastulli, an Italian steel worker, addresses this question in a study by Alessandra Portelli that explores the relationship between oral testimony and the written record. Trastulli had died as a result of a clash between workers and police in 1949 in the industrial town of Umbria in central Italy. The official police account of the event was at

⁴⁶ R. E. Overbeek De Smidt, 10 April, 1958.

variance with that of the organisers at the time. Also the comrades of the slain worker varied in their account on matters of timeframe and the sequence of events. This pointed to the apparent unreliability of oral testimony and memory in the face of facts. However an analysis of the incident points to the desire to extract value from an event, “actively and creatively generated by memory and imagination in an effort to make sense of crucial events and of history in general”.⁴⁷ Portelli notes that the killing of Trastulli on 17 March 1949 lasted no longer than thirty minutes. Yet from that point on (and thirty years later) “the memory of this brief episode has exerted a shaping influence on the town’s identity and culture”.⁴⁸ The story of Luigi Trastulli and that of the tree in Treaty Street demarcates the *experience* of it from *how* it is remembered. Walter Benjamin refers to “an experienced event” which is limited, and a “remembered event” which is unbounded because it serves as a “key to everything that happened before and after it”.⁴⁹ Pierre Nora contributes to this understanding by his sense of “true memory...which has taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body’s inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories, and memory transformed by its passage through history”.⁵⁰

Seventeenth century travellers approaching the Cape settlement along its eastern precincts would see, on the mountain side of the Castle, the gallows with its macabre adornments. In 1825 the Rev. Samuel Broadbent witnessed the exercise of punishment

⁴⁷ Alessandra Portelli, *The death of Luigi Trastulli and other stories, form and meaning in oral history*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 26.

⁴⁸ Alessandra Portelli, *The death of Luigi Trastulli*, p. 1.

⁴⁹ Walter Benjamin cited in *The death of Luigi Trastulli*, p 1.

⁵⁰ Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire’, in G. Fabre, R. O’Meally (eds), *History and Memory in African-American Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 5.

based on the Old Testament morality of retribution. A slave had been sentenced for threatening the life of his master and was already on the platform of the scaffold when “an official galloped to the spot, bringing a respite”. The dramatic news that he had been pardoned brought no discernable change and he “descended in a sullen mood, as if he thought strangling better than life.”⁵¹ Broadbent also witnessed the flogging of three criminals who had been suspended from an upright plank “to which they were drawn up by a cord on a pulley, with their breast to the board, and so high that only with their toes they could just touch the ground, to prevent them springing to and fro”.⁵² At this point they were beaten “with a bundle of elastic rods” up to the count of “forty stripes save one on the naked back; For the Dutch acted upon the Jewish law in that respect”.⁵³ The back of these persons were then branded as “another person took a red hot iron with large letters on the end, out of a fire, in a grate close by, and then applied the letters to the raw back, from which steam arose, and a slight hiss could be heard”.⁵⁴ The gallows were a cruel feature of colonial justice. Their coded manifestation was regulated in a manner that was both visible and enabling of the viewer to regard its practice as morally acceptable.

The colonial archive and the function of visuals

Early seafarers sailing into Table Bay would pass the Dutch fortifications such as the Rogge Baai, the Amsterdam and Chavoness strategically placed along the shoreline. This conglomerate of the spectacle and surveillance, the gallows, the cemeteries and the forts

⁵¹ Samuel Broadbent, *A Narrative of the first Introduction Of Christianity amongst the Rolong Tribe of Bechuanas, South Africa: With a brief summary of the subsequent history of the Wesleyan Mission of the same people* (London: Wesleyan Mission House, 1865), pp 152-3.

⁵² Samuel Broadbent, *A Narrative of the first Introduction Of Christianity*, pp 152-3.

⁵³ Samuel Broadbent, *A Narrative of the first Introduction Of Christianity*, pp 152-3.

⁵⁴ Samuel Broadbent, *A Narrative of the first Introduction Of Christianity*, pp 152-3.

were key to the colonial anxiety to maintain hold of its territorial acquisition. The logic of occupation was sustained by brutality but flawed in its application as the story of the Amsterdam Battery will demonstrate.

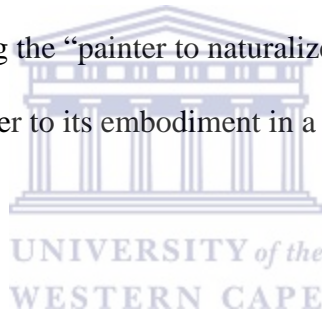
The Amsterdam Battery had been built in 1781 as part of the defence lines dotted along the Table Bay Coastline from Rogge Bay along to Mouille Point. A visitor to the Amsterdam Battery in 1910, J.H.R. de Smidt, noted that the biographer, Rudolph Siegfried Alleman, while pleased with “these fine batteries” was dismissive of the “so-called artillerymen”. He lamented that these combatants “would certainly not storm heaven or set the bay on fire”.⁵⁵ And they never did because the British initiated their seizure of the Cape in January 1806 by landing on the other side of the bay near Blaauwberg. De Smidt also referred to the anticipated arrival of the British. He had noticed the “the great thickness of the outer rampart, with its stone-fronted walls”, in contrast to the top with overgrown grass “on which a cow may at times be seen peacefully grazing”. This non-military scene was further complemented by the “grassy, crescent-shaped courtyard, the greater part of which is now taken up by sheds used for the storage of produce and looking singularly out of place amidst such old-time environs.”⁵⁶ At the top of the rampart visitors were rewarded with “a superb view of the Bay, town and mountain”. De Smidt conjures up an image of General Janssens who, during a inspection of the fortress, must have pondered “with sadness of heart over his indifferent chances of success in contending against the vastly superior forces of his

⁵⁵ Rudolph Siegfried Alleman quoted in J.H.R. de Smidt, ‘The Amsterdam Battery’, *The State*, February 1910 (Cape Town: South African National Library), p 258.

⁵⁶ ‘The Amsterdam Battery’, in *The State*, February 1910, pp. 259-260.

enemies”.⁵⁷ The writer concludes his musing “with a pang of regret for the passing of so striking a landmark”.⁵⁸

Visual images expressed colonial desire and was informed by the culture, the geography and the value system of the metropolis. Foucault observes that a painting could be regarded as a “discursive practice...not a pure vision that must be transcribed into the materiality of spaceIt is shot through...with the positivity of a knowledge (*savoir*).⁵⁹ David Bunn’s study on Thomas Pringle’s depiction of the Eastern Cape landscape of the 1820s and its association with settler capitalism, underscores Foucault’s point. The corollary of sight and surveillance disciplines the colonial subject while simultaneously, in its landscape format, allowing the “painter to naturalize a particular type of public subject without appearing to refer to its embodiment in a community of opinions, a nation, or a class”.⁶⁰



When Jan van Riebeeck left the Cape after a ten year stay the settlement consisted, *inter-alia*, of a fort, a garden, a church and a hospital “a nice hamlet with four streets...canals looking somewhat like real Heerengracht in Amsterdam”. The English artist Thomas Bowen, in his engraving *Prospect of the Cape of Good Hope*⁶¹ would add in the detail of the gibbet located on the beach below Lion’s Head (see Figure 8). The huts of the Khoi settlement were situated a distance away from the Castle, just above the gallows. The

⁵⁷ The Amsterdam Battery in *The State*, p. 261.

⁵⁸ The Amsterdam Battery in *The State*, p. 261.

⁵⁹ Michel Foucault, ‘The Archaeology of Knowledge’, in Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: A denigration of vision in 20th century French thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 407.

⁶⁰ David Bunn, ‘Our Wattled Cot’: Mercantile and Domestic Space in Thomas Pringle’s African Landscapes’, in WJT Mitchell (ed), *Landscape & Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago), p 141.

⁶¹ Thomas Bowen, ‘Prospect of the Cape of Good Hope’, Nicolaas Vergunst, *Hoerikwaggo: Images of Table Mountain* (Cape Town: South African National Gallery, 2000/01), p 44.

reassuring signifiers of order were in place and the civilizing forerunner of the present-day concept of development was in progress. Lengthwise the painting is divided into three equal sections, the sea and the sky framing the settlement. In the foreground is the water of the bay with a ship anchored in the vicinity of the ‘Landing Bridge’.

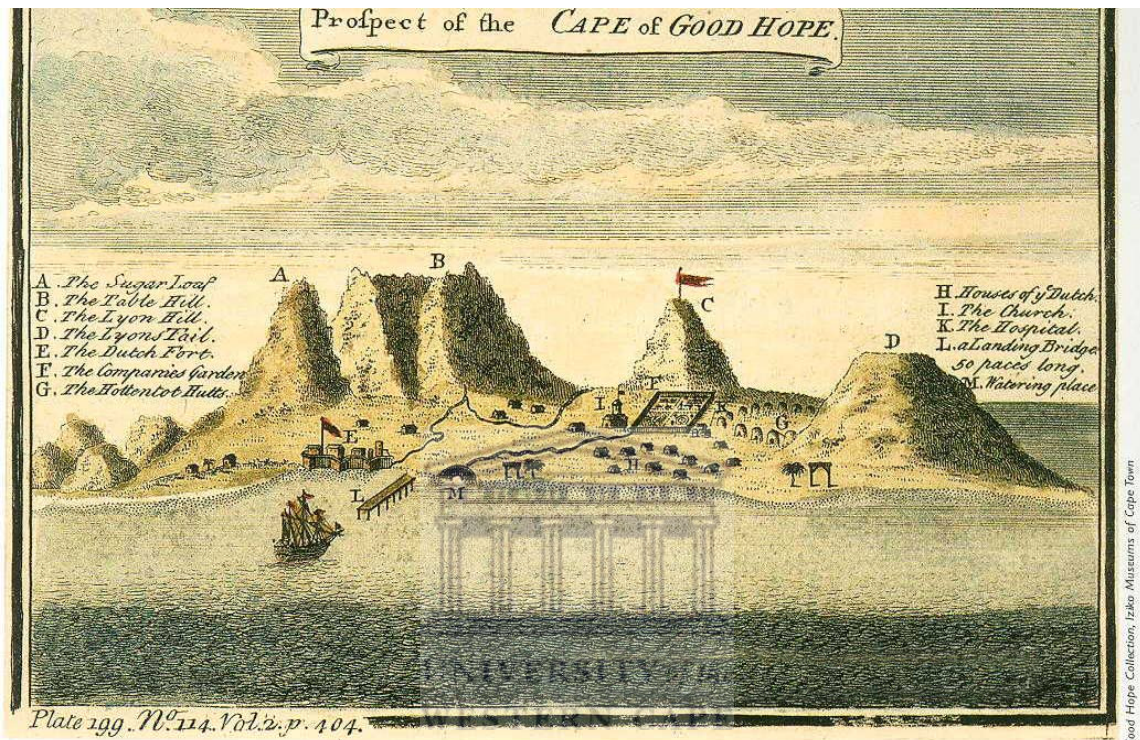



Figure 8: ‘Prospect of the Cape of Good Hope, an engraving by Thomas Bowen (Nicolaas Vergunst’s, *Hoerikwaggo: Images of Table Mountain*)

The waters of Table Bay are calm and partially shaded and frame the lower part of the painting. There are no people within a context where “rendering things visible is a necessary prerequisite to administrative control”.⁶² Bunn’s observations of the frontispiece of Francois Le Valliant’s *Travels into the interior parts of Africa, by way of the Cape of Good Hope*, is that it establishes “the ordering of items according to degrees of familiarity”.⁶³ When this perspective is applied to Bowen’s work one notes how ‘The

⁶² David Bunn, “Our Wattled Cot”, p. 128.

⁶³ David Bunn, “Our Wattled Cot”, p. 131.

Dutch Fort' is centred between the exaggerated heights of 'The Sugar Loaf' and 'The Table Hill' and the ship in the bay. The visual line between the sea and the land is dominated by the mountain and is linked by 'a Landing Bridge 50 paces long'. The ship provides a visual association between the settlement at the Cape and the port-town from which it sailed. The virtue of the civilizing standards of the distant metropolis is incarnated in the church in the centre of the painting, the 'Houses of the Dutch' and 'The Hospital'. The Khoi huts are on the edge of the settlement, partially in the shade and their outlines are not as clearly defined as in the case of the houses of the Dutch. Their seasonal migration identified them as indigenous birds of passage with limited claim to property and the land in the Table bay Valley.



In a sketch titled *The Great Barracks and Lion's Head on a stormy day, viewed from the Castle Barnard* presents a seemingly sympathetic view on slave life at the Cape (see Figure 9). Lion's Head, partially covered by billowing clouds, dominates the sketch. Its brooding beauty is in sharp contrast to the macabre detail of the gallows. The mountain was a sanctuary for those slaves who were able to escape, a promise of the possibility of freedom for those who wished to. In the foreground of Barnard's sketch are members of Cape Town's social underclass depicted in various forms of leisure or labour.

Closer to the gallows is the figure of a shackled slave, his back bent. Panel four of the same sketch presents the same scene but with more detail. Barnard's abhorrence is reserved for the manner in which the previous rulers of the Cape extracted confessions from the condemned. She was glad that "the sad evidence of what was practiced by the

Dutch government only remains on a high ground hard by the entrance to the Castle”.⁶⁴

This was a reference to *Justitie Plaats* (Justice Square). This gallows, and others served as a public reminder and a warning to all who passed by of the consequences of criminal behaviour.

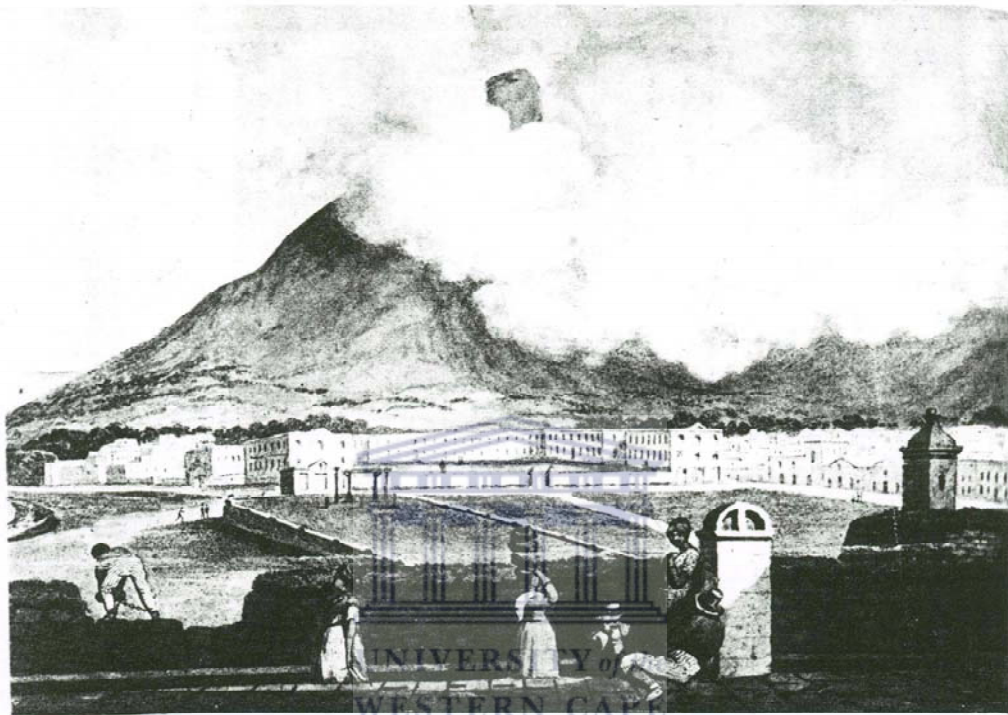


Figure 9: A sketch of Justice Square by Lady Anne Barnard
(Lady Anne Barnard's *South Africa A Century Ago*)

Barnard's drawing is all the more effective for its understated inclusion of everyday activities occurring in the vicinity of *Justitie Plaats*. The gallows are presented as an accepted feature of the urban landscape.

The diaries and travelogues of a variety of birds of passage at the Cape created, suggests Bunn, "a transitional landscape" which allows them "to "ramble," rove, or wander."⁶⁵ This

⁶⁴ Lady Anne Barnard, *South Africa A Century Ago: Letters written from the Cape of Good Hope, 1797-1801* (Cape Town: T. Maskew Miller, 1913), p. 79.

