REVIEW ARTICLES

Customs and Beliefs of Bleek and Lloyd Scholarship

SHANE MORAN
University of KwaZulu Natal

Customs and Beliefs of the /Xam. Edited by JEREMY C. HOLLMANN. Johannesburg: Witswatersrand University Press, The Khoisan Heritage Series. 2004. xxxii + 439pp. ISBN 1-86814-399-6, and *The Broken String. The Last Words of an Extinct People*. By NEIL BENNUN. London: Penguin Books, 2004. ix + 420pp. ISBN 0-670-91250-6.

Imagine a burning hotel. Of the one hundred people inside, the stranded delegates from a conference on the representation of indigenous peoples organised by academics and activists, it is only possible to save fifty. There happens to be just that number of South African San or 'Bushmen' guests trapped in the flames. Despite the commitment to a universal principle rejecting any appeal to race as arbitrary, is it not reasonable to save them before other guests because of the obligation to preserve threatened cultures? Doesn't a sense of the injustices of history, and an appreciation of the vulnerability of marginalised cultures, demand the preservation of the most threatened?

David Theo Goldberg[1] uses this parable to demonstrate the relevance of non-biological or culturalist racial distinctions. The assumption is that if the culture, defined in terms of language and practices, vanishes then the people or race are extinct too, and visa versa. In this non-biological interpretation race stands for historically specific forms of cultural connectedness and solidarity. Hereditary here involves cultural practices and self-identification. If race, as Anthony Appiah argues,[2] biologizes what is culture or ideology, then Goldberg responds that it is also evident that the biological conception of race as heritability cannot be simply opposed to a cultural approach. Biology is itself a product of culture, and so privileging race as descent inflates a nineteenth-century reading of the significance of race into a transhistorical category.

Taking issue with Goldberg's argument, Walter Benn Michaels claims that although we no longer identify race with the biological or conflate race and culture, culture is tied to a biological anchor.[3] Discrimination, even the virtuous

1. David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture. Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 212-13.
2. K.A. Appiah, 'The Uncompleted Argument: Dubois and the Illusion of Race', *Critical Inquiry*, 12, 1985, 21-37.
3. Walter Benn Michaels, *Our America. Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 179-80, note 239.

kind, does require identifying race and culture to the extent that persons embody culture. He points out that the analogy between cultures and persons leads to a misunderstanding about the nature of culture. If culture is simply what people do rather than who they are then it doesn't matter if the San all move to the suburbs and start hanging out in malls. San culture will have died even though there's been no loss of San. To identify culture with *who* a group is to slide into using culture as race, and the fact that we so readily think of culture in these terms means that it is continuing the racial thinking it is supposed to have supplanted. What is being preserved under the melancholic cover of vanishing cultures is nothing other than a fetishization of phenotype and descent; in short, the nostalgia of race—an inheritance that will remember us if we do not remember it.[4]

Whatever the merits of this debate, it does illustrate the importance of the San to explorations of the relation between culture and race. But this is an exemplarity that has a built in ambivalence for the exemplar is also the sample, one among a series of potential substitutes that best represents the common feature of that series. This standing in for others on the basis of resemblance is balanced by a sense of exemplarity as uniqueness, as paragon, as the best example, what cannot simply be exchanged for another, despite the seductive power of resemblance. These two senses are in tension with each other to the extent that being reduced (or elevated) to an exemplary example institutes an economy that is not necessarily fortuitous.

Jeremy C. Hollmann's *Customs and Beliefs of the /Xam* draws on Dorothea Bleek's contributions to the journal *Bantu Studies* that appeared in nine parts between 1931 and 1936, based on the material of the Bleek and Lloyd Collection in the Jagger Library at the University of Cape Town. This material is supplemented with the additional notes from the Jagger manuscripts that Dorothea omitted so as not to hinder the flow of the narrative. The original parallel text format with /Xam and its translation mirroring each other is retained while peculiarities of spelling have been restored and punctuation standardised. In addition to the folktales, with each section preceded by a useful introduction by Hollmann, there is a reprint of Dorothea's *Bushman Grammar* introduced by Tom Güldemann of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology/Linguistics. The *Bushman Grammar* originally appeared in English in two issues (1928/9 and 1929/30) of the *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen*. Within Hollmann's overall conception of representation as a form of praxis this intralinguistic focus makes it possible to aspire to learn the grammar of the /Xam language: 'This book is intended as a contribution towards the reassertion of respect for and appreciation of Bushman cultures.'[5]

In making this material accessible, and in preserving the diacritical and typo-orthographic uniqueness of the original, Hollmann has performed a valuable service. However my copy has no publication date and a binding problem where pages 201–216 are missing, seven sections according to the contents page.