⁶⁵ David Bunn, "Our Wattled Cot", p. 139.

unrestricted mobility “is the ultimate indication of being at home in an environment; having free passage and moving, according to whim, with a naturalness like passage of breezes or rivers also masks the artificiality of the colonial presence”.⁶⁶ One of these visitors was a British businessman, Robert Semple who lived in Cape Town during the First British Occupation. In his description of a walk around Lion Hill, Semple refers to the Amsterdam battery “originally built with caserns beneath for firing two tier of cannon, though these are now bricked up or formed into windows to air the prison rooms below”.⁶⁷ The traces of the subjugated enemy are held up for the attention of the reader. Semple used the language of the sympathetic observer and incorporates the landscape into his commentary as he refers to the stones “which shines in the moon light, and seem not to have been set there by chance...these black and whiter stones are memorials of the dead – and of the neglected dead. Yonder is the slaves burying ground”.⁶⁸ Walking on, Semple notes that the “slaves’ burial ground is close by the road, and perfectly open; beside it, near to the town, are two burying places belonging to particular inhabitants, and walled around”.⁶⁹ These are the cemeteries of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Lutheran Church, and next to it “perfectly open” lies the Prestwich Cemetery. The reference to the fort of an oppressive Dutch past is refrained in the description of the slave burial ground. Semple presents himself as the embodiment of the new and enlightened colonial presence. The bodies of “the neglected dead” are used to mediate this positive view of the British imperial presence.

⁶⁶ David Bunn, “*Our Wattled Cot*”, p. 139.

⁶⁷ Frank R. Bradlow, *Robert Semple’s Walks & Sketches at the Cape of Good Hope* (Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1968), p 62.

⁶⁸ Frank R. Bradlow, *Robert Semple’s Walks & Sketches*, p. 62.

⁶⁹ Frank R. Bradlow, *Robert Semple’s Walks & Sketches*, p. 62.

Contemporary understanding of slavery and the related challenges

The story of South African slavery had been held in abeyance by the urgency of the struggle against apartheid. Where a popular slave awareness exists it is often in reference to the trans-Atlantic slave experience. An example of this is Van der Ross's book on Cape slavery which has on its cover a photograph of African slaves crowded on a slave ship.⁷⁰ The title, *Up from Slavery*, is from Booker T. Washington's autobiography by the same name.⁷¹ The Iziko Slave Lodge Auditorium was opened in December 2004. The image on the invitation was an artefact from the British anti-slavery movement, the *Description of a slave ship* (see Figure 10). It is the Liverpool slaver the *Brookes* depicted in a cross-section, front-view and side-view format.

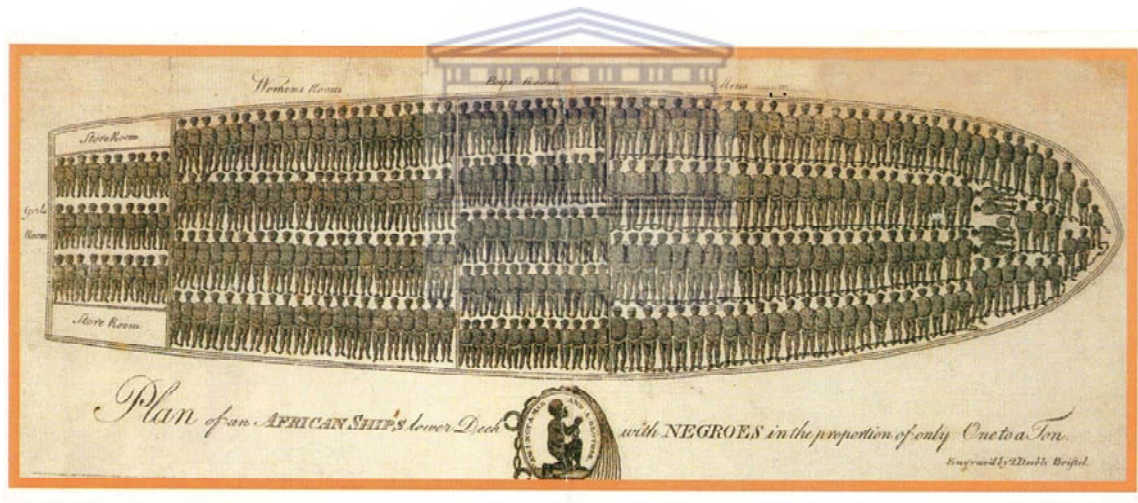


Figure 10: A plan of the lower deck of an African slave ship
(An Iziko Museum invitation to the opening of the Iziko Slave Lodge Auditorium, December 2004)

By borrowing images of the Middle Passage and inserting these into the Cape Slavery narrative the curators of the *Iziko* Slave Lodge had collapsed two different experiences of

⁷⁰ Richard E. van der Ross, *Up from Slavery: Slavery at the Cape, their origins, treatment and contribution* (Ampersand Press in association with the University of the Western Cape, 2005).

⁷¹ Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (New York: Bell's Publishers Co., Inc., 1965).

slavery into the one image and inevitably excised the lesser-known narrative. The *Description* had been produced in 1788 by the Plymouth Committee of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade (SEAST). The *Iziko* invitation showed a portion of the engraving, *Plan of an African Ship's Lower Deck with Negroes in the proportion of only One to a Ton*.

Wood argues that SEAST was a movement of abolitionists who had a “cultural agenda which dictated that slaves were to be visualised in a manner which emphasised their total passivity and prioritised their status as helpless victims”.⁷² Njabulo Ndebele speaks to a similar concern in a collection of essays which purports to “centre on how it happens that certain versions of the past get to be remembered, which memories are privileged, and what the *loci* are for the production of memory”.⁷³ Ndebele believes that certain ways of presenting black suffering during the apartheid era “may confirm the image of blacks as helpless victims, suffering complainants before whites who claim to understand their plight and declare themselves to be willing to help”.⁷⁴ A similar historical perspective is shared in relation to Western society’s understanding of the Middle Passage. These conclusions frame the understanding that the Middle Passage obliterated African culture and proved to have been the definitive experience of black humanity. The victims of slavery owe their destruction or related salvation to western injustice or charitable response, as the case may be. Wood contrasts this view of the Middle Passage with an insight obtained from the writings of Henry Louis Gates:

⁷² Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory*, p 19.

⁷³ Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds), ‘Introduction’ in *Negotiating the past: The making of memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), p 1.

⁷⁴ Njabulo Ndebele, ‘Memory, metaphor, and the triumph of narrative’, in Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (eds), *Negotiating the past*, p 27.

The notion that the Middle passage was so traumatic that it functioned to create in the African a *tabula rasa* of consciousness is as odd as it is a fiction, a fiction that has served many economic orders and their attendant ideologies. The full erasure of traces of culture as splendid, as ancient, and as shared by the slave traveller as the classic cultures of traditional West Africa, would have been extraordinary difficult.⁷⁵

The strongest proponents of the '*tabula rasa*' theory were the pro-slavery propagandists who drew on over three hundred years of writings on Africa which depicted its people as childlike heathens, sexually promiscuous and barbaric.⁷⁶ While the abolitionists set about to counter these, "the images they produced obey a series of symbolic and narrative codes which deny the slave cultural representation".⁷⁷

The *Iziko* invitation contained the two images which were central to the visual propaganda produced by SEAST. These were the *Description* and the abolitionists' seal which depicted a chained African male kneeling on one knee, his hands raised in supplication. This emblem bore the question, "Am I not a man and a brother?" These images were largely expressed in narrative form and were indicative of the testimonies of white observers reporting from wherever slavery was practiced, including the Cape. The descriptions served to evoke guilt and a sense of responsibility while presenting the slave in a manner which would abate any fear of a possible vengeful response in the event of such a person being freed. There is a double enslavement at work in form of the violence endemic to chattel incarceration and that of the reality of erasure: "The black as cultural absentee, the black as a blank page for white guilt to inscribe".⁷⁸ The image of the slaves

⁷⁵ H. L. Gates Jr., 'The Signifying Monkey', cited in Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory*, p 19.

⁷⁶ Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory*, p 20.

⁷⁷ Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory*, pp 21-22.

⁷⁸ Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory*, p 23.

in the *Description* arrayed in a linear order diminished and commodified their humanity. The supplicant image, in almost prayerful devotion, is that of the heathen worthy of all the redemptive possibilities of western civilization, sufficient unto being the white man's burden.

This chapter has investigated and argued that slavery and the related legal sanction of torture, punishment and execution were the accepted norms by which colonial hegemony was established at the Cape settlement. It is recognised that this excruciatingly effective means of enforcing the imperial will has had long-term consequences. In addition it is suggested that contemporary approaches to slavery in South Africa may inadvertently contribute to, if not the erasure of the slave story, then certainly to the muting of its voice.



CHAPTER THREE
GRAVE DISTURBANCES, REMOVALS
AND THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATION

This chapter is a bridging one marking the transition from the archival, the archaeological to that of the oral history and the biographical consideration of Chapter Four. It explores how the mobility of transient slave-descended communities unlocked a desire for what they never knew, namely a familiar place of belonging. The associated absence of a satisfactory contemporary mythology and a historically unfulfilled longing informed the imagination of a community. Their consciousness and identity were derived from “the social dynamics of remembrance and commemoration defined by a strong sense of the dangers involved in forgetting the location of origin and the tearful process of dispersal”.¹

The unnamed dead of Prestwich Place had mostly been buried there early in the eighteenth century under traumatic circumstances. They had often been buried outside the walls of the formal cemeteries. This meant that they did not benefit from the established emoluments of the deceased such as headstones and having their names recorded in a death registry. Their associates were bereft of the solace succoured by rites of remembrance and a site for mourning. This displacement of the colonised body was a constitutive moment in the experience of diaspora beyond its association with movement only. Be it that of the maroon communities of runaway slaves, the flight of the Khoi beyond the immediate precincts of colonial repression or the Group Area scattering of

¹ Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps. Race, Identity and Nationalism at the End of the Colour Line* (Allan Lane: Penguin Press, 2002), pp 123-124.

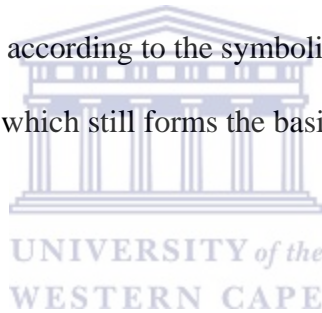
their descendants. The skeletal remains of the Prestwich dead were never exhumed. By the time “a force of hired and convict labour moved into Somerset Road with crowbars and sledgehammers”² under the auspices of the Disused Cemeteries Act of 1906, the Prestwich Cemetery had long since been built over. This was unlike the story of their neighbours in the rest of the Somerset Road necropolis whose remains had been taken to Maitland Cemetery since the closure of the cemeteries in 1886. These remains were reinterred in lots which had been allocated to the different mainline Christian denominations. The details related to their death such as the date of burial and the officiating minister were recorded in the burial registers at the cemetery and at the City of Cape Town’s Cemeteries Board in Wale Street, Cape Town.

The formation of communities from amongst the city’s social underclasses was nurtured by the stability which accompanied place-making. Over a period of time, particularly from the onset of the post-emancipation period after 1834, the underclasses had developed a mythology about themselves which informed a self-awareness transmitted by means of orality and stories created by belonging. In his commentary on Benedict Anderson’s celebrated concept of imagined communities, Partha Chatterjee, observed that Anderson had “demonstrated...that nations were not the determinate products of given sociological conditions such as language or race or religion; they had been, in Europe and everywhere else in the world, imagined into existence”.³

² R.R. Langham-Carter, ‘Cape Town’s first graveyards’, *CABO*, Vol. 2 No. 1, June 1973, pp 21-22.

³ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation And Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), p 4.

Writing about Berlin, Karen Till, refers to it – as one can of Cape Town – as “a place haunted with landscapes that simultaneously embody presences and absences, voids and ruins, intentional forgetting and painful remembering”.⁴ The word ‘haunted’ is appropriate to District One because towards the end of its existence in the 1970s the area was referred to as ‘Ghost Town’.⁵ As the Group Areas Act emptied the place of its people, the many vacant houses represented the set of a western movie, a genre familiar to those who frequented the bioscopes in the vicinity. Many of the communities associated with Cape Town express an acceptance of ghosts in the way they draw attention to their unseen presence. Ghosts are expected to visit their loved within a specific period after their death. They appear like Hamlet’s father as harbingers of the future. Dreams were interpreted according to the symbolism of the numbers of the Chinese-associated *fahfie* game which still forms the basis for playing the Lotto.



Contesting Prestwich

During September 2005, participants in an on-site walk in District Six recounted a visit they had made to Loader Street in *De Waterkant*.⁶ They had found a group of Germans living in the cottage which had been their home until the Group Areas Act forced them from the area in the 1960s. Something in the attitude of their German successors irritated one of the visitors and she enquired after the ghost which had haunted the cottage. When the living refer to the ghostly haunting of people and of places they do so either to scare

⁴ Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin: Memory, Politics, Place* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p 8.

⁵ Interview Stanford Krynaaw, 21 January 2003: “That area was nicknamed ‘Ghost Town’ because it was so reminiscent of the cowboy plays that was shown at that the time at the favourite movie house called the ‘West End’. Stanford Krynaaw is an ex-resident of District One. Transcribed copies of the interview are in the possession of the author.

⁶ Bonita Bennett, personal communication, 1 October 2005. Bonita Bennett is the Head of Collections, Research and Documentation Department at the District Six Museum, Cape Town.

or to intrigue the listener. In this instance it was to express knowledge in a manner in which the recipient was not able to contest. For the ex-resident the house in Loader Street opened a door to a pre-removal past of childhood memories. The ghost was an archival reference, an artefact, the awareness of which endorsed a claim of having lived in that haunted space.

Suggested evidence of who the unnamed dead of Prestwich Place might be came from an intriguing source, that of a psychic, Belinda Silbert. She had visited the site during November 2003 accompanied by a reporter from the Cape Argus.⁷ Silbert described the burial ground as a place of trauma where “many souls have not been able to move on”. Silbert claimed that the voices of some of the dead of Prestwich Place had called out to her. Her reconstruction of the burial ground showed that the interred represented a cross-section of the settlement’s population. For instance the northern end had been the resting place of Muslims who had been forced to convert to Christianity and were buried as neither. They wished to be buried as Muslims. Many of the informants were young, as in the case of Anna Februarie who had been 17 years old at the time of her death. Her unbaptised son had been buried with her. He was Klonkie, “the slavemaster’s son”. The child had not been baptised “because the slavemaster’s wife prevented it”. Anna’s fear that Klonkie could not enter heaven and her unwillingness to leave him, kept her earthbound. Another, the beautiful Hannah van Rinsburg, was a victim of small pox, whose “family discarded her when her face became eaten by the pox”.

⁷ Jeanne Viall, ‘City ghosts speak from the grave’, *Cape Argus*, November 11, 2003.

This familiar acknowledgment of the dead of Prestwich Place was at the first Public Consultation Meeting held on 29 July 2003. Zuleiga Worth, who had identified herself as a Muslim and as an ex-pupil of Prestwich Street Primary School, challenged the allegedly unknown nature of the burial ground: “We grew up with haunted places; we lived on haunted ground. We knew there were burial grounds there”.⁸ Her claim was later corroborated by William du Plooy, 82, who described how in the 1930s he and his fellow pupils were compelled to dig up graves at the Prestwich Burial Ground: “The principal forced us to go to the graveyard on Tuesdays and Thursdays during woodwork and needlework classes”.⁹ The boys from standards three to six had to work among the graves and dig up bricks and return the bones into the graves. The principal, “a hell of a bloody cruel chap”, used the bricks to build a house in Stellenbosch. Mr du Plooy also recalled that during the intervals the pupils would play in the graveyard which was opposite his old school, on the corners of Prestwich, Napier and Alfred roads.¹⁰ Du Plooy did not express an awareness of the history of the Prestwich Burial Ground other than that it was a spatial reference to a particularly traumatic and private childhood experience.

When the Prestwich Burial Grounds were uncovered during June 2003 a permit to exhume was sought from SAHRA. This was granted and four days later test excavations were carried out as stipulated by the Heritage Resources Act. On that same day, 9 June, the required Public Consultation notices were posted at the site as part of the 60-day notification period. Subsequent exhumation from 11 June onwards revealed the

⁸ Zuleiga Worth, at the first public meeting, 29 July 2003. (Personal notes of the author). This meeting was convened by the Cultural Sites & Resources Forum (CSRF) as part of the 60-day Public Consultation process required by SAHRA.

⁹ *Cape Argus*, Wednesday, October 29, 2003.