4. According to Robert J.C. Young the categories of culture and race developed together, imbricated within each other. The sense of culture (from the Latin *cultura* and *colere*) as cultivate and inhabit — implicated in the Latin for farmer, *colonus* — informs the meaning of colony, and 'colonization rests at the heart of culture' (*Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* [London: Routledge, 1995], 31).
5. Jeremy C. Hollmann, *Customs and Beliefs of the /Xam*, 1.

I would also have been grateful if Güldemann could have informed us about the German reception of the 'Bushmen' researches, particularly during the early 1930s. This said, the book is endorsed by Axel Thoma on behalf of the Working Group for Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) representing the San of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. Those involved in the Oral Testimony Collection Project, conducted by the San for the San, thank Hollmann for making this unique collection available to the broader public and thereby also to the San; 'they have valued the stories of an extinct group of their fellow San and of their language.'[6] The attempted withdrawal from autochtonic and homophyliac rootedness so distinctive of the struggle of democracy thrusts its roots into the security of autochthonous foundation and the stock or genius of filiation.[7]

Janette Deacon provides the 'Foreword' and unveils the following scene for the reader:

> Imagine being in goal in a city hundreds of kilometres from your family and the stark rural landscape of your home. You try hard to remember every rock and every bush that is familiar to you. You are afraid to speak your own language. Your fellow prisoners and warders do not understand your language and they call you stupid because you do not know what they say. One day, a strange man visits the prison and asks if you can teach him to speak as you do. He gets permission for you to live in the relative comfort of his home. Slowly you teach him and his sister-in-law how to use their tongues to make the click sounds in /Xam. You say the names of objects and objects to them over and over again until they get them right. They take a long time to write the words down, and then stumble over them again the next day. You wonder if they will ever learn. After a few months they can put a sentence or two together and they ask you to tell them stories. At first you tell them simple things. They find it hard to grasp why you laugh when you do, and you hang back when you realise they don't know enough to comprehend the depth of the story. The metaphors so obvious to you are lost on them …[8]

According to Deacon, '[t]hese could be the thoughts of ||Kabbo, the grandfather whose knowledge and patience were the cornerstone of the /Xam language and memories that were recorded in Cape Town in the nineteenth century.'[9] The fact that ||Kabbo spoke Dutch[10] is not allowed to interrupt the sketch: '/Xam has

---

6. Axel Thoma in Hollmann, *Customs and Beliefs of the /Xam*, xii.
7. See Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997), 103, and Geoffrey Bennington, *Interrupting Derrida* (London: Routledge, 2000), 28. See also an argument for the ethico-political necessity of melancholia in the introduction to David E. Eng and David Kazanjian, eds., *Loss. The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003). Compare the Australian debate as related by Elizabeth A. Pivonelli, 'Settler Modernity and the Quest for an Indigenous Tradition', *Public Culture*, 11(1), 1999, 19-48.
8. Janette Deacon, 'Foreword', in Hollmann, *Customs and Beliefs of the /Xam*, xiii.
9. Deacon, xiii.
10. See Helize Van Vuuren, 'Orality in the Margins of Literary History: Prolegomena to a Study of Interaction between Bushmen Orality and Afrikaans Literature', in Johannes A. Smit *et al*, eds, *Rethinking South African Literary History* (Durban: Y-Press, 1996).

become like South Africa's Latin and has taken its place in the country's coat of arms.'[11] A narrative that stresses empathy, immediacy, reciprocity, and humanistic affinity displaces the mediating power structure of the scene of transcription: 'these memories were recorded as they were spoken.'[12] In accord with the tradition of political philosophy the origin and destination, *arkhe* and *telos*, must be thought of as peaceful.