¹⁰ *Cape Argus*, Wednesday, October 29, 2003.

immensity of the find and on 22 June a meeting was convened at SAHRA “to discuss reassessment of scale of exhumation project”.¹¹

On 23 July the University of Cape Town (UCT) convened a media briefing at the site. This was followed by the first Public Meeting at St Stephens Church, Cape Town on Tuesday 29 July 2003. Many of the questions asked from the floor along with the contributions of two of the panellists contributed to the conceptual foundation on which the campaign for Prestwich Place came to be built. The meeting constituted part of the statutory 60-day Public Consultation required by SAHRA to inform the public of the process. At this meeting the public was invited “to contribute towards decisions about the final destination of the exhumed remains”.¹²

The record of the meeting showed that 104 people had attended in addition to a panel representative of all interested parties inclusive of members of academia and the heritage sector.¹³ In his presentation to the meeting, Lucien Le Grange, a prominent architect and heritage specialist, referred to Cape Town as “a palimpsest, a layered edifice with many layers of meaning and detail, both figuratively and literally”.¹⁴ He believed that the value of the contribution made by the slaves who had built Cape Town has not been fully acknowledged: “This accidental ‘discovery’ of burial sites is perhaps (an opportunity) for

¹¹ Antonia Malan, ‘Prestwich Place: Exhumation of Accidentally Discovered Burial Ground, Public Consultation Process, 9 June to 9 Aug. 2003’ (Collection of the Prestwich Place Project Committee), p 1.

¹² Cultural Sites & Resources Forum, ‘Exhumation of accidentally Discovered Burial Ground in Prestwich Street, Green Point, Cape Town. Public Meeting, 29 July 2003’ (Collection of the Prestwich Place Project Committee held in the District Six Museum), p 1.

¹³ Cultural Sites & Resources Forum, ‘Prestwich Place Public Consultation: Record of First Stakeholders Meeting, 29 July 2003’, (Collection of the Prestwich Place Project Committee), p 1.

¹⁴ Lucien le Grange, ‘First public meeting held at St Stephen’s Church, Riebeeck Square, Cape Town on 29 July 2003, Appendix’ (Collection of the Prestwich Place Project Committee).

us to ‘give slaves a voice’ Its significance transcends the academic interests of archaeologists and the building interests of developers”.¹⁵

Le Grange referred to the information distributed at the meeting noting that “it appears that decisions have already been made”. His caution “that hasty and expedient decisions” be avoided concurred with the sense shared by many at the meeting of the opportunity presented by Prestwich Place. He suggested that the issue could be used “as a catalyst by which to persuade heritage agencies into concerted action”. This required an attitude which was willing to be guided by public opinion. A historian from the University of the Western Cape (UWC), Ciraj Rassool, maintained that the point of departure for any discussion on memory, “was the grave, the site of interment of the body into the earth, and markings of such sites as the primary memorial”.¹⁶ Rassool observed “that all of the developments thus far, seemed to proceed from the premise that the main task was to remove all the remains from the site, and for the remains to have some other “final destination”.¹⁷ He questioned the purpose for this removal. Was it “to ensure their protection? For research?” Rassool noted that no consideration seemed to have been given to the option of leaving Prestwich Place undeveloped.

At the meeting, information was also provided on how the discovery of human skeletal remains at Prestwich Place affected the developer who was “faced with unforeseen work stoppage and serious financial costs”. The meeting was informed that it was “in everyone’s best interests that the Prestwich Place project proceed with minimal delay

¹⁵ Lucien le Grange, ‘First public meeting’.

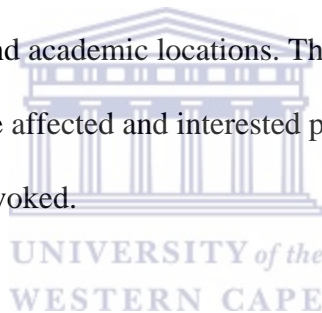
¹⁶ Ciraj Rassool, ‘First public meeting’.

¹⁷ Ciraj Rassool, ‘First public meeting’.

while maintaining maximum cultural heritage potential”.¹⁸ A draft proposal suggesting ways of memorialising the discovery was handed out at the meeting.¹⁹ It was recognised that the skeletons were literally the history of all the people of Cape Town who had left “no possessions or archives”. Prestwich Place was thus also perceived as the spatial location of a past or pasts literally layered beneath its surface. The histories encrypted in the bones would be revealed by “careful scientific examinations”.²⁰ A point of tension, articulated in relation to the physical representivity of the skeletal remains, emerged:

“We can find out what people looked like, how tall they were, what kinds of food they ate, what diseases they suffered from, how old they were when they died, and sometimes we can tell why they died”.²¹

The authors of the proposal had identified their concerns narrowly within the framework of their respective disciplines and academic locations. They also responded in a manner that was uninformed by how the affected and interested public would choose to respond to that which Prestwich Place evoked.



In the process of place making, memory, observes Karen Till, “is the self-reflexive act of contextualizing and continuously digging for the past through place”.²² At this point of the discovery the state heritage resources agency, SAHRA, and the UCT-based Cultural Sites and Resources Forum seemed more committed to the application of the letter of the law of the National Heritage Act, than be alerted by the tensions arising from the unfolding story of Prestwich Place, one which identified it as a marker of “absence and

¹⁸ Cultural Sites & Resources Forum, ‘Prestwich Place Exhumation Public Consultation Process’.

¹⁹ Special Focus Group (Archaeology & Physical Anthropology) of the Cultural Sites & Resources Forum, UCT, ‘A Proposal for the Future of the Prestwich Place Remains, 29 July 2003’ (Collection of the Prestwich Place Project Committee).

²⁰ ‘A Proposal for the Future of the Prestwich Place Remains, 29 July 2003’.

²¹ ‘A Proposal for the Future of the Prestwich Place Remains, 29 July 2003’.

²² Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin*, p 11.

loss, longing and desire”.²³ The idea presented in the draft proposal of using the skeletons as a source of knowledge so as to “build up a picture of a whole society” was premature.²⁴ The value of the uncovering could never only be about the bones. It served to unlock memories inherent to the “a process of continually remaking and re-memembering the past in the present rather than a process of discovering objective historical ‘facts’”.²⁵ The proposal identified “the need for a peaceful final resting place for the dead, and the legitimate concerns of historians and scientists who may wish to study the bones”.²⁶

A few months after the discovery at Prestwich Place, a committee of lay people - the ‘Hands Off Prestwich Place *ad hoc* Committee’ (HOPP) - identified themselves “as part of the descendant community of the people represented by the skeletal remains at the Prestwich Street Burial Ground”.²⁷ Their claim was in relation to the requirement of the *National Heritage Resources Act* that when an unknown grave is uncovered then work at such a site should stop immediately.²⁸ The Act also referred to “any person or community which is a direct descendant” who should be assisted with any “arrangement for the exhumation and re-internment of the contents of such a grave”.²⁹ HOPP associated the Prestwich Street Burial Ground with that of the fractured history of “a large section of Cape Town’s community”.³⁰ During 2004 HOPP was renamed the Prestwich Place Project Committee (PPPC) and along with the District Six Museum it recognised “that

²³ Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin*, p 11.

²⁴ ‘A Proposal for the Future of the Prestwich Place Remains’, 29 July 2003.

²⁵ Karen E. Till, *The New Berlin*, p 11.

²⁶ ‘A Proposal for the Future of the Prestwich Place Remains’, 29 July 2003.

²⁷ Hands Off Prestwich Street, *ad hoc* Committee, ‘Submission to SAHRA’S Appeal Committee, 23 October 2003’ (Collection of the Prestwich Place Project Committee), p 1.

²⁸ Act No. 25, 1999: National Heritage Resources Act, 1999. Republic of South Africa, Government Gazette, Vol. 406, Cape Town, 28 April 1999, paragraph (6), p 62.

²⁹ Act No. 25, 1999: National Heritage Resources Act, 1999), p 62.

³⁰ ‘Substantiation of Appeal, 15 October 2003’ by the Hands of Prestwich *ad hoc* Committee, p 1.

the community forcibly removed from the area through the Group Areas Act had a strong albeit often forgotten connection to the area and its environs”.³¹ Prestwich Street and its associated burial grounds was a feature of the colonial landscape. It was also part of old Cape Town and contemporary urban space. As such it brought “memories together in complex ways, in as much as people’s experiences of the urban landscape combine(d) their sense of place with the politics of space”.³²

The ‘imagined community’ of Prestwich Place is associated with the experience of place such as streets of Cape Town. These streets and those in the “older quarters of other South African cities”, recalls Le Grange, “had steep inclines from which you could see the mountain slopes or the harbour and fishing boats”. Then there were those which “were narrow and more intimate in scale running along the contours of the hills and mountain slopes on which these neighbourhoods were typically located”. Streets were the arena of the public, “often the place of work, of trading, of residence, the place of interacting, of promenading and the stage set cultural ceremonies”.³³ The residents of these streets, writes Le Grange, were testament to a “integrated form of urban existence” before apartheid’s removals.³⁴ This integration was a product of patterns of settlement and exclusion in Cape Town’s colonial past.

³¹ District Six Museum (D6M) and Prestwich Place Project Committee (PPPC), ‘Prestwich Street Memorial Project: Research proposal, November 2005’ (Collection of the Prestwich Place Project Committee).

³² Lucien le Grange, ‘District Six: Urban Place and Public Memory’, (Collection of the Prestwich Place Project Committee), p 1.

³³ Lucien le Grange, ‘District Six: Urban Place and Public Memory’, p 3.

³⁴ Lucien le Grange, ‘District Six: Urban Place and Public Memory’, p 4.

A Genealogy of Removals

Since 1795 the Cape had been part of a world economy dominated by imperial Britain.³⁵

The accrued benefits of being both a port city and the centre of government gave rise to a place of substantial demographic diversity. From 1875 on Cape Town's population consisted of "...merchants and civil servants...several thousand 'Prize Negroes', freed from slave ships after 1807...the voluntary arrival of workers from Europe, particularly from Britain".³⁶ Added to these numbers were "KhoiKhoi, freed slaves and...Africans from the Eastern Cape".³⁷ In Cape Town, like all other world cities, these individuals formed enclaves within a commonwealth of communities. Gradually their initial separate identities coalesced around the shared experiences of exclusion from colonial society.

Their circumstances had been foreshadowed in the fate of the Khoikhoi. The size of the Khoi settlements had been determined by "the availability of resources, the local patterns of seasonal mobility, and the need for defence against raiders".³⁸ The hut of the Khoikhoi could be seen as a metaphor for their lifestyle and that of other colonised groups at the Cape. It was "made of a frame of green branches planted into the ground and bent over and tied together". This structure "could be dismantled and re-erected in a new location if and when the need arose".³⁹ Eventually these huts were permanently removed from the Table Valley as the settlement of Europeans determined the terms of co-existence. The original inhabitants of the valley were driven to its social and physical periphery. They

³⁵ Nigel Worden and Clifton Crais (eds), *Breaking the chains: Slavery and its legacy in the nineteenth-century Cape Colony* (Johannesburg: Witwaters University Press, 1994), p 3.

³⁶ Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*, p 13.

³⁷ Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*, p 13.

³⁸ Alan Barnard, *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa*, p 160.

³⁹ Emile Boonzaaier, Penny Berens, Candy Malherbe, Andy Smith (eds), *The Cape Herders: A history of the Khoikhoi in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1996), pp 37-8.

became a ‘marginal’ people, a term, which for the purpose of this chapter, is best explained as when it is used in the context of “people on the periphery who are excluded from status and access to the important products of the society”. They have limited options “in making a living and gaining status. The degree to which they are marginalized depends on their ability to find status through their labour, and this, in turn, depends on the number of ‘surplus people’ available to do the work”.⁴⁰

The insignia of dispossessed, subjugated lives is that of being the flotsam of history, at the alpha of an alluring omega. They had been uprooted and driven off land on which they had gathered beneath recurring moons, brought as slaves onto the shores of Table Bay, un-grouped from those who shared their language and their village deities. This southerly point of Africa was a place of arrival for those who chose to or were compelled to settle here, carrying in their being the desire for new vistas and beginnings or the memories of dislocation. Their bodies had been transported to the foot of Table Mountain by slave ships, passenger boats, horse-and-cart, and they came on foot. From 1834 on the urban history of Cape Town had been mapped by the post-emancipation mobility of ex-slaves. Robert Ross’s essay, ‘Structure and culture in pre-industrial Cape Town’⁴¹ identifies the emergence of residential areas characterised by poverty “in which the ex-slaves exchanged the exploitation of their masters for that of their new landlord”.⁴²

⁴⁰ Emile Boonzaaier et al, *The Cape Herders*, p 32.

⁴¹ Robert Ross, ‘Structure and Culture in Pre-industrial Cape Town: A Survey of Ignorance and Knowledge’, in Wilmot G. James and Mary Simons (eds), *The Angry Divide: Social and Economic History of the Western Cape* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 1989), pp 40-6.

⁴² Robert Ross, ‘Structure and Culture in Pre-industrial Cape Town’, p 45.

Members of Cape Town's merchant class invested their slave compensation money in property and continued to exploit their former bonded labour albeit in the manner determined by a wage-based economy.⁴³ The slave-holding estates outside the city boundaries were sub-divided and redeveloped. As a result the slum areas associated with Cape Town's post-emancipation period extended from the narrow alley ways of the foreshore "beyond the castle to the east and towards Green Point in the west, into areas that had become known as Districts Six and One respectively".⁴⁴

The 1836 edition of the Cape Almanac contained a list of 'Free Blacks'.⁴⁵ Included in the directory were the names and addresses of Abdol Saboer, *alias* Achilles van Batavia, Malay schoolmaster, 4 Coffee Lane; Abraham van der Kaap, carpenter, 3 Chiappini Street; Adam of Mr G.H. Meyer, shoemaker, 28 Waterkant; Caroline van de Kaap, 14 Rose Street; Clara van de Kaap, 23 Waterkant. The directory of the following year prefaced the list for "Free Blacks" with an explanation of the difficulty of drawing up an accurate record of the free blacks in the town. This was apparently due to "their perpetual removals from one place to another, which generally takes place at the beginning or middle of every month". For this reason the compiler of the directory limited the representation of Free Blacks to "the principle personages of that community, upon reference to any one of whom the required parties may be easily found out."⁴⁶

⁴³ Robert Ross, 'Structure and Culture in Pre-industrial Cape Town', p 45. See also Lalou Meltzer's essay on the subject in Nigel Worden et al, *Breaking the chains*. In 1867 the Municipal Board of 1840 became a council and the city was divided into six electoral districts numbered one to six.

⁴⁴ Vivian Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*, p 14.

⁴⁵ *Cape Calendar and Directory for the Leap Year 1836*, pp 104-106.

⁴⁶ *Cape Calendar and Directory for the Year 1836*.

These intra-city movements were most likely the result of not being able to pay the rent and moving consequent to or in anticipation of eviction. But people also moved as their social conditions improved and as accommodation became available in different parts of the city.

District One and the Autobiographical Imagination

Amsterdam Street and the associated biography of my family are interlinked with the more distant history of Prestwich Street. I was born in the Cape Peninsula Maternity

Hospital in Constitution Street, District Six.

A few day days later I was taken home to my paternal grandparent's home at 6 Amsterdam

Street, off Ebenezer Road in the Dockland area. Our family left the area in the early

1960s and would eventually end up in

Factreton Estate. For a brief period we lived

in Sunflower Street in Bridgetown. I have no

recollection of our time in Bridgetown nor of

the circumstance under which the photograph



Figure 11: Sunflower Street, Bridgetown
(Private collection of author)

of myself standing next to the house, was taken (see Figure 11). “You were old

enough to kick the wall”, recalled my mother, “and say that you didn’t want to be there”.⁴⁷

The demarcation of personal space (and the accompanying social relations) is evident in the fence which separated the neighbour’s house from ours. Community relationships were being redefined by the over-the fence interaction with the immediate neighbours on either side of the semi-detached council dwelling. It was a spatial and related social movement away from the common gathering place, either at the corner shop or directly outside the door onto the pavement. It was different from District One where individual visibility was within community out on Amsterdam Street.