The value of the /Xam archive as witnessing and as testimony underlies the substitutive symmetry implied in a hermeneutic oriented on the presence of a shared primal meaning, mirroring the ideal encounter or communion of reader and author via the medium of text as intentional object. The effect of the narrative scene of commensurability elicits an identification, self-present and living, characterized as both essentially prior to writing and beyond the reach of colonialist ideologies:

> For both Wilhelm and Dorothea Bleek, and for Lucy Lloyd and the /Xam, this endeavour was a labour of love. None of them received monetary reward for learning the language of the other, nor for publishing what had been recorded. While Lucy Lloyd and Wilhelm and Dorothea Bleek may have achieved academic recognition, their purpose was not to enrich themselves, but to record the knowledge for generations to come. Each contributed to the integrity of the whole.[13]

Hollmann's 'Introduction' also takes up the benign portrait of the scene of transcription and the politics of friendship: 'The /Xam were the teachers, and Wilhelm and his sister-in-law, Lucy Lloyd, the pupils and scribes.'[14]

What is ignored in the attempt to ground ethics in an *ethos* or *ethnos* of face-to-face encounter is evidence that Bleek was South Africa's first systematic theorist of racial difference; that he helped to inaugurate a tradition of comparative philology in South Africa in which historical narrative was linked into the competitive struggle between races; that he was involved in anthropometric measurement and ethnological photography; and that the garden scene of reciprocal translation and transcription has been demystified.[15] Despite the wish to redraw the colonial past nothing yet disproves Lubbock's remark in *Prehistoric Times* (first published in 1870) that 'Bleek regards them [Bushmen] as the lowest of human races'.[16]

---

11. Deacon, xiii.
12. Deacon, xiii.
13. Deacon, xv.
14. Hollmann, 2.
15. See Andrew Bank, 'Of "Native Skulls" and "Noble Caucasians": Phrenology in Colonial South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 22(3), 1996, 387-403; 'The Great Debate and the Origins of South African Historiography', *Journal of African History,* vol. s38, 1997, 261-281; Saul Dubow, *Illicit Union: Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 79; Michael Godby, 'Images of ||Kabbo', in Pippa Skotnes, ed., *Miscast. Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1996); Andrew Bank, 'From pictures to performance: early learning at the hill', *Kronos*, 28, 1997, 66-101.
16. J. Lubbock (Lord Avebury), *Prehistoric Times* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913), 437.

Bleek's own appreciation of 'Bushman' cultures was articulated within a narrative of human development that granted interest to the exemplar of the lowest level. While he certainly imported aspects of European evolutionary thought into Africa, it is also true that a whole series of colonial models was bought back to the West, and the result was that the West could practice something like colonization, or an internal colonialism, on itself.[17] The /Xam were of interest because of the light they could throw on the origins of community and the nation, of language, of religion, of literature, even of humanity and historical progress. Neo-humanism was an intimate part of Bleek's discourse and he resolutely and at every opportunity underlined his commitment to the essential unity and shared destination of mankind. Although I would caution against turning Bleek into a convenient scapegoat for racism and apartheid, it could be shown that it is from within this humanism that the philologist mines the resources incorporated into culturalist racism. Just as colonial power shaped the agency of the colonial intellectual and was imprinted on the margins of scholarly work, so it preoccupied the intellectual imagination with the question of origins.[18]

Writing of the historical genealogy of colonialism and imperialism in mid-nineteenth century European scholarship, Robert Young notes that this was the period in which Matthew Arnold's ethnographic politics—drawing on the work of Renan, Blumenbach, Niebuhr and Bunsen—were coded as *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) and answered obliquely by E.B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871) which argued for the essential unity of evolving humanity.[19] Apart from the well-known connection with Arnold via his defence of Colenso,[20] Bleek's work and his interest in the 'Bushmen' are not unrelated to these better known contemporaries. Christian K. Bunsen, famous diplomat and secretary to the historian Niebuhr, was a friend and sponsor of Bleek, introducing the young philologist to Colenso in London. In *Researches into the Early History of Mankind*, Tylor discusses Bleek's work on African fables, remarking the imperfections of 'Bushman' language while maintaining the universality of the mental processes of man. For Darwin and Engels the 'Bushmen' epitomise both the limitation and the power of the species. Subsequently Plekhanov refers to the 'Bushmen' for evidence of primitive communistic instincts, and in America Du Bois, drawing on Frobenius, remarks the superior development of the 'Hottentot' over the 'Bushman'. Most importantly, considering the interest in the aesthetic of the Bleek and Lloyd archive, the 'Bushmen' also figure in the birth of modernism. Roger Fry, organiser of the ground-breaking Post-Impressionist exhibition of 1910 featuring Matisse and Picasso, published an essay entitled 'The Art of the Bushmen'. Fry

---

17. Michel Foucault,*"Society Must Be Defended". Lectures at the Collége de France, 1975-6*, trans. David Macey, edited by Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003), 103. See also Robert Bernasconi's discussion of the extent to which contemporary ideas, for example of social development, remain tied to a model that can best be described as colonialist ('Hegel at the Court of the Ashanti', in Stuart Barnett, ed., *Hegel After Derrida* [London: Routledge, 1998]), 63).
18. Mahmood Mamdani, 'Race and Ethnicity as Political Identities in the African Context', in *Keywords: Identity* (Cape Town: Juta, 2004), 22.
19. Young, chapter 3.
20. See Jeff Guy, 'Class, Imperialism and Literary Criticism: William Ngidi, John Colenso and Matthew Arnold', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23(2:2), 1997,19-242.

thanks Dorothea Bleek and, while valuing the primitive vision of the 'Bushmen', notes—in an echo of W.H.I Bleek—that 'the South African Bushmen are regarded by other native races in much the same way that we look upon negroes'.[21]

Representations of the 'Bushmen' have a history. The first people have figured as a central mediator in nation building as much in 1994 as in the Jan van Riebeek Tricentenary of 1952.[22] One could add George Stow's *The Native Races of South Africa* (1905) and the incorporation of the 'Bushmen' within the desirability of South African national unity and reconciliation. Commemorative rhetoric can shade off into a version of the funeral oration or *logos epitaphios* ridiculed by Plato's *Menexenus*. In this rhetoric we all belong to the same community, which is thereby legitimated via the mead of memory and renown, thanks to those who purchased the safety of the living by their deaths. The contingency of history is erased in an aura of 'belonging', and the sacrifices of the past were in some sense unavoidable for the creation of our present and future.[23] Within the celebration of common humanity there is a work of mourning that swallows others, consigning them to the intimacy of affiliation and belonging.

None of this sedimented representationality of the 'Bushmen' is allowed to derail the temptation of false recollection (*paramnesia*) and manufactured continuity and unity. Homeopathic history not only modifies what happens afterwards, but everything that went before via a retroactive effect (Freud's *nachträglich*)[24] specific to the structure of remembering. Why does historical scholarship fail to impinge on the supposed historicism of the 'Bushmen' industry? What of the place of metaphor and figuration in Bleek's own theory of the origin of language?[25] Why the exclusion of any consideration or thematization of writing, the very technology of archivization, from the scene of inscription? The critical hiatus or repression forms a protective barrier—but protecting what? A more self-consciously literary approach usefully foregrounds the importance of imaginative investment.

Neil Bennun's *The Broken String. The Last Words of an Extinct People* also opens with a narrative, asking us to imagine the setting of a cave painting in Lesotho: 'Walking upstream you will pass the mouth of the cave high above the opposite bank and a step half-acre of maize on your right; some twenty minutes later you will come to …'[26] The odyssey of return to an archaic source

---

21. Roger Fry, *Vision and Design* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1920), 61-2. Interpreting the 'Bushmen' as substitutive or surrogate victim has limited purchase given that the function of the *pharmakos* is to exteriorize the violence of the community, to displace rather than dispossess (René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1977]).
22. See Annie Coombes, *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* (London: Duke University Press, 2003), chapter 5.
23. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 20-21.
24. See Sigmund Freud, *The 'Wolfman' and Other Cases*, trans. Louise Adey Huish (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 245-6. Such an invocation presupposes a critical reflection on the importance of the 'Bushmen' (and Zulus) in Freud's articulation of the primitive.
25. It is possible to demonstrate conclusively that the centrality of anthropomorphism and personification in Bleek's account of the origin of language constitutes a tropological mechanism that organizes his ethnological distinctions. Race and culture are for Bleek only thinkable within such terms.
26. Neil Bennun, *The Broken String. The Last Words of an Extinct People*, 3.