For a few years after having moved out of District One, my mother and I commuted by train on Sundays from Elsies River to St John’s Anglican Church on Waterkant Street near District One.⁴⁸ It was here during one of the services that I first had a sense of calling to the priesthood. I have not been conscious of this formative memory until recently, as I have been writing this thesis. Over these past three years I have experienced the redevelopment and remembering of an attachment to the area. I had read in the newspapers about the discovery of skeletal remains at Prestwich Street. It was within that context that I perhaps again began to remember a forgotten landscape. The repeated acts of systemic violence played out in the dislocation of communities from the built environment had reinforced the experience of removal. While it fostered amnesia by

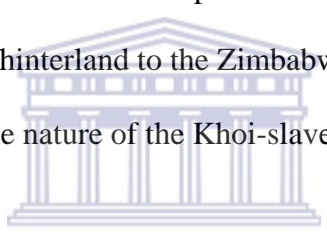
⁴⁷ Sarah Weeder, personal communication, 20 December, 2005 (Personal notes).

⁴⁸ From District One we moved to Bridgetown and then to Factreton. Here my parents were divorced and my mother along with my two brothers and I moved to Elsies River.

alienating the body from a spatial familiar, at the same time it also served as the means of sustaining memory.

The Zimbabwean writer, the late Yvonne Vera, describes the train that “comes to Bulawayo to Fort Victoria to Gwelo to Que Que to Gatooma to Salisbury”.⁴⁹ She writes that “the city is like the train....There is something strange in that even if one has not dreamt of any kind of success in coming here, getting back on the train in order to go back to an earlier safety feels like failure, like letting go”.⁵⁰

The South African inversion of that experience is that our return to the city is to that place of our primary disruption. The description of the experience of the newly arrived émigrés from the hinterland to the Zimbabwean cities of the 1940s suggests some similarity with the nature of the Khoi-slave-settler encounter at seventeenth century Cape:



The people have come from everywhere, and absorb and learn not only each other's secrets, but each other's enigmatic languages. Accent rubs against accent, word upon word, dialect upon dialect....They laugh when meaning collapses under the weight of words...but they know something precious has been discovered when a new sound is freed, and soothes the gaps between them.⁵¹

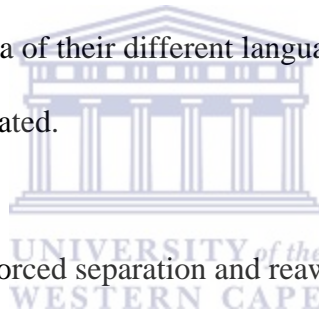
An apartheid-period train ride from Cape Town would take one through racially ascribed residential areas. When I was young enough to be led by my mother's hand the train ride was a blur of names...Woodstock... Salt River... to where we eventually alighted. But when I was old enough to be sent into the city on my own to Wellington's in Darling

⁴⁹ Yvonne Vera, *Butterfly Burning* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1998), p 43

⁵⁰ Yvonne Vera, *Butterfly Burning*, p 43.

⁵¹ Yvonne Vera, *Butterfly Burning*, p 43.

Street to buy mature cheddar for a macaroni and cheese dish, a critical alertness was required. When the train left Maitland Station and if the next stop was Ndabeni, it meant that I was on the wrong train and line. I could only relax if the next station was Mutual. But only for a little while, because as the train left Mutual, I would scan the name of the next station. Woltemade meant that Elsie's River (and home) was a few stations ride away. Langa meant that I was lost in terms of language, and course, destination. By my physical appearance it would be known that I was lost and vulnerable with my consignment of cheese. The next station would be Bonteheuwel where I would still would be lost, fearful of the township's notorious thug life but better equipped to take my chances. A train ride was a scopic lesson in how communities who had learnt to communicate beyond the enigma of their different languages and culture (as in Vera's description) were forcibly separated.



This violence of the state re-enforced separation and reawakened memories of first encounters, anxieties, fears and sense of strangeness. The city becomes that thing in the distance which St Augustine's *City of God* presents as a metaphor to express the desire for a place of well-being. The Iranian scholar, Kian Tajbakhsh, cites Augustine as an example of "a long tradition in philosophical and theological thought that has used the term as a metaphor for a space within which humans live and dwell together".⁵² This need for "a place of well-being" is well reflected in the perception of Cape Town in popular memory. Memories of a pre-removals city, although are recalled as a time of hardship, but where the familial structures and kinship networks functioned for the

⁵² Kian Tajbakhsh, 'Cities and Civilizations: Exploring The Problems Of Cultural Interaction From Both Angles', in *Peace Policy*, Vol. 7, 2002.

mutual benefit of those in need of support. I have never really lived in Amsterdam Street in the way that I can speak of having lived in Elsie's River where I grew up playing soccer till the streetlights came on and the paraffin lamps and candles were lit. I remember Amsterdam Street by that which had replaced it – the highway overhead, an example of what Paul Connerton refers to as traces: “Whether it is the bones buried in a Roman fortification, or a pile of stones that is all that remains of a Norman tower... what the historian deals with are traces: that is to say the marks, perceptible to the senses, which some phenomenon, in itself inaccessible, has left behind”.⁵³

My “attachments to place” most likely occurred a while after my birth in the early hours of a Wednesday morning in October of 1957.⁵⁴ Amongst the first sounds I would have heard would have been the call to prayer, the *Athan*, from the Muir Street Mosque, east of Hanover Street in District Six. My parents separated while we were still living in Factreton. After the divorce my mother, my brothers Mark, John and I moved to Elsie's River. In his reflection on the fatherhood of God, the Anglican theologian, Thomas Smail, suggests that we are “all shaped by our lacks as much as by our gifts, for none of us starts complete”.⁵⁵ But I did not arrive on those streets incomplete. On my being I bore the markers of inner-city Cape Town where my difference was in sync with the multiplicities of diversity into which I had been born. We lived in a part of Elsie's River where Balvenia Avenue crossed 40th Street creating the border between Indian classified Cravenby Estate and the coloured community of Malawian / Xhosa / Khoi / Griqua /

⁵³ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 9.

⁵⁴ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MS: MIT Press, 1995), p. 16.

⁵⁵ Thomas A. Smail, *The Forgotten Father* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1980), p. 11.

Indian and other descent. My appearance located me comfortably within the Indian community where I frequented the backyard and kitchen of the Chettys, our opposite neighbours. The sons of the Chetty household, Nadrajan and Progarsen were my immediate friends.⁵⁶ There was the familiar density of people. We lived in one of the rooms of the ‘Servants Quarters’ of Aunty Emmy, a coloured woman who had married Mr Singh, an Indian businessman from Durban. We shared a communal bathroom and toilet with four other families.

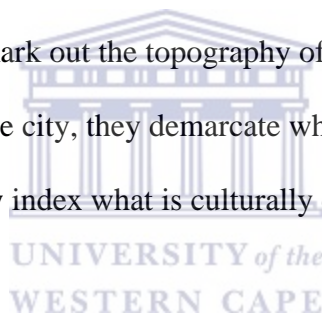
The winter drone of the Mouille Point foghorn was replaced by the call of the *muezzin* providing a continuity of memory between Cape Town and Elsie's River. The faint call from the Sixth Street Mosque of ‘Allahu Akbar’ (*Allah is the Greatest*) would drift into my sleep. The warmth from the body of my sibling next to me would draw me back into sleep as the assurance; ‘Ash-hadu anna ilaha illallah’ (*I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah*) consecrated the homes of all within ear-range. By the time the herald of the Creator informed us that ‘La ilaha illallah’ (*There is none worthy of worship except Allah*) I would be sound asleep. The busy hiss of the primus stove would eventually wake me.

Memory Conflicts

A Cape Town tourist brochure handed out during a *Topless Tour* of Cape Town promises a city, which is “a harmonious blend of architectural styles...between the high rise office

⁵⁶ There is a romantic veneer to my memory of Elsie's River and Cape Town. It was violent and District One was overcrowded. Death records show that many residents had died from respiratory related causes.

blocks, Edwardian and Victorian buildings”.⁵⁷ This introduction to the above street level depiction of the city’s history, illustrates how Cape Town’s colonial and apartheid legacy is encoded in the architecture of the built environment. Gargoyles glare from a past shared with Europe. The visual theme of the *Topless Tour* is continued in the Italian Renaissance style of the City Hall, St George’s Cathedral, the buttress stone, which was laid by the Duke of Cornwall (later King George V).⁵⁸ The appeal to public memory is further contained in the statues adorning the various public spaces in Cape Town: Cecil John Rhodes in the Gardens; Jan Smuts seated next to the Houses of Parliament and outside the Slave Lodge, the horse-backed General Louis Botha at the main entrance to Parliament; and the seaward facing Jan van Riebeeck at the bottom of Adderley Street. These monuments to history “mark out the topography of the corporate body of the city....By their positioning in the city, they demarcate where and when public remembering should occur, they index what is culturally central and what is not”.⁵⁹



The stories of Cape Town are expressed in different and often conflicting understanding of its history. The perspective of what Seremetakis refers to as the “dominant memory” has a longevity that dictates a seductive account of the past. Currently in the city it has monopolised the gaze of the public in the form of statues, period architecture and other forms of historical representation.⁶⁰ Seremetakis relates an account of her visit to Vienna where she was conscious of being viewed “by dozens of eyes of petrified angels and human figures of monumental proportions that convey the sense of everyday life as the

⁵⁷ ‘Cape Town and Cape Peninsula Tourist Attraction’, from www.sa-venues.com/wcattrac.htm.

⁵⁸ ‘Topless Tour’ of Cape Town, www.cape-town.net/html/citycen.htm, p. 2.

⁵⁹ C. Nadia Seremetakis, ‘The Other City of Silence: Disaster and the Petrified Bodies of History’ G. Bradstetter and H. Volkers (eds), *Re-Membering the Body* (Vienna: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 2000), p. 1.

⁶⁰ C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Other City of Silence*, p. 4.

theatre of the “unknown” dead”.⁶¹ The statues of the heroic dead, a public display of the collective memory, serves to sublimely arrest the attention (and recollection) of those persons passing. Within the context of “dominant memory” these monuments are not solely a marker of the past but its pedagogical place in public memory is to compel the viewer to remember.

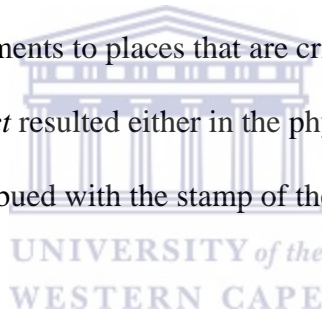
Events in post-communist Europe provide examples of how dominant memory can be undermined. With the fall of communist regimes the statues of Lenin and Stalin felt the sharp edge of popular anger and resentment. In Central and Eastern Europe monuments from the Soviet era were torn from their concrete or bronze pedestals. In Hungary the icons of the former communist regimes were removed from their plinths and transported to a site outside Buda, Statue Park Museum.⁶² The Statue Park Museum was the consequence of a national dialogue which accommodated the concerns of both those who were positive about communism as a way of life and those citizens who wished to be part of a process of, if not of destroying the memorabilia of the Soviet era, at least of having the experience of laughing at the gathering of these communist greats assembled far from the ordinary walks of life. Seremetakis refers to this as “their topographic exile” whereby “their lack of any claims on the truth of history was sealed”.⁶³ They are still remembered but no longer in the mandatory manner of the past. In Cape Town thus far, in the absence of such cathartic opportunities, the ongoing and accumulative effect of the protracted acts of physical and juridical violence of our colonial and apartheid pasts is

⁶¹ C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Other City of Silence*, p. 1

⁶² Statue Park Museum, http://www.szoborpark.hu/en/en_museum_gigantikus.php;
<http://csmonitor.com/cgi-bin/durableRedirect.pl?durable/1998/05/08/p8s.htm>.

⁶³ C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Other City of Silence*, p. 1.

lived out in the psyche and bodies of those South Africans who were at its receiving end. Seremetakis suggests that the power and the ingrained authority of “dominant memory” has its antithesis in “private memory (which can also be collective and shared)”.⁶⁴ It is an understanding of memory “as having material and sensory coordinates”.⁶⁵ Memory is then more than just a storehouse for facts, a database of names, places and the resting place of experience. Its value is in its association with the built environment and the spatial delineations of the city: “Memory can be found in the emotional connection to particular spaces that have their own biographies and carry biographies within them...memory is linked to sounds, aroma, and sights”.⁶⁶ Similarly Hayden’s concept of “a sense of space” is established by the human body, which, through the five senses, enables people to “make attachments to places that are critical to their well-being or distress”.⁶⁷ The *Group Areas Act* resulted either in the physical obliteration of buildings or the gentrification of areas imbued with the stamp of the class of the new owners.



The next chapter is framed by the following questions: How do people remember when the material in which their memory is embedded is destroyed or removed? How to restore place with its associated knowledge (sight, sound, smell, touch and taste) into the everyday of experience of people whose sense of place have been effected by spatial transformation? There are no conclusive answers except the possibilities indicated by the personal photographs of the interviewees in the next chapter.

⁶⁴ C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Other City of Silence*, p. 4.

⁶⁵ C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Other City of Silence*, p 4.

⁶⁶ C. Nadia Seremetakis, *The Other City of Silence*, p 4.

⁶⁷ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place*, p 16.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISTRICT ONE: PLACE OF A CONTINUED ABSENCE

This chapter refers in an exploratory manner to the Jewish Holocaust¹ to establish how related memory work can contribute to an understanding of slavery as evoked by the Prestwich Burial Ground. A scrutiny of Marianne Hirsch's methodology encourages the observation that the descendants of the Holocaust survivors and South Africa's slave-descended communities are the recipients of an "acute consciousness of a lack, of a continuous absence".² This part of the dissertation examines the insights and stories of ex-residents of District One by placing them alongside the photographs from the interviewees' personal collections. These are constituent elements of the Group Areas Diaspora which have remained largely unexplored. This is done as a deliberate strategy of reclaiming memory as a way of overcoming erasures and dispossession.

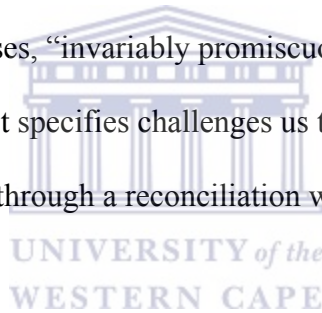
In this chapter we return, like Milosz Czeslaw, "who after many years / Returned to the city of his youth. There was no one left / Of those who once walked these streets. / And now they had nothing, except his eyes".³ The diasporic sojourn did not culminate in those first steps onto the geography bounded by the bay and the slopes of Signal Hill. The

¹ "The word *holocaust* originally derived from the [Greek](#) word *holokauston*, meaning "a completely (*holos*) burnt (*kaustos*) sacrificial offering", or "a burnt sacrifice offered to God". In Greek and Roman [pagan](#) rites, gods of the earth and underworld received dark animals, which were offered by night and burnt in full. Holocaust was later used to refer to a sacrifice Jews were required to make by the [Torah](#). But since the mid-[19th century](#), the word has been used by a large variety of authors to reference large catastrophes and massacres": *Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia* © 2001-2005 *Wikipedia contributors*.

² Alain Finkielkraut, 'The Imaginary Jew', cited in Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, narrative and postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p 244.

³ Milosz Czeslaw, *Facing the River* (Manchester: Carcanet Press Limited, 1995), p. 20.

return was complicated by a sense of the shift “connected with transforming the familiar unidirectional idea of diaspora as a form of catastrophic but simple dispersal that enjoys an identifiable and reversible ordinary moment - the site of trauma – into something far more complex”.⁴ What the returnee saw was framed by a sense of belonging not necessarily shared by the preceding generations who were defined by the point of origin and subsequently by their place and places in colonial society. The people who lived in District One from the days of the slave-holding estates above Somerset Road and the immigrant communities who moved into the dockland area from the beginning of the twentieth century did not swim in the same gene pool. Their diasporic identities were “creolised, syncretized, hybridised, and chronically impure cultural forms”.⁵ It was, as Paul Gilroy succinctly emphasises, “invariably promiscuous”, and as such “diaspora and the politics of commemoration it specifies challenges us to apprehend mutable forms that can redefine the idea of culture through a reconciliation with movement and complex variation”.⁶



The streets Prestwich and Amsterdam ran parallel to each other from Ebenezer Road on a straight course towards the city. Amsterdam Street ended in Alfred Street while Prestwich continued on across the Buitengracht into the foreshore section of the city. Between these two streets, beginning at the Ebenezer Road end were, firstly, the burial ground of the South African Missionary Society (SAMS), followed by one set aside for Mozambicans, or *Mozbiekers*, and lastly the Lutheran Burial Ground on the site on which

⁴ Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps. Race, Identity and nationalism at the end of the Colour line* (Allan Lane: Penguin Press, 2002), p 128.