that is alive in the present is a familiar frame that encloses the figuration of the 'Bushmen'. The product of a decades' worth of work, Bennun also presents an idyllic portrait of the relationship between Bleek and Lloyd and their informants, the latter 'exchanging prison walls for a furnished shed in a colonial garden', 'living in the furnished shed in the garden'.[27] Conceding that 'Dorothea found it more difficult than Lucy Lloyd to transcend the racist climate of the South Africa of her day,'[28] Bleek's complicity with colonialist racism is elided.[29]

Interspersing historical narrative with excerpts from the Bleek and Lloyd collection of folklore, letters and newspaper articles, Bennun attempts to meld together the colonial narrative with the /Xam material. This ambitious strategy is most effective when translations of meditations on mortality are juxtaposed with the narrative of Bleek's illness and death from tuberculosis. Particularly poignant is Dia!kwain's letter to Calvinia, translated by Lloyd, written three days after Wilhelm's death in search of information concerning the whereabouts of his sister and her children.

One of the achievements of this book is to convey a sense of the topography of the Cape, as the journeys and interrupted communications of the /Xam informants and their amanuenses are tracked over months, even years. The coincidence of Bleek and his future wife meeting in a Cape Town lodging is a moment in a long series of events; from Bleek's first aborted trip to the Congo that placed him in London and able to meet Colenso, to Jemima and her sisters' struggle with an overbearing and bankrupt father that compelled them to abandon the family home in Durban. The epistolary courtship between Bleek and his bride-to-be in England reveals a side of Bleek, frail and without a steady income, rarely glimpsed in the conventional scholarship:

> Well these dreadful prospects of many years of spiritual and mental fasting make me sometimes very savage … making me wish that slavery was a lawful institution, and that I was allowed to buy my dear sister as a slave, to keep her all for myself. But then I am afraid I should never be able to pay the price for a jewel so much valued as she is; and if I had it I should not be able to set it in proper fittings. But I see already your face thoroughly shocked at this … and must therefore implore you not to read the preceding last sentences, or if you have already read them to forget them altogether, except you should like to hear them, what indeed cannot well be disposed.
>
> If I had the least spirit of chevalerée in me I should have altered the proposition altogether and have supposed myself a humble slave, who craved to be bought by a master or a mistress he liked. But

27. Bennun, 38, 45.
28. Bennun, 337.
29. For a negative judgement on the garden myth see Adam Ashforth's review of Bennun's book in *Times Literary Supplement*, June 16, 2005, 27.

> then you see there would not have been much difficulty about it, as I would have been rather a drug in any decent slave market and could, therefore, be had very cheap, though it might be said that it was not worth having at all. As to my own predilection I should certainly prefer being a slave to being a slave owner.[30]

These meetings and the departure and arrival of /Xam from a forbidding interior powerfully convey the precarious nature of the colonial economy. The value of Bennun's cinematic narrative rests primarily on the weaving of various sources to give some sense of the challenges of settler life during that period, particularly for women. Grasping the past artistically—Nietzsche's classical history responsive to the needs of life, as opposed to antiquarian history aiming at the truth[31]—employs shifting perspectives and free indirect discourse to build up a phenomenological sense of space and time. The point is to allow the reader to vicariously inhabit a colonial scene of longing that is thereby humanised.[32] The reader is able to be the neutral third party between various communicants, an indulgence denied to those meshed in the historical narrative.

Bennun feels free to interpolate and domesticate the /Xam material as he sees fit.[33] In Hollmann's presentation the retention of Bleek and Lloyd's typo-orthographic notation and the parallel \Xam text make it more difficult to ignore the process of inscription. In contrast with Hollmann, there is a lack of annotation in Bennun's book; for example, the letter quoted above is simply referenced as 'unpublished manuscripts in the Grey Collection at the National Library of South Africa'.[34] In this Bennun and his publisher (like Dorothea) may be astute in reading the needs of the target market of general readers in search of an emotional journey unencumbered by scholarly paraphernalia. Part and parcel of this appeal is the false connection of the idyllic domestic scene, a type of screen memory[35] in which an early memory is used as a screen for a traumatic later event. The latter may well be connected to (mis)recognition of the continuing dispossession and immiseration that accompanies post-apartheid development, now freed of overt racism but still operating within the husk of the same economic system.

Bennun's contrasting of the reciprocal relation of the /Xam and their translators with the horror of exterminatory Boer commandos and the machinations of the racist Langham Dale, chairman of the Committee of the South African Public Library, certainly highlights the variegations in what is often taken to be a monolithic colonialist ideology. Yet Bleek and Lloyd, and Dorothea, were part of this mobile

---

30. W.H.I. Bleek in Bennun, 104-5.
31. See Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On the Advantages and Disadvantages of History for Life', in *Unfashionable Observations*, trans. Richard Gray (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).
32. See Jacques Derrida's contention that all cultures and nation-states have their origin in an aggression of a colonial type (*On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, trans. Mark Dooley and Michael Hughes [London: Routledge, 2001], 57).
33. A liberty also taken by Stephen Watson, *Return of the Moon. Versions from the /Xam* (Cape Town: Carrefour Press, 1991); Antjie Krog, *the stars say 'tsau'. /Xam poetry of Diä!kwain, Kweiten-ta-//ken, /A!kúnta, /Han=kass'o and //Kabbo* (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2004); and Alan James, *the First Bushman's path. Stories, songs and testimonies of the /Xam of the northern Cape* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2001).
34. Bennun, 400.
35. See Sigmund Freud, 'Screen Memories', in The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, III (London: Hogarth Press, 1962).

ideology even as they sought to preserve indigenous knowledges and resisted the most invidious forms of racism. Hollmann reveals the haunting power of the colonial legacy when he writes: 'I use the word "Bushman" only as an adjective, referring to "Bushman people" rather than "Bushmen". In doing so I mean to refer to a unique South African culture, rather than to a means of describing a race of South African people'.[36] The point that the perceived invisibility of the 'Bushman' descendants has arisen 'because they have lost their languages and their ancestry is no longer pure', and the conclusion that '[t]oday, however, South Africa's Bushman descendants have been making themselves heard in a variety of ways, political and cultural',[37] attempt to break with the racist past. Yet the bridging concepts of descent and culture risk transmitting the infrastructure of a discourse demanding critical reflection because of the history in question.

36. Hollmann, 4.
37. Hollmann, 1.

‘Our Book’: A personal reflection on Ray Alexander Simons’ *All my life and all my strength*

PATRICIA VAN DER SPUY
Castleton State College

All My Life and All My Strength: An Autobiography. By RAY ALEXANDER SIMONS, edited by RAYMOND SUTTNER. Johannesburg: STE Publishers, 2005. ISBN 1-9198-5512-2

Ray Alexander Simon’s autobiography *All my life and all my strength* was published weeks after her death. Ray would have died disappointed, as she had desperately wanted to see this book through to publication.[1] But I believe she would have been pleased with the result.[2] Overall, it faithfully reproduces the stories she told me, during our twice-weekly meetings, over more than three years (my task, through the Centre for Popular Memory at the University of Cape Town, was to facilitate the compilation of her life story). These stories, however, may disappoint readers who are looking for a coherent, cohesive discourse on the anti-apartheid movement, or an incisive insider account of ‘notable’ people, policies and politics within the liberation movement. This book is not about the ‘great’ men and women of the movement, although many of these do appear on her pages.[3] Many activists who knew and interacted with Ray and Jack Simons, including the book’s editor, who might expect to find themselves in these pages, will not. Similarly, the Federation of South African Women, of which Ray was a founding member, is given short shrift once she has described her part in the process by which it was established, and the name of Helen Joseph, for instance, receives no attention. One could speculate on the deeper meanings of such silences, but in the final analysis, when Ray looked back over her life, she recalled particular people and moments that she wanted to be acknowledged and remembered. Readers will be introduced to many ‘small’ people whose significance in Ray’s life, and therefore in the struggle itself, is unrecorded, or at best under-recorded, elsewhere. Vanquished adversaries are also remembered, most notably factory bosses and the Special Branch; the latter more often ridiculed than the former who appear as starkly ominous foes. Importantly, Ray manages to infuse humanity into regular policemen, never missing an opportunity to educate people on their rights and the sufferings of others. She also demonstrates how it was both necessary and possible in the pre-apartheid period to work with agents of the state, from Patrick Duncan to ministers Colin Steyn and Walter Madeley.