⁵ Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps*, p 129.

⁶ Paul Gilroy, *Between Camps*, pp 129-130.

the Prestwich Street Primary School today stands exactly opposite the Prestwich Burial Ground. The association between the two streets was extended by development. The residences and commercial buildings of Amsterdam Street emerged as the graves of Prestwich Street disappeared beneath the warehouses and terraced-houses that accompanied the extension of the city beyond its Buitengracht precinct into the City of the Dead.

The story of Amsterdam Street began at the lower end of *Die Gestig* Burial Ground of the London Missionary Society (LMS). The directors of SAMS successfully petitioned the Governor for land for a cemetery. They calculated that the prospect of a dignified funeral would encourage slaves and Free Blacks to avail themselves to Christian teaching.⁷ In 1818 land was duly set aside for the burial of “heathens who had been instructed in the Christian faith”.⁸ An advert informing slave owners and Free Blacks that a burial ground was being prepared and would be available for their use, was placed in a local newspaper.⁹ The response from the identified constituency resulted in the increase of worship services. Included in the membership of the *Gestig* were persons by the surname of Stoltenkamp and so it was that in 1855 my paternal great-Grandmother, Amelia Magdalena Stoltenkamp, was baptised there.¹⁰ In 1897 a church-based commission approached the government for permission to exhume the graveyard so as to facilitate an alternate usage of the site.¹¹ Permission was granted in 1900 and during the following

⁷ Records of the Dutch Reformed Church, CA Vol. 1 1/6 (Cape Archives, Roeland Street, Cape Town).

⁸ Dawid P. Botha, *Die twee-eeue erfenis van die SA Sendinggestig* (LUS Uitgewers, 1999), p. 22.

⁹ Dawid P. Botha, *Die twee-eeue erfenis van die SA Sendinggestig*. This information was sourced from ‘*Notulen van 1 Okt. 1815 tot 20 Sept*’, in the *Notule van Direksie: 9 Jan. pp 90-96* (United Reformed Church Archives, Stellenbosch).

¹⁰ SA Gestig Marriage Register: 1835-1876 (United Reformed Church Archives, Stellenbosch).

¹¹ Records of the Dutch Reformed Church, CA Vol. 1 1/12a (Cape Archives, Roeland Street, Cape Town).

year the land was divided and portions A and B were transferred to persons trading as ‘Purcell, Yallop and Everet’.¹²

A photograph, which illustrates a function of the colonising camera, is one taken from Signal Hill during the first quarter of the twentieth century (see Figure 12). It projects “a South African colonial modernity”¹³ and its organised presence in Cape Town. This representation of the settled landscape is sectioned into three components. Firstly, the empty, grassy hill where the photographer had positioned himself and which frames the middle part which shows how succeeding histories are visually compounded. The 17th century Amsterdam Battery on the right edge of this section; the clusters of cypress trees marking the closed, but as yet undeveloped, burial grounds in the area, and the greater Dockland area of the 20th century with Sacred Heart Catholic Church in the middle.

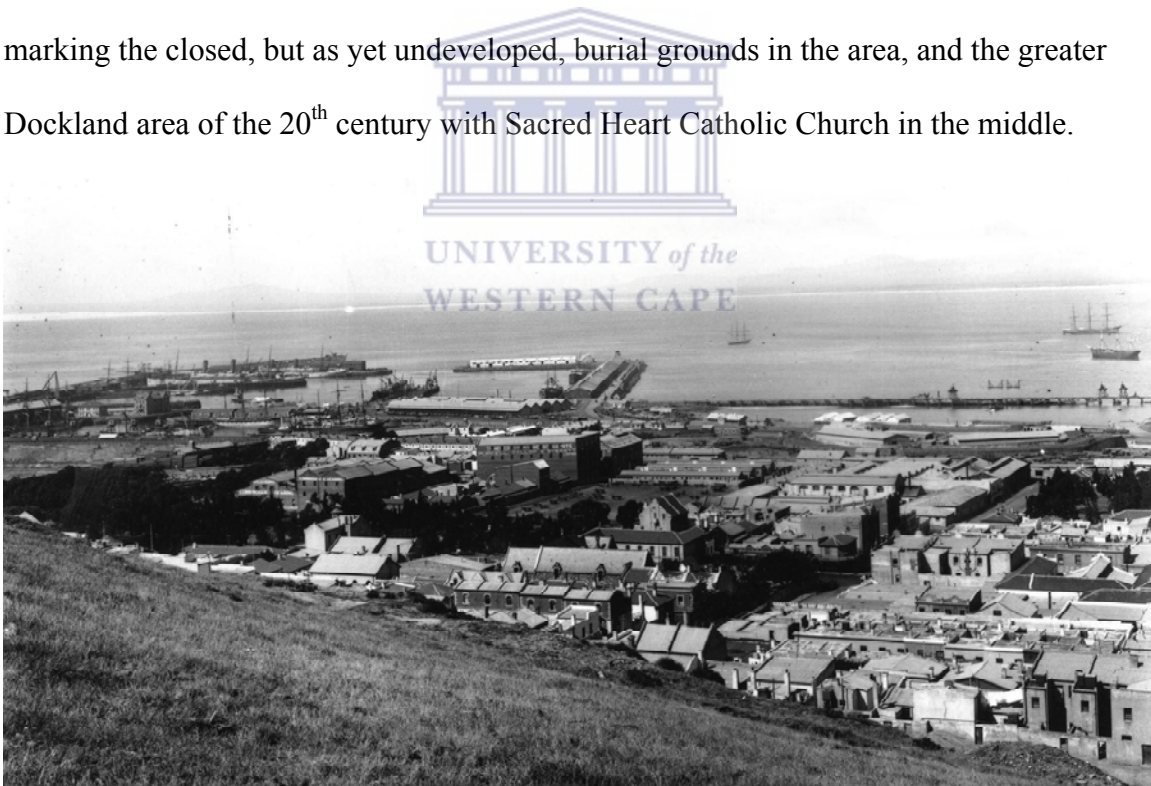
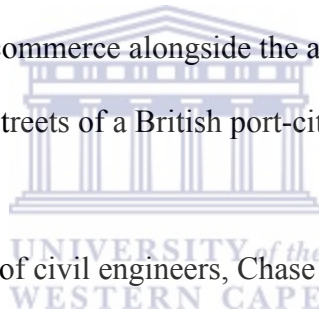


Figure 12: A view of District One from Signal Hill
(Cape Archives Collection: E 8144)

¹² Transfer Deed of Erf Number 150: Diagram No 1296/1901 (Office of the Surveyor General and Deeds Office, Plein Street, Cape Town).

¹³ Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Sylvester and Patricia Hayes (eds), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the making of Namibian History* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), p 3.

The harbour area with its boats is framed by the waters of Table Bay, the distant Tygerberg Hills and the white sky into which the scene fades. This photo is in contrast to the early seventeenth century and later paintings of the settlement. Some of these were the substance of the European fantasy of the Cape, its exaggerated landscape features an acknowledgment that the painter was using sources other than his own experience and eye for inspiration. The artists who were present at the scene usually reflected their visual perspective from the distance and surmised safety of the bay. The movement of the observer from the bay onto the land is a measure of how the relation to the colonised space had been altered. It had become the terrain of the familiar. The only indigenous feature in the photograph is the undeveloped land in the foreground. As for the rest of the image it is one of industry and commerce alongside the assuring presence of the church centred in the neat and orderly streets of a British port-city.



The insurance plans of the firm of civil engineers, Chase Goad Limited, allow for the narrowing of focus onto Amsterdam Street and details how it was a mixture of businesses and residential buildings (see Figure 13).¹⁴ In July 1898 Erf 165 “formerly portion A of lots 34 – 38 between Ebenezer and Amsterdam Streets” was transferred onto the name of W. Beatty.¹⁵ The GOAD plan shows that the residences in the street were seven double-storey dwellings numbered from 2 to 14 and these were bounded by Ebenezer Road, Amsterdam Street, Bennet and Fleming Streets. Next to the row of double-storey tenements in Amsterdam Street was the CTC coffee warehouse and the ‘Braces & Belts’ factory stood on the corner of Amsterdam and Bennet Streets. An archival photograph

¹⁴ The GOAD Insurance plans: 1895, 1925, 1925, 1937, 1949, 1956 (The South African National Library).

¹⁵ Transfer Deed for Erf No. 165, folio 165 (Office of the Surveyor General and Deeds Office).

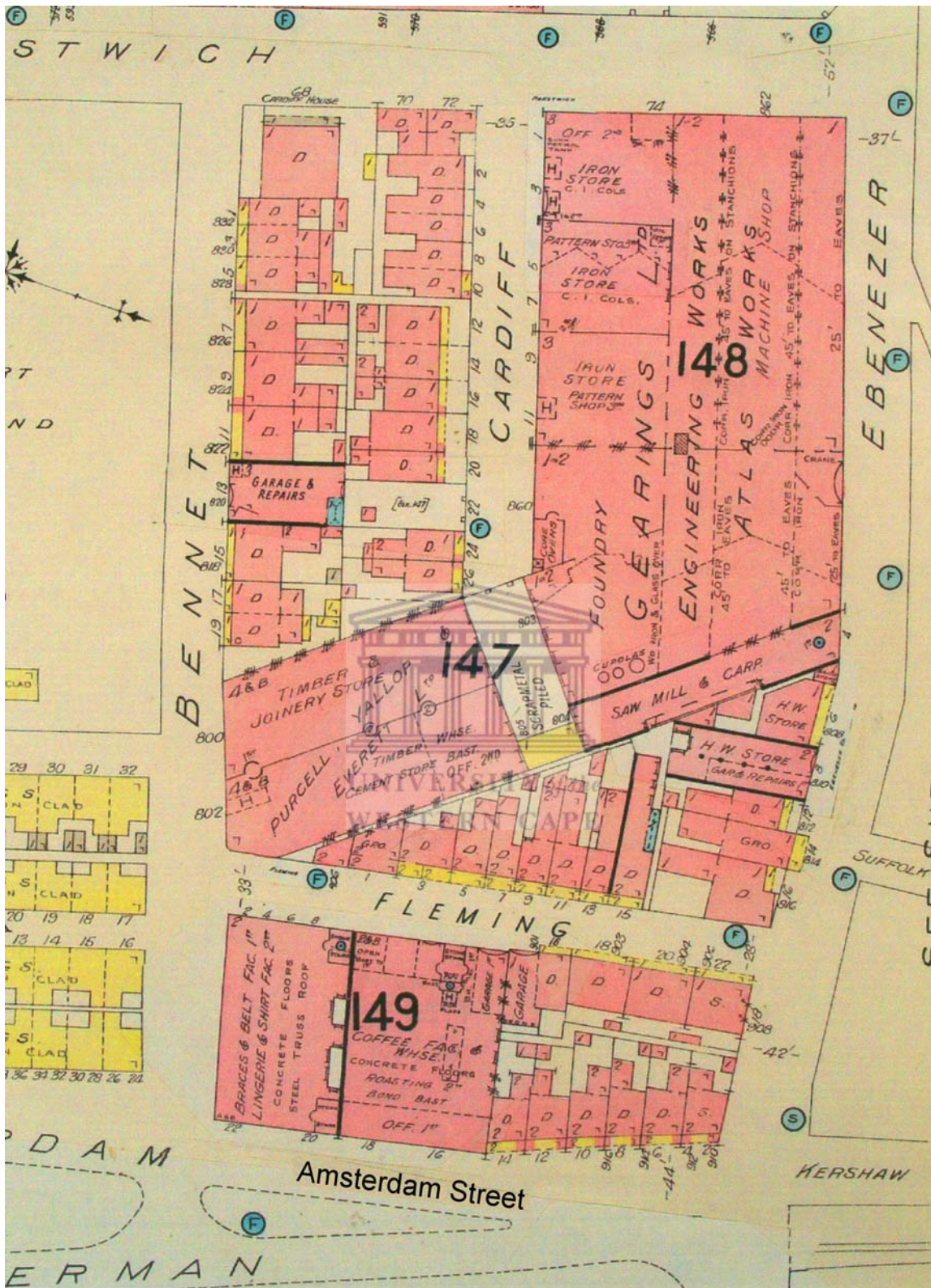


Figure 13: The GOAD Insurance plan of the buildings in Amsterdam Street and environs (National Library of South Africa Collection)

with the Ebenezer Road Station in the centre refers to the CTC Co. Ltd, an indication of how commercial interests would eventually evict the residents of Amsterdam Street, the soon-and-once-again-to-be-dispossessed frame the right hand-side of the photograph (see Figure 14).¹⁶



Figure 14: The platform of the Ebenezer Road Station
(Cape Archives Collection: E 8966)

On the next block were the houses of the coloured employees of the South African Railways and Harbour (SAR&H). These were made of galvanised iron and were referred to as the ‘tin pots’ behind which was the cart-stand lined by Prestwich Street. Adjacent to these houses were the SAR&H stables in Battery Street. Ruth Dudley, born in 1939, recalled a scene associated with the stables:

¹⁶ E 8966 (Cape Archives, Cape Town).

I can remember standing at my grandmother's, on her stoep in Ebenezer Road, and watching all the horses and carts coming out at dusk. I can hear the horses and I can see them coming up and they had these big trailers, with the cart part, but it wasn't small, it was a big flat-bed. They did all the carting, transporting for the docks with that horse and cart. And they would come up, up Ebenezer Road from the bottom, from the dock-gates and turn and round to where the stable were. I can hear them. They put the horses inside the stables and park these big wagons on this big square.¹⁷

Where Amsterdam and Alfred streets met was the J. Sedgwick & Co. Ltd Wine Stores.

Opposite was the Amsterdam Battery which spanned the length of three blocks. The white employees of SAR&H lived in double storey houses near the City Tramways

Depot adjacent to the customs entrance to the Duncan Docks. A resident who grew up in the area during the fifties provided this detail:

We had six grocery stores in this little area, one on the corner of Amsterdam Street owned by Jewish people. One on the corner of Ebenezer and Kershaw Street, owned by Portuguese, one directly opposite in Ebenezer Road owned by Muslims, and one in Fleming Street, owned by Muslims. We lived next door to a butcher (German) separated by their carport. We had the traffic Department, the City Council's goods yard, the Immigration Detention Centre, Irvin & Johnson's warehouse...and a nightclub called the Navigator's Den (whites only).¹⁸

The buildings in Amsterdam Street were expropriated in October 1967 by the City Council.¹⁹ With many residents rapidly moving out, the many empty dwellings in the area resembled a movie lot and "was nicknamed 'Ghost Town' because it was so reminiscent of the cowboy plays that was shown at that the time at the favourite movie house".²⁰ In the 1970s Amsterdam Street's row of double-storey dwellings was demolished. All for

¹⁷ Interview with Ruth Dudley, 26 November 2002. Ruth is an ex-resident of District One,

¹⁸ Brenda Vawda, e-mail correspondence, 16 August 1999. Brenda is an ex-resident of District One.


¹⁹ Cape Town City Council – Valuation Records – Property Record.

²⁰ Stanford Krynauw, interviewed 21 January 2003.

nothing, as people say, because the highway for which it had been removed continues to arch over where Amsterdam Street used to be and ends abruptly in the vicinity of Buitengracht Street, a concrete metaphor for the unfinished business of the city.

Photographs and the recasting of history

In most of the photographs I studied I became aware of how comfortable the photographed individuals appeared. I realised that the houses were small and lack of a camera flash no doubt compelled them to be photographed outside their homes. These out-of-house photographs speak to the nature of community living with its accoutrements of belonging and security.

The logo of the University of the Western Cape, featuring a classical building facade with columns and a pediment, with the text 'UNIVERSITY of the WESTERN CAPE' below it.

From the 1900s, a section of Amsterdam Street was a site where successive generations of the street's residents posed for informal family snapshots. This was the area adjacent to the Tramways Depot, parallel to Amsterdam Street and at the foot-end of Ebenezer Street. The Tramway walls formed the background to these photos. But this twentieth century leisure activity was prefaced by a distant and tragic reality.