---

1. The word ‘disappointed’ was a powerful weapon, wielded against both the foes of freedom, and any who did not measure up to her unyielding ethical, ideological, and practical standards.
2. The only editorial intervention which would, I think, have distressed Ray was the decision to edit Jack Simons’ commentary on an article written by Joe Slovo (338).

Iris Berger noted in her introduction, 'This is very much the memoir of an activist' (12). Ray does not enter into discussion of the politics of liberation, whether of the nation, the workers, or women. Rather, readers will find a selection of anecdotes, linked chronologically, that provide unparalleled insight into grassroots activism in the first half of the twentieth century. That the later third of the book does not live up to the promise of the earlier part is due largely to Ray's declining health and memory; we are left with tantalizing nuggets that, had Ray's health held, would have provided the thick description readers will no doubt desire. Berger also wrote, 'Simons's account emphasizes the public and political aspects of her life; nevertheless she intersperses details of her personal life…' (11). Ray Simons was an activist who from the age of four did not distinguish between the personal and the political, one who was intensely devoted to an ideology that was absolutely rooted in real, corporeal people. Her political commitment and ideological framework were developed and played out within her family; one would struggle to find a single example in this book where the personal is not political, and vice versa. Birth, abortion, miscarriage, marriage, death, sex, eating – all are integral to Ray's (and others') activism. Ray is concerned to point out the personal costs of political struggles – her miscarriages, her health and that of Johnny Gomas suffered as a direct result of their politics. The bodily needs of workers – food, shelter, decent living conditions – were crucial to Ray; food plays a central role in many of the anecdotes, from the food her mother prepared when she was in hiding to the buns she organized for striking workers. The political was deeply personal beyond the bounds of family too: Ray's concern for workers was never purely ideological. She was deeply concerned with their living conditions, and with their rights: but while she struggled for all workers' rights, her stories are of particular people: a pregnant worker who needed confinement allowance, another worker suffering sexual harassment by a foreman. Ray was always alert to sexual harassment, and exposed it wherever she found it. Ray's story is one in which it is impossible, absurd even, to try to pick apart the personal from the political. The editor has raised the question of whether Ray was a feminist[4]. To me, the question is absurd.

In a footnote to her introduction, Iris Berger wrote that the text 'has a multi-layered history.' (12, n2). This footnote relates to the production of the book itself, and begs the question of whether it can be read as autobiography. More broadly, it raises questions of authorship within academia, where research assistance is employed. But in this case, there are factors specific to this project which complicate the notion that this book is simply and only, Ray's story.[5] This

3. Chris Hani is a case in point, but although Ray clearly admired him deeply, she does not reflect on him, or their relationship. One finds the same for Thabo Mbeki – a short biographical description, and a note on his perceptiveness must serve to alert readers to Ray's attitude; OR Tambo, similarly, exists as part of a backdrop, essential, but unexplored. In the latter chapters, there are a number of potted one-paragraph biographical summaries of some of the leaders, but one does not gain insight into Ray's relationship with, for example, Moses Mabhida.

4. Raymond Suttner: 'I cannot speak for Ray beyond what is in the book… Any autobiography is one person's version of history. There are things in this book I do not agree with, but I had to be faithful to her story.' Cited in *The Sunday Independent* September 26 2004.

5. Ibid.

book was not only published posthumously, but the author's physical condition prevented her from proof-reading the final version of the manuscript. The editor noted that one of Ray's daughters, Tanya Barben, did read it, and therefore it may be assumed that it is 'authorised' by one member of the family – but not by the author. The editor has taken on the role of public discussion of the book, and he has underlined that he did not agree with everything Ray said, but that it was her story. However, there are editorial interventions: did the author agree with the strategy of including editorial comment or explanation within the text with no clear distinction between her words and his? Was she in a position to disagree? In some cases, a footnote is attached to indicate that the original material has been supplemented by material from elsewhere, but this is not true of the entire text. There is a tension in the text between the authorial voice on the one hand, which is very much an oral voice, with Ray's particular inflections, and on the other, the standard grammar of editorial intervention. The orality of the text is clear, for instance, where Ray addresses her audience directly: 'you can imagine my horror!' (107) – this was spoken to me, as the embodied audience; at moments in the story, there is an intimacy between narrator and listener that is true to the process of compiling this story – at this moment in its development. The changing tone of the piece reflects the changing relationship between Ray and her assistant, and the author's increasing anxiety to complete the text when she could not easily remember the story she wanted to tell – in the text this occurs in the mid-1950s.

The overt editorial presence within the book, which is unusual with auto/biography (who edited Nelson Mandela's autobiography, or Elenor Sisulu's biography of her parents-in-law?), begs the question of who should – or can – speak for the author, or for the book. But I want to push the auto/biography question further, beyond the role of the official editor, to that part of the process that has thusfar been hidden from public scrutiny: the production of the manuscript before it came into his hands. From the book's title to the shape of the manuscript, to the very presence of a viable manuscript – and even to the content itself after Ray suffered concussion – this is the product of more than one person. Where does the author begin and end?

The 'history of the process' was essentially as follows. In footnote 2 of the introduction we read:

> Ray Simons began this work by typing her life story. When she became too weak to continue on her own, the rest of the narrative was recorded and then transcribed. (12)

In fact, the process of compiling the manuscript before it came onto the editor's desk was the work of many hands. Ray Alexander had intended, and attempted, to write her memoirs since the early 1980s, if not before, when she was in exile in Lusaka. In 1998 she began to dictate her early life to a friend, who typed as Ray dictated. However, this accounted for only the first couple of pages of the manuscript. Ray was unable to pay her friend for her assistance, and was concerned that she would not be able to complete the manuscript. Iris Berger was instrumental in raising funding from Ford Foundation for the recording of Ray's

life; the project found a home in the Centre for Popular Memory at the University of Cape Town, and I was employed to facilitate the process. It was therefore not ill health, but a need for funding, that initiated this collaborative project. Thus, from August 1999, Ray and I began to meet on average bi-weekly.

The process was also more complicated than footnote 2 suggests. The story was not 'recorded and then transcribed'. While Ray was well enough, each two to three hour session was recorded, transcribed, reviewed, and part of my job was to collate and compile the manuscript from disparate elements. There was much repetition, much leaping around in time, some comments on tape, some not. The first session began with Ray reading the typed script of her early life, dictating for the tape recorder. However, by the end of that meeting, Ray had begun to speak less formally, from notes. This became the pattern of our sessions: she would note down the topics she wished to cover in advance, and we would discuss the previous meeting's material before beginning the current session's taping. This of course meant that there was a fair amount of 'free association' and disruption of chronology. I was expected to compile a reasonably coherent narrative that made sense chronologically. It is clear from the final product that this was not always successful. Nevertheless, I began to transcribe the tapes, but soon needed to recruit colleagues to assist, and so their ears and eyes and hands became integral to the creation of the manuscript too.[6] I was very clear about my responsibility: to assist Ray to get her story down. This meant developing a relationship of trust in which dictation became conversation, taping or taking notes, researching and taking more notes, transcribing, conferring with others who were transcribing, compiling a manuscript, reviewing it together, reworking it, revisiting it again, going over the important stories, doing whatever I could to reduce Ray's anxiety and achieve our goal. I believe part of the reason Ray and I were able to work together so well was that I had no vested interest in her story; all that mattered was that I should support her in telling it through to the end, to her satisfaction. After a month or so, she relaxed a little, and we began to laugh together. Our changing relationship is reflected in the change of tone in the text: the first few chapters do not address the reader, whereas in later chapters the author draws her reader (or listener) directly into her experience. The later chapters reflect Ray's loss of clarity concerning some of her memories of exile, except having to leave her daughters, and being able to bring her son to Manchester so as to avoid conscription into the South African army. Otherwise, in these late chapters there is something of a retreat from intimacy, until we reach the two memories which never faded: her and Jack