During the pre-colonial days the greater Amsterdam area would have included a beach on which children from the nearby Khoi settlements may have played and where their fathers may have fished. In 1781 the VOC built the Amsterdam Battery, a visible acknowledgement that the Cape had progressed beyond its transitory status as a refreshment station with the sole purpose of supplying provisions for east-bound mercantile traffic. The permanent nature of the Dutch occupation became even more

evident with the establishment of the eighteenth century burial grounds beyond the western Buitengracht. By the nineteenth century the area was part of a large tract of increasingly developed land situated between the Amsterdam Battery and Gallows Hill. By that time it was incorporated into a comprehensive necropolis inclusive of the Somerset Road Cemeteries, the Wit Sands paupers burial ground and the multitude of graves buried beneath accumulated layers of development. On execution day Somerset Road became a *via dolorosa* along which the covered wagon carrying the condemned trundled onto the elevated crucifix above the bay.

Hirsch's notion of postmemory can be extended into that of absent or deferred memory of slave descendants.²¹ Is it possible that this site of memory in Amsterdam Street had served not only as a witness from the past but can function as a bridge between memory and post-memory for contemporary and future generations? A reading of the Amsterdam Street's community photographs presents the possibility for recasting the violent history that played itself out in the area from the seventeenth century onwards.

During the autumn of 1958 a thirty-something James Baldwin visited the south of the USA for the first time. As the plane flew "over the rust-red earth of Georgia" it eventually was low enough for him to see the tops of trees and he "could not suppress the thought that this earth had acquired its colour from the blood that had dripped down from these trees".²² He imagined a young black man "hanging from a tree, while white men

²¹Marianne Hirsch (ed), *The Familial Gaze* (London: University Press of New England, 1999), p 22.

²² James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket: Collected nonfiction 1948-1985* (New York: St Martin Press, 1985). p 184.

watched him and cut his sex from him with a knife”.²³ With this bloody tableau in mind Christian Walker observes that in

every African American family album there is an image that points to what James Baldwin has identified as the “Negro’s past of rope, fire, humiliation, castration and death.” It is in those aging and fading pictures of relatives, living and dead, that one finds the underlying nature of self-actualisation and its antecedent, the internalisation of oppression.²⁴

The subjects in my Amsterdam Street photographic collection reflect a similar ambivalence in the self as some exude an image of confidence and substantial self-esteem while others mirror the bleak interior of the subjugated soul. An ex-resident who had grown up in the area in the 1920s uses the name ‘Gallows Hill’ in reference to the Traffic Department unaware of its place in the city’s history:

You see when I was young Amsterdam Street, as I said, finished up at Ebenezer Road. In front of us was the old way where the train used to run. The Sea Point line. That was opposite. But on the other side of that was the City Tramways. Now that piece of ground was open ground that ran along right past Amsterdam Street, up around the back of West End School, and around the back of Gallows Hill. And between that area where the railway line ran and the houses was Amsterdam Street.²⁵

A resident who was a child in the forties remembers “that a huge oval ashveld connection (had been built) between Amsterdam and Port Roads which was great as we used this for our playground”.²⁶ It was this space which, in the 1920s my grandmother, Marie Evon, would oversee - from the *stoep* or her station on the balcony of 10 Amsterdam Street - her children and later her grandchildren playing in the vicinity as she once did. The only

²³ James Baldwin, *The Price of the Ticket*, p 184.

²⁴ Christian Walker, ‘Gazing Colored: A Family Album’, in *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photograph* (ed), Deborah Willis (New York: The New Press, 1994), p 66, cited in D. Willis, ‘A Search for Self’, in *The Familial Gaze* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), p 122.

²⁵ Interview with Lionel Mancini, 2 August 2003.

²⁶ Brenda Vawda: e-mail correspondence dated 16 August 1999.

girl in a family of seven boys, Marie had been born 18 October, 1886 to Louis Evon, a native of Reunion Island,²⁷ and Cape-born Sarah Edwards.²⁸ Louis and Sarah were married a year later on 17 July 1887. The street directory for 1902 registers Louis Evon as resident at 70 Hout Street between Buitengracht and Rose streets which meant that they had lived in the Bo-Kaap part of Hout Street.²⁹ By 1910 the Evon family were living at 10 Amsterdam Street.³⁰ Sometime between 1902 and 1903 the Evon family had moved into 2 Amsterdam Street above the corner shop owned “by a Jewish fellow by the name of Samuels”.³¹ In 1921 Marie Evon married John Henry Weeder and they started their married life in Marie’s family home in Amsterdam Street.



Brenda Vawda, my father’s God-child, remembers my grandmother as “an angel, a saint and we all loved her dearly”.³² The warmth of this description is at first glance suggested in the photo of my paternal grandmother sitting in a field of daisies with a little white child next to her on the ground (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: Marie Weeder
(Private collection of Denise Hannerval)

²⁷ The Estate of Louis Evon, No 24367, 29 October 1929 (Cape Archives, Cape Town).

²⁸ The Register of Baptism: 1883 – 1919 (Sacred Heart Catholic, Somerset Rd, Green Point).

²⁹ *Cape Times*, Cape Peninsula Directory for 1902.

³⁰ *Cape Times*, Cape Peninsula Directory for 1910.

³¹ Lionel Mancini, interviewed 2 August 2003.

³² Brenda Vawda, e-mail correspondence, 16 August 1999.

A more careful study shows that she is leaning towards and away from this unknown child who is the subject of the photograph. Even while my grandmother is physically centred in the scene her questioning frown and the distance – suggesting a lack of intimacy – between her body and the child not only illustrates her discomfort and anxiety but conceptually places her on the periphery. The image records my grandmother as an awkward Madonna uncertain, perhaps, if she was correctly representing the photographer's instructions in her pose. The child gestures to the photographer who most likely would have been male and possibly the child's parent. The triangular relationship between my grandmother, the confident child and the photographer is skewed towards the latter two, her deference to both is clear. When I cover the figure of my grandmother in the photo it affirms the independence of the child and when I do the same with the child's image it exposes the dependence of my grandmother on the inclusion of the child in the photograph (and her life) in that her left arm is obscured by the child's body rendering her without her left arm and hand. The photographer had further dismembered my grandmother as her feet are completely outside of the frame. She is not complete (ly) in the picture, so to speak. This photo pictures the legacy of internalised servitude as my grandmother's presence in the photograph is that of a supportive backdrop to keep the child from any harm should he/she lose balance and fall back.

This image of a Black Madonna and White Child is a prototype of the colonial past and the apartheid present/future in that it presents my grandmother not as a woman but an employee doing her duty. It is this apartheid Christ-child who "is set for the fall and

rising of so many”³³ whom her descendants will be required, in different ways but with the same intent, to serve.

A contrasting photograph of my grandmother is that of her on the *stoep* of her home in Amsterdam Street (see Figure 16).



Figure 16: On the stoep of 10 Amsterdam Street
(Private collection of Denise Hanerval)

Again she has been cut off at the knees, so to speak, and the photographer has framed her image with a *brookie*-lace shadow on the wall directly behind and the railings of the *stoep* on the one side and the wall of the apartment on the other. The position of the front-room’s window sill indicates that the photographer would have been directly in line with the front-door and would have had no space to move back so as to allow for a full length study of my grandmother. It also meant that she chose where to stand and that suggests

³³ Luke 2:34, ‘The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha, Revised Standard Version’, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

her ease with the photographer although the part of her face not obscured by the shadow remains somewhat inscrutable.



Figure 17: Ma Weeder's arm and John Henry Weeder
(Private collection of Denise Hanerval)

In another photo the missing arm reappears though this time minus her body as my grandmother, if she mirrored the pose of my grandfather, leans proprietarily on the *stoep* railings, at ease in her domain (see Figure 17). Other photos, aunty Betty Weeder posing with her Sunday-going-to-church clothes, my father holding his God-child in his arms, suggests that the *stoep* was a communal space from which one observed and participated in whatever occurred within eye-and ear-shot.

Included in my readings are photos of persons who I have only gotten to know during my interviews and so I function within the limitations of the outsider. On the other hand, because we have our own photographs we “thus know the habit of understanding them, we all are equipped to imagine ourselves into the snapshots of others, into the dreams and

the passions they conceal.³⁴ The first of these belong to Lionel Roy Mancini who had been born in 1926 at home in Amsterdam Street. A photograph that caught my eye in Lionel's collection was that of a family in late Victorian dress taken in the studio of a local Cape Town photographer (see Figure 18).



Figure 18: The Mancini family newly arrived from Italy
(Private collection of Neville Mancini)

It is of Lionel's father, Carlo Andrea Mancini, who along with his parents came to South Africa from Italy in 1903 "straight to 6 Amsterdam Street".³⁵ Lionel believed that his grandfather "seems to have been quite well off, because I know he used to be a sort of a lender of money to the fishermen, and he used to lend them money to go out fishing".³⁶

³⁴ Peter Galassi, "Pleasures and Terrors of Domestic Comforts", (New York: The Museum of Modern Art 1991), p 11 cited in Deborah Willis (ed), *A Search for Self, in The Familial Gaze* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), pp 117-119.

³⁵ Interview with Lionel Mancini, 2 August 2003.

³⁶ Interview with Lionel Mancini, 2 August 2003.

The markers of class in the photograph could have been supplied by the photographer: the walking stick in the father's hand; the miniature cane in Carlo's right hand; and, the parasol lightly held in the hands of his mother, her index finger unconsciously pointing towards her son. Young Carlo has the pampered look of a child that had never played barefoot and the formal elegance of his parents would have been constructed so as to assure those back home in Italy that all was well with their people in Africa.

The second photograph from the Mancini collection was taken in the 1940s (see Figure 19).



Figure 19: The Mancini family
(Private collection of Neville Mancini)

The photograph is taken outdoors with the wall of the Tramway Depot as background. Neville and Lionel Mancini are in the foreground of the photograph, their white school shirts are bright against that of the dark clothes worn by their parents who are standing behind them, and on either side stood their sister Francesca and their brother whose name was not mentioned in the interview

He had fought in World War II. A tall man, he wore an opened-neck shirt with the sleeve of the arm which was visible, rolled up. This casual appearance contrasted with that of his more formally dressed parents. He looks away from the camera and there is no physical contact between him and his mother or his younger brother Neville who are standing next to him in the photograph. A portion of his and Francesca's bodies are outside the frame and the sister seems to be looking at the brother and the suggested drama embodied in these persons does not seem to have affected the four persons who are in the centre of the photograph and the younger ones are wondrously oblivious of their elder siblings. The tension is offset by the cheerful dominance of an obviously delighted Lionel standing next to a more sedate Neville who was content to have his mothers' hands rest gently on his shoulders.

This maternal protectiveness is sustained by Francesca whose left hand in on Lionel's shoulder, the front part of her body in line with the camera lens, while her attention is on the elder brother. It is the women in the photograph who are physically associated with the younger boys while the elder males are detached from the moment. Carlo's demure

stance could be regarded as prescient as he died soon afterwards in April 1940.³⁷ The awareness of that registers this photograph with Sontag's notion of photography as "the inventory of mortality".³⁸ He would have been interned if he had been alive during the war:

Italy entered the war in May 1940, or was it June 1940. Somewhere around there. And they came around to intern my father because he was an Italian and he was never naturalized, but he was already dead. We had one hang of a job to convince them that he was dead. But then we had to prove to them that he was dead so I had to go and get the death certificate. I had to run up to the priest's house.³⁹

The photograph resonates with the ordinariness of life in District One as shared by others in the community such as Maria Mancini. She had arrived during the 1920s in Cape Town from the Island of Madeira as an eight-year old. She recalled how safe she had felt as a young woman in the area. One night on her way to church she passed a group of young men. One of them called out "Hey, you don't want to know me now!". And the other one says, "Hey, jy hou vir jou twilight, nê?".⁴⁰ The first generation residents of Amsterdam Street were largely from southern Europe. Virginia Abrahams typifies a sector of the community descendant from mainly immigrant males. She believed that her father, Fernancio Gonzalez, had left Portugal to escape the army. Her father, a chauffeur for Mr Johnson of *Irvine & Johnson*, would not allow his children to go to the local cinemas: "He used to tell us, 'you make the Jewish people rich'. We used to go *skelmpies*".⁴¹ Gadija Assiem was born in 1924. Her father was "Chinese, hundred

³⁷ Interview with Lionel Mancini, 2 August 2003.

³⁸ Susan Sontag, *On Photograph* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), p 70.

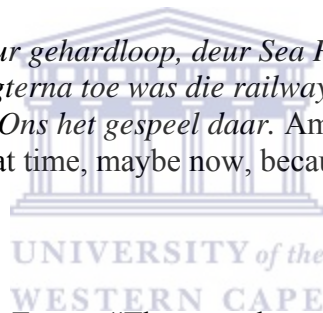
³⁹ Interview with Lionel Mancini, 2 August 2003.

⁴⁰ Interview with Maria Mancini, 11 August 2004.

⁴¹ Interview with Virginia Abrahams, 7 October 2002.

percent, from Canton”.⁴² He converted to Islam and was known as Ishmail Osman. Before his marriage he had worked in a laundry but later went to work for the Council. During this time he was involved in an accident: “That was the time of the trams. Something on the tram got hold of him. He hurt his head and then he stopped working for the Council”. He returned to “his business in Sea Point”.⁴³ Her family had lived at 2 Amsterdam Street where my grandmother’s family had been in the early 1900s. Her memory registers the movement of generations as she recalls her neighbours at the time: “Nancene was next to us, and the Weeders next to the Mancinis and then the Lawrences. And the Evanses too”. Outside number 2 were the traces of the old Sea Point Railway line:

*Daar het mos a trein deur gehardloop, deur Sea Point toe. Daar was railway lines gewees. Agterna toe was die railway lines nog altyd daar toe ons kinders gewees het. Ons het gespeel daar. Amsterdam Street was not really a busy street at that time, maybe now, because there has been many changes.*⁴⁴



Her memory is shared by Sylvia Evons: “They say the trains used to go through to Sea Point. But there was an old station and we used to play on it. Then later on they built the tramway”.⁴⁵ The Evons and the Mancini families had been neighbours, “then they moved out and then we moved to number 6, because it had electricity in the house”.⁴⁶ This was a feature of life at that time because not all the houses had electricity and as your families’ circumstances improved or their number increased they would move when a better house

⁴² Interview with Gadija Hassiem, 8 October 2002.

⁴³ Interview with Gadija Hassiem, 8 October 2002.

⁴⁴ Interview with Gadija Hassiem, 8 October 2002.

⁴⁵ Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

⁴⁶ Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

became available: “You know the war broke out. And then we moved into that house, then my Ma Weeder stayed downstairs and we stayed upstairs”.⁴⁷

Douglas Collison was born in December 1924 in the dock area and stayed there “until my father and myself was (sic) moved out through the Group Areas to a place called Bridgetown”.⁴⁸ His father was a shunter on the railway and “he came from England. My mother was a St Helena woman”.⁴⁹ As a seventeen year-old he signed on as a galley boy on a supply ship: “We were supplying ammunition to the people in North Africa”.⁵⁰ On his return to Cape Town he found that the area had changed during his absence:

Coming back after two and a half years and you look at certain parts of the place. It started to change because they took the Ebenezer Road station. And there was a road there. The train line was gone. There was no train from Cape Town station to Sea Point anymore. And the building of the Tramway was going up. And there was another place... Irvine and Johnson had a storage, a sort of ice place on that same plot where the Tramways was building, Irvine and Johnson had a sort of a storehouse where they kept ice in storage.⁵¹

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The changes were obvious in the home also: “There was a sort of rail with a little gate leading to each house. And the pathway in the front was all tarred”.⁵² The houses had electricity and his mother had told him “your dad bought a radio. And I looked and there was this big square thing standing on the table with a dial in the front. His Master’s Voice or something with dog on it”.⁵³ Collison noted that the roads were better lit and that

⁴⁷ Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

⁴⁸ Interview with Douglas Collison, November 2002.

⁴⁹ Interview with Douglas Collison, November 2002.

⁵⁰ Interview with Douglas Collison, November 2002.

⁵¹ Interview with Douglas Collison, November 2002.

⁵² Interview with Douglas Collison, November 2002.

⁵³ Interview with Douglas Collison, November 2002.

before a “bloke used to come around at about eight, nine o’clock at night and light the gas lamps. Gave a bit of light in the road but nothing much”.⁵⁴

But the racial demographics of the area were also beginning to change and were best evident in the fortunes of the Burnsdale Soccer Club. It had been founded by Carlo Mancini, the father of Lionel and Neville. Neville showed me a statue made of pewter of a football player with a ball at his feet (see Figure 20). It was mounted on a small marble block and the inscription on the attached brass plate showed that it had been presented to C. Mancini in 1924: “AFC Reserve League”. The statue had broken and had been poorly repaired.⁵⁵

The older brother, Lionel, recalled talking to his father about the club: “I remember him saying that they used to play on a field down opposite the old Queens Hotel in Dock Road. That’s down where the ICS building and eventually the Cape Town power station was built on that piece of ground down there”.⁵⁶ The members of the team were largely Italian and Portuguese fishermen.



Figure 20: Burnsdale Soccer Trophy
(Photographer: M.I. Weeder)

In the early 1930s Douglas Collison joined

Burnsdale: “You see it originally was an Italian team and they were called the Burnsdale.

⁵⁴ Interview with Douglas Collison, November 2002.

⁵⁵ Interview with Connie and Neville Mancini, 11 August 2004.

⁵⁶ Interview with Lionel Mancini, 2 August 2002.

So when they disbanded so we said to the Italians, no, no, we're going to take your name".⁵⁷ He had no idea why they disbanded the team: "Something happened amongst the Italians, man. They were always fighting on that field. I tell you, Saturday afternoons, people used to run for their lives on that field. They used to chase one another with knives".⁵⁸

Lionel and Joan Mancini moved out the area in 1953 and when they returned to visit the rest of the Mancini family he found that "they'd moved out to the southern suburbs, the Claremont area. They'd all moved out to the Claremont area, and my youngest sister she moved up into the Gardens when she got married".⁵⁹

A resident who eventually emigrated to Canada identifies her parents generation as "first-degree mixed or real half-caste"⁶⁰ and she struggled with the move from the "cosmopolitan area of Ebenezer Road and its environs" to the "suburbs of the Cape Flats and the distinct non-white areas".⁶¹ In Cape Town they had known "such a diverse set of people, Portuguese, Italians, French, Malaysians, Scots, Xhosa, and so on".⁶² She felt ill-prepared for the "ramifications of South African politics and apartheid – all we knew there was a Nationalist Party and a United Party and whatever went on in these parties we were not privy to any information, nor were we given the choice of finding out either". She alludes to the elections that brought the National Party into power: "We listened and we shut up –

⁵⁷ Interview with Douglas Collison, 25 November 2002.

⁵⁸ Interview with Lionel Mancini, 2 August 2002.

⁵⁹ Interview with Lionel Mancini, 2 August 2002.

⁶⁰ Brenda Vawda, e-mail correspondence, 16 August 1999.

⁶¹ Brenda Vawda, e-mail correspondence, 16 August 1999.

⁶² Brenda Vawda, e-mail correspondence, 16 August 1999.

it was white people's talk and we didn't really understand their excitement and listening to the radio and what polling and counting the votes were all about".⁶³ It was for these reasons, she concludes, "why so many good people of our mixed heritage sought the solace of other countries shores to make our home".⁶⁴

Stanford Krynauw was born in 1940 and represents a generational perspective indicative of how the area had changed after the World War II years. He remembers that most "of the inhabitants of that particular area fed the docks and were their staff: the Stevedores, the trawler men, the fishermen".⁶⁵ He speaks in clear terms about race: "There was one man in particular who stood out. He was the only the only black man being a deep sea diver. Mr Liddle. He lived in the area".⁶⁶ The dockland area "comprised a set of houses all attached to each other of corrugated iron. That was the Dock Cottages. Then you get the area adjacent to that – that was the Fleming Street, the Amsterdam Street, Ebenezer Road, Suffolk Street – that area was the area in which we lived".⁶⁷

He is one of two persons who referred to the Carnival. "The coons: there was this rivalry between *Bo-Kaap* and *Onder-Kaap*. Now the team that emanated from the Ghost Town area was The Liberties. On the Chiappini Street, Rose Street side you had a team there called The Hollywoods. The Liberties was organised by a guy called Bug Benny".⁶⁸

⁶³ Brenda Vawda, e-mail correspondence, 16 August 1999.

⁶⁴ Brenda Vawda, e-mail correspondence, 16 August 1999.

⁶⁵ Interview with Stanford Krynauw, 21 January 2003.

⁶⁶ Interview with Stanford Krynauw, 21 January 2003.

⁶⁷ Interview with Stanford Krynauw, 21 January 2003.

⁶⁸ Interview with Stanford Krynauw, 21 January 2003.

The Somerset Road Cemeteries had for decades been within walking distance of the communities living in the surrounding areas. By the time the cemeteries were closed towards the end of the nineteenth century, the practice of accompanying the coffin on foot, continued. Except that the mourners could now only walk as far as the Monument Station: Lionel Mancini had recalled the ritual which accompanied death in District One, in this instance that of his father and his grandmother:

What they did is they washed him and shaved him and got him all ready to put the shroud on, whatever he was getting buried in, and sort of prepared him before the undertaker got there. That was a normal thing for them to do amongst us. The community. And then you got buried from the house. They put the coffin into a special carriage on number one platform of Cape Town Station. They put the coffin on trestles in a special carriage, and they all went out this train to Woltemade's number one first gate, then they took the coffin out and put it on a carriage, and then they took the coffin down to the... I don't remember my father's but I remember my grandmother. My grandmother went from the church to the station with a glass coach. It was glass sided, horse drawn, black horses in the front with big plumes on their head. You could see the coffin. It was this side of the carriage. But I quite distinctly remember this cart with the high side and the glass oval and the two black horses in front with the bloke sitting on.⁶⁹

Stanford Krynauw adds his generational view on what he remembers as *“die loep lyke”*:

“Then all the family and friends used to come and they first worshipped at home and then the coffin is placed on a horse-drawn carriage and everybody in a orderly fashion would walk right down Portswood Road to Cape Town station and then at Cape Town station everybody would get into the train and go to Woltemade”.⁷⁰

It was a practice that formed became part of childhood memories associated with a trip out of the city: “Then we used to get off at Woltemade number three and then we used to

⁶⁹ Interview with Lionel Mancini, 2 August 2003.

⁷⁰ Interview with Stanford Krynauw, 21 January 2003.

walk along the train line”.⁷¹ The solemnity of the occasion was lessened by the youthful capacity to extract pleasure and perhaps envalue the rites for the dead with their own sense of life: “If we were naughty then we take some of the flowers off the other graves and put it onto our grave. We used to do all that. You know children being children!”.⁷²

Photographs and the unconstructed past

For a long time my only link with District One was a small photograph taken on my parents’ wedding day in September 1956. Since the age of eighteen I have accumulated a number of photographs sourced from amongst my mother’s personal collection. They had been kept in plastic bags in her wardrobe. I cannot recall seeing photographs framed and hanging on the walls of the places we had lived in over a period of time. Perhaps it was because we were always on our way to somewhere else. The photographs in the plastic bags - the latter in itself a measure of impermanency - were never unpacked and sorted along linear themes marking occasions and events and displayed in albums. If it is as Marianne Hirsch believes that the camera is “the primary means by which family memory is perpetuated, by which the family story is told”, then the absence of an album tells a particular story which, in the case of my family, was that of rupture.⁷³ The wedding photographs speak to the promise of the nuclear family which divorce undermines. Such photographs, “the product of other looks and gazes” are defining references as family members are reminded of their respective role in the life of the family.⁷⁴ The resultant double exposure is one where the photograph continues to function within the

⁷¹ Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

⁷² Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

⁷³ Marianne Hirsch, ‘Introduction: Familial Looking’, in Marianne Hirsch (ed), *The Familial Gaze* (London: University Press of New England, 1999), p xvi.

⁷⁴ Marianne Hirsch, *The Familial Gaze*, p xvi.

conventional circulation of meaning of what constitutes family and so then reminds us, as family, what we no longer were and had become – incomplete in our single parent status. The absence of the photo-album can be construed as an act of resistance to the discomfort of being defined. It was protest without fuss.

My mother's wedding day photographs forms part of what Hirsch refers to as 'postmemory': "...distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection"⁷⁵ In this instance the photograph is Barthes's 'umbilical cord'⁷⁶ establishing my mother's association with Amsterdam Street independent of my need to associate myself with my brief physical placement there. Within the restrictive belly of apartheid the telling of stories of the experiences of our parents and that of their parents, *ad finitum*, were muffled by their fear and were at best voiced in a cautionary manner. Post-apartheid context re-remembering becomes possible with the return to place, spatially or as constructs of memory. Hirsch's concept of postmemory can be extended beyond the Holocaust experience of her immediate family and applied, not only to our "own belated stories" but beyond to that of slavery and "the stories of the previous generations shaped by traumatic events that can neither be understood nor recreated".⁷⁷ Hirsch recognises that the Holocaust is not unique "in the discourses of postmodernity" but chooses it to frame her perspectives from "the place that is personally most devastating and thus potentially most telling for" her.⁷⁸ Similarly my mother's wedding

⁷⁵ Marianne Hirsch, *The Familial Gaze*, p 22.

⁷⁶ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1982), p 81.

⁷⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *The Familial Gaze*, p 22.

⁷⁸ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, narrative and postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p 14.

photographs provides the interstices between our private memories and that of a distant unconstructed public past.

I present my observation of four photos commemorating that event: three of the photographs illustrate the standard and expected approach to the genre of wedding photographs and the last one was taken by an amateur photographer which reveals features absent from the previous two.



Figure 21: Sarah Weeder (i)
(Private collection of Sarah Weeder)

The first of these wedding photos was taken in my mother's parental home at 26 Beatty Avenue, Garden Village (see Figure 21). She is posing in the *voor-kamer* sitting, she says, on a cushion and is boxed in by a table and an *imbuia*, half-moon table on which stood a wireless.⁷⁹ Her gaze is directed at the photographer who would have guided her to pose in a particular manner. Her smile registers her uncertainty. The photograph is bright and in focus but the scene lacks nuances. I remember the oval-shaped oak table.

⁷⁹ Interview with Sarah Weeder, 27 November 2005.

The *imbuia* table is in my possession as I inherited it twenty-four years ago and I wonder what became of the oak table. The room was also referred to as the living-room where visitors were received on Sundays and where my Uncle Phillip slept at night.

The second photo is a full-length one of my mother who is no longer smiling and her resemblance to my younger sister draws my attention (see Figure 22). The flash-light might have bounced off the wall and the reflected light created a fuzzy lightness which dulls part of the slightly out-of-focus photo which is darker than the previous one. The bride looks confident and the upper portion of her body is framed by three photographs: the one is the wedding photograph of one of my mother's older brothers, David and, his wife, Pauline. Their faces are not identifiable but I have seen the photograph in my mother's plastic-bag collection and recognise the photograph by the arrangement of figures. Uncle David is dead as are all the members of my mother's immediate family. I recall her sadness on receiving the news of the passing of her eldest brother Nicholas as she quietly said, "I am now the only one left of my family". Above the wedding photograph is a portrait one of my mother and her youngest brother, Phillip, taken when they were aged three and five respectively. The portrait is a study in concern as my mother casts a protective look towards her brother on that day, her consistent response to her troubled sibling till the day she organised his funeral. He had died young, an unmarried father of three children: his first-born, Naomi, had preceded him to the grave.



Figure 22: Sarah Weeder (ii)
(Private collection of Sarah Weeder)

To the left of the brother-sister portrait was one which I remember but cannot identify. The portraits were done by a William Derry who was “like Van Kalker but he came to your home”, recalls my mother.⁸⁰ My living seventy-year old mother links me from the day of her wedding to a receding continuum of familial dead. My nine-year old cousin, Naomi, had died from injuries sustained from a stone thrown at her head.

The third portrait troubles me because I am unable to identify the person whose face is framed above that of my mother’s veiled head. The wall which forms part of the

⁸⁰ Interview with Sarah Weeder, 27 November 2005.

background to this photo is marked by a pattern running its length and it locates my mother's head (representative of memory) in the lighter section of the wall, the part which reflects my struggle with memory. But what emerges is this bride in referential relation to her brother in her childhood and the person in the most shaded part of this living-room scene and the realisation of the impossibility of integrating aspects of the past into my own. But that distant portrait remains, as does the holocaust of slavery, resolutely in the picture, so to speak. In this photograph the half-moon table is less prominent but stands in proximity to the bride's body, the womb of my being. My mother had taken the table when her mother had died and in turn I not so much inherited it as claimed it during one of my first visits to my parental home as her newly-married son.

A retired priest, Fr Bob de Maar, remembers an incident during his early years of ministry in Manenberg as his new parishioners were moving into the parish from the newly proclaimed 'white' areas along the Suburban Line. An ex-District Six resident had called him to her flat. An antique wardrobe stood out in the rain. It was far too big to be carried through the narrow doorway of her new apartheid home. Fr Bob could not remember what happened to the wardrobe but we speculated that either it was sold or broken down and reassembled inside the flat.⁸¹ Sometimes we accommodate the past in proportion to our ability to receive it but we omit a little piece of memory or retell a story to make us appear less unheroic. This dance with the past becomes a local version of the *Judenstern* whereby victims are identified not by their wounds but by that which conceals it. I do not know how much of that awareness translates into consciousness but

⁸¹ Comment by Fr Bob de Maar at a Heritage Day planning meeting held at St Philip's, Chapel Street, District Six, August 2005.

photographs allows for re-invention and facilitates an insertion of value in the acts of the ordinary or the grand events of life. This could partially explain the seemingly inordinate amount of time allocated to wedding photographs during the fifties and sixties. After the wedding ceremony in the church the bridal party would move on to Van Kalker's Studio in Woodstock (see Figure 23). These sessions would proceed late into the afternoon with people often waiting their turn to be photographed.



Figure 23: The Weeder and Verwey family in the Van Kalker Studio
(Private collection of Denise Hanerval)

After my parents had left Van Kalker's they went home to Amsterdam Street. Someone wanted to take a photograph of the newly-married couple (see Figure 24). The sun was going down and Amsterdam Street was filled with shadows and the only good light available was around the corner in Ebenezer Road. ("Perhaps the photographer did not

have a flash”, suggests my mother).⁸² But why take another photograph and one which was so obviously informal, I asked my mother. There was a family drama a-play as the marriage was one between the Catholic Weeders and the Anglican Verweys.



Figure 24: Bridal party posing next to the Amsterdam Cafe
(Private collection of author)

My father’s sister, Olive, had not attended the wedding which had taken place at St Athanasius in Garden Village, the parish-church of the bride. Monsignor Rourke, the Weeder family’s parish priest, had put the telephone down when my father informed him that the marriage would not take place at Sacred Heart up the way in Somerset Road.

⁸² Interview with Sarah Weeder, 30 November 2005.

When my mother related her account of the marriage drama I suggested that she had literally moved in with the enemy.⁸³ I have valued the photograph mainly because it was the only one in my possession wherein my parents were together. It had provided me with my first image of my father. It documented me in relation to his maleness and in later years his presence in the photograph mediated the link between myself with his and our city. I redefined the place of Phillip in the photograph in the light of perspectives I gained from my mother. He stands as her protector in almost a proprietorial fashion, a temporary yet infinite reversal of roles and in direct line with his father standing guardian-like at the extreme end of the photograph.

The photograph taken on the pavement of Ebenezer Road is stripped of the ceremonial coding of the photograph in the bride's home and the one taken in Van Kalker's studio. The amateur photographer functioned independent of the photographic canon. Guided by the technical limitations of his camera, the private formalities of the occasion and the curiosity and interest of the public were collapsed into one frame. The photograph is small and I used a magnifying glass to read facial expressions and other details. In the foreground are my parents flanked on either side by Doreen the bridesmaid and Phillip the bridegroom. Patty, the flower-girl, and Doreen are looking out of the frame and away from the camera. The long day had taken its toll and they are resisting the demands of the moment. The setting allows for dissent as the scripted formula for posing and looking, the instruction of when to smile, all had to compete with what was within and outside of the frame such as the conversation of the unofficial members of the photograph and the noise of the traffic in Somerset Road. The shuttered window of the Amsterdam Cafe divided

⁸³ Interview with Sarah Frances Weeder, 30 November 2005.

the photograph between the private as in the bridal party and the public crowded on the corner of Ebenezer and Amsterdam roads. The personal realignment of relationships were now publicly defined. On the edge of the gathering of onlookers was the figure of my mother's father looking on as a member of the public at his only daughter.

Unlike the two formal photographs the one taken in Ebenezer Road locates it spatially. It associates it with a time when the cottages for the white workers of the railways still existed, as in the photograph, just beyond Amsterdam Street. I showed the Amsterdam Café photograph to Lionel Mancini (LM), Neville Mancini (NM) brothers and their wives Joan and Maria (MM).⁸⁴

- LM Hey...Neville, that will take you back years...look at that. Do you remember that sign? *laughs*
Now that was Samuels shop, hey? Amsterdam Café.
- NM My goodness, I remember the till here on the side.
- MW *That's my mother and father's wedding day.*
- MM I see that. He was a short old man that had this little...
- LM He had a son and a daughter. I know the daughter's name was Raia. She was a short fat little girl.
Was Samuels a Moslem?
- No, Jewish.
- MM A tiny little man.

The photograph of my parents evoked from the Mancinis fond reminisces of individuals who were not in the photo. My parents are crowded out of their own photograph by the Mancinis' memories of the owner of Amsterdam Café and that of his daughter, Raia.

The photograph of my father's aunt, Alice Evon, was taken in her living-room in Garlandale Estate, Athlone where she and her family had moved from Amsterdam Street

⁸⁴ Interview with Lionel and Joan Mancini, Neville and Maria Mancini, August 2004.

in the 1960s (see Figure 25). The reflection of the flowers in the vase in the shiny surface of the table displays a double displacement. The indoor scene is a literal withdrawal from the community life exemplified by the public gathering of the women of the neighbourhood at “Goolam’s shop on the corner of Amsterdam Street and Ebenezer Road. And they’d meet there and they’d stand and talk and talk in the shop”.⁸⁵



Figure 25: Alice Evon in her new home in Athlone
(Private collection of Sylvia Evon)

A communal vigilance was bestowed on the children of the area: “Mrs Lawrence stayed next door, the old lady and the old man used to sit in the corner there, he used to watch when we’re playing to see if we’re naughty, then he used to tell my ma”.⁸⁶ Alice Evon, framed by what appears to be new furniture, reclines wearily to one side with an attempt of a smile on her face. It’s a striking photograph announcing an intent to begin anew but for Alice it is a journey begun to late in her life.

⁸⁵ Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

⁸⁶ Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

It was Sylvia Evon, Alice's daughter, who guided me to the grave of our forebears, Sarah and Louis Evon, at Gate No. 10 at the Maitland Cemetery (see Figure 26). The grave was right at the end of the path which began at the entrance at Voortrekker Road. Close to the railway line, the tombstone was cracked and broken as Sylvia had said it would be.⁸⁷

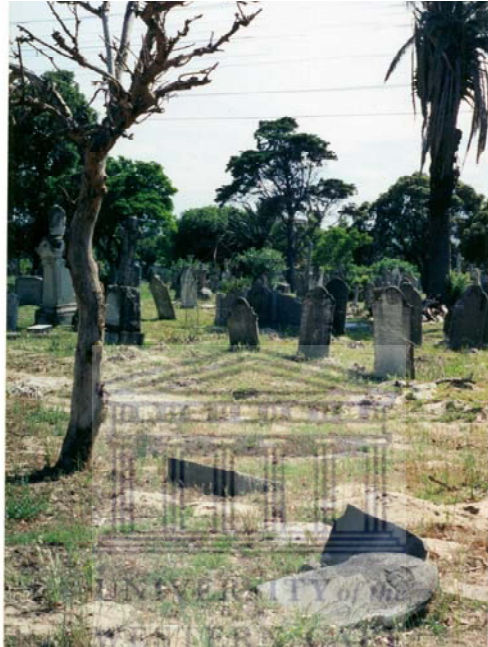


Figure 26: The grave of Sarah and Louis Evon
(Photographer: M.I. Weeder)

The physical neglect of the grave and its marker points to a history of loss and destruction.⁸⁸ Sylvia remembers that her “grandpa was French. Because we had a big photo in the dining room of my grandpa. He was a white man. Frenchman. Big, strappy man”.⁸⁹ That photograph of Louis Evon she recalls as far back as the 1940s and remembers her grandfather within the value attached to a lighter skin colour as prevailing at that time. The neglected grave of Louis and Sarah Evon is in contrast to the well-maintained, marble-covered family plot of their descendants a short distance away at the

⁸⁷ Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

⁸⁸ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, narrative and postmemory*, p 13.

⁸⁹ Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

cemetery entrance at Gate 10. The generational distance and perhaps the absence of rites of transmitting memory seems to have caused a disjuncture between how the Evon family remembered their dead.



Figure 27: Sylvia Evon
(Private collection of Sylvia Evon)

The photograph of Sylvia was taken when she was “about 26 or...I must have been because that was before we moved” (see Figure 27).⁹⁰

The photo serves as a cross reference to the wedding day of my father’s sister, Olive. Sylvia had been a bridesmaid: “and that was the following Sunday the cutting of the cake. You see that was the cutting of the cake and we took photos”.⁹¹

Sylvia’s pose is as unpretentious as the setting with its rough textures of unpainted brick, the crude wire mesh that covered the window behind her and the clutter of grass, stones and sand between her feet. Her spirit is strong and the diaspora would not rend her helpless and she returns to the area: “I ride past there, I’ve got a car, I ride past there, or when I go to Green Point, or when we go for a drive on a Sunday. I show my friends, it’s all changed”.⁹² She struggles to describe her feelings in relation to those occasions:

⁹⁰ Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

⁹¹ Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

⁹² Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

“Nothing...I don’t know...it’s just...”.⁹³ But she is sure-footed when she finds her way along the path of memory:

When we moved here, we always visit them. The Gonzalez’ and we visit my ma. My ma was there. Because it was a thing with our family, every Sunday then we must make cake. There was no electricity...but my ma always baked bread on the coal stove and we had to make cake, because they’d come upstairs and we sit on the balcony. Gus’ children, they all come...the family always came to my ma on a Sunday. Every Sunday we know the families must come, always got together and the family, talk and talk, and there they go again.⁹⁴

The photographs in this chapter are mainly within the domestic setting of family. Some of the persons in the photographs are as dead as those whose remains were uncovered at Prestwich Place. Through a reading of the family photos within the context of their personal circumstances I have come to some understanding of what the photos represented. The impact of apartheid on the personal provides the umbilical link with the biographies of the Prestwich dead. This makes public mourning possible.⁹⁵ The oral narratives, photographs and other memorabilia of individuals within communities affected by the Group Area Act determined “*diaspora des cendres*” – “the place of origin has gone up in ashes”⁹⁶ are the South African equivalent of the *yizker bikher*. These are the memorial books which record the “historical accounts of community life before the destruction as well as detailed records of the genocide that annihilated these communities. They contain photographs as well as texts, individual and group portraits

⁹³ Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

⁹⁴ Interview with Sylvia Evon, August 2002.

⁹⁵ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 20.

⁹⁶ Nadine Fresco, ‘La Diaspora des cendres’, cited in Marianne Hirsch’s, *Family Frames*, p 243.

evoking life as it was *before*".⁹⁷ These *yizker bikher* witness to the past but "are also sites where subsequent generations can find a lost origin, where they can learn about the time and place they will never see".⁹⁸ Hirsch juxtaposes the ordinary family portraits of the Jakubowicz, "a Polish- and Yiddish-speaking family of Auschwitz survivors",⁹⁹ who had been her family's neighbours in Rhode Island in the 1960s, with "the many pictures of atrocities from the concentration and extermination camps".¹⁰⁰

Guided by how Hirsch uses these images which are "connected to the Holocaust by their context and not by their content"¹⁰¹ we take the bodies hanging from the gallows, attached to the whipping tree or post, impaled on a wooden stake – or the half-exposed skeletons at *Wit Sands* paupers burial ground, or at the Somerset Road Cemeteries or the exhumed skeletal remains found at Prestwich Place – and add to these "bodies, or the hair, or the shoes depicted, all those others we know about but which are not in the picture".¹⁰² And so "it is precisely the displacement of the bodies depicted in the pictures of horror from their domestic settings", continues Hirsch, "along with their disfigurement, that bring the enormity of Holocaust destruction", or in the case of South Africa, that of slavery.¹⁰³

The understated manner in which the South African slave narrative has been told has disabled the affected community from discerning the relationship between slavery and

⁹⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 21.

⁹⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 246

⁹⁸ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 247

⁹⁹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 17.

¹⁰⁰ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 20.

¹⁰¹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 20.

¹⁰² Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 21.

¹⁰³ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 21

their identity and how they, like their Jewish counterparts, have been “exiled from a world that has ceased to exist, that has been violently erased”.¹⁰⁴ One of the acute differences between the two communities is that the children of the survivors of the Jewish Holocaust have been given an association with the world of their parents through the application of the concept of ‘postmemory’ which is “distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection”.¹⁰⁵ Postmemory “characterises the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth”.¹⁰⁶ Hirsch recognises that the Holocaust is not unique “in the discourses of postmodernity” but chooses it to frame her perspectives from “the place that is personally most devastating and thus potentially most telling for” her.¹⁰⁷ The voices of elders in the South African story-telling tradition were often textured by fear and expressed in a cautionary manner creating an estrangement from the past. Apartheid and its varied application is undeniably ‘the place that is personally most devastating’ for the slave-descended community of South Africa.

Amsterdam Street’s apartheid past figuratively holds a similar potential as a place of gathering for the emotional and intellectual resources from which to venture into the narrative of Prestwich Street and to engage the resurrected revenants of its burial ground. It is this experience of departure and return which “brings with it its own narrative genres and aesthetic shapes” writes Hirsch, “and thus permits us to return from a somewhat different angle, to the photographic aesthetics of postmemory -- the photograph’s

¹⁰⁴ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), p 244.

¹⁰⁵ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 22.

¹⁰⁶ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 22.

¹⁰⁷ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 14.

capacity to signal absence and loss and, at the same time, to make present, rebuild, reconnect, bring back to life.¹⁰⁸ In 2003 the dead of Prestwich Place re-turned the public gaze onto District One and its place in the spatial landscape of the city.



¹⁰⁸ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p 243.

CONCLUSION

The struggle associated with what became known as the Prestwich Burial Ground was sustained by the commitment of a variety of interest groups and institutions. These were expressed in the assertion of the rights of the developer, in the intentions of archaeologists and anatomists to do anatomical research on the exhumed remains, in the demands of community groups for the remains to be left in the ground, in the manner in which SAHRA chose to interpret and apply the Heritage Resources Act, and, finally, the decision of the government-appointed tribunal. All served to ensure that that the matter remained in the public domain. While executive power was in the hands of the heritage agencies, the work of public bodies helped to focus the minds of the relevant decision-makers. Threading a course through the intentions of the participants in this battle were the varying ways in which each group not only understood history, but also how the different communities of the city had experienced it, and the extent to which they were able, or, willing, to remember a past brokered by the discovery of the Prestwich Burial Ground.

I have attempted to cast some light on a facet of Cape Town's past from the spatial location of its northwest end, the site of ancient graves and the gallows of its colonial past. It is a moment of making history, with memory as an artefact and as a resource to explore and attempt to understand a personal and collective past. Through the process of research and the interviews conducted with an array of persons, I have come to understand how one is part of the making of history in a conscious manner and as a

recipient of a rich legacy contained in the lives and struggles of others. This knowledge encouraged me to work towards imagining the past of a particular community associated with a specific part of old Cape Town, District One of *de Waterkant*.

This imagined past is an intellectual and conceptual construct based on an accepted canon of research of established historians in the field of Cape slave history. While the archive is an important resource, it is also, as Foucault recognizes, “the law of what can be said”.¹ Therefore the researcher should be guided by Stoler’s urging “to refigure our uses of the colonial archive”. She writes that the archival rule and conventions “might designate who were reliable ‘sources’, what constituted ‘enough’ evidence and what – in the absence of information -- could be filled in to make a credible plot”.² Foucault characterised the nineteenth century as obsessed with history “with its themes of development and suspension, of crisis, and cycle, themes of the ever-accumulating past, with its great preponderance of dead men”.³ The ethos of the time influences how and what is recorded. When engaging the contents of the archive and its understating of the lives of ordinary people, the researcher, conscious of Foucault’s observation, needs to apply a critical hermeneutic when reading the archive. This has been a strength of social history which delves the archive of the personal, the ungreat, of the memory of the individual. The release of that which was hidden, by the ‘freeing’ of memory, helps to break the silence of the archive and its appropriated knowledge (and ownership) of the past. Ranajit

¹ Michel Foucault cited in Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form’, in Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Reid & Razia Saleh (eds), in *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, 2002), p 87.

² Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance’, p 94.

³ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces: Heterotopias’, was the basis of a lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967. It was later published in *Architecture / Movement / Continuité* in October, 1984. This manuscript was released into the public domain Berlin shortly before Michel Foucault’s death.

Guha, notes that the function of colonial knowledge “was to erect that past as a pedestal on which the triumphs and glories of the colonizers and their instrument, the colonial state, could be displayed to best advantage”.⁴ The archive was the imperial warehouse treasuring “cultural artefacts of fact production, of taxonomies in the making, and of disparate notions of what made up colonial authority”.⁵

In his prosaic ode to imperialism Joseph Conrad evoked the memory of “the bearers of the sacred” who had once sailed along the Thames and beyond “into the mystery of an unknown earth!”. These “heralds of the British empire”⁶ had been preceded by the Dutch who arrived in the bay below the Hoerikamma at a time “when the land was only cattle tracks and footpaths”.⁷ That is a part of a story which continues onto that of another which occurred only eighteen years ago in 1988 at Gate number ten in the Maitland Cemetery. My mother, holding her one-year old grand-daughter, Chiara, in her arms stood at the grave of my father, Stanley Weeder. She took sand from his grave and placed it in my daughter’s hand and said, “Stanley, this is Michael’s first-born”, and holding Chiara’s hand with the sand tight in her own, added, “Chiara this is your grandfather”. This unscripted rite exceeded the liturgical conventions of the Christian faith. Yet the physical placement of soil from the ancestral grave of one generation into the hands of a living descendant expressed an association of my firstborn with her forebears buried in the vicinity. Their graves were located along the path running from

⁴ Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp 2-3.

⁵ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Colonial Archives and the Arts of Governance: On the Content in the Form’, in Carolyn Hamilton et al, p 85.

⁶ Joseph Conrad, *Youth, Heart of Darkness and The end of the Tether* (New York: Everyman’s Library, 1974), p 47.

⁷ Bessie Head, *The Collector of treasures* (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1980), p 1.

the entrance at Gate number ten up to the railway line, which more than a hundred years ago had brought the mortal remains of the first generation of Amsterdam Street residents from Monument Station.

Flying high above the Indian Ocean en route to a conference in Bali in April 2006, I was seated next to Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu. I had been talking to him about a mutual acquaintance whose wife suffered from Alzheimer's. I told him that the person in question no longer knew who her husband was. The Arch was silent for a while and then asked, "What are our relationships without memory?"⁸ I thought of the irony of that question in the context of our journey to the island home of 17th century slaves. Their odyssey to the Cape had been the severing of a relationship with all that had defined them. Slavery provides South African slave descendants with an emotional and intellectual place from which to understand and engage, not only their past, but also their place within the commonwealth of South African communities. The communities descended from slaves experience the "notion of being here and not being here"⁹ in a particularly painful way.

The understated slave narrative also sits uncomfortably on the South African body politic. One of the reasons is the manner in which the descendants of slavery are spoken *about*. This includes the manner in which the term 'African' has been surrendered to those who appropriate it as a birthright, along with the concomitant assumed right to exclude, ultimately arbitrarily so, others from expressing a similar self-awareness. A

⁸ Conversation with Archbishop Emeritus, Desmond Tutu, 28 April 2006.

⁹ Yvonne Vera, *Butterfly Burning* (Harare: Baobab Books, 1998), p 48.

misreading of South African history has occurred due to the inclination to place its oppressed communities on a hierarchal scale of who was more oppressed than the other. Related to this matter is the concern about who speaks *for* the descendants of slaves. I have walked the well-beaten tracks to the various archives of the city. The occasional ‘new’ fact uncovered by my research, I would later discover, had already been noted and recorded by historians before me. However I have interpreted these texts from within the socio-cultural context of the slave-descended community. In doing so I have discerned possibilities to communicate the story of slavery in ways that the slave-descended community can begin to own and access their past. I am guided by Chinua Achebe’s belief that if “somebody is telling a story about me and it doesn’t look like me at all I have a responsibility to say, ‘Well, that’s how you see it. But this is way I see it’”. The result is that there are “two stories instead of one and as my people say, ‘Whenever some thing stands, something else will stand next to it’”. Creating “a second story to stand beside the first one” gives the world a choice.¹⁰

¹⁰ Chinua Achebe, notes from an audiovisual recording at ‘The hands that shaped humanity’ exhibition at the Iziko Slave Lodge, Cape Town, 2005.

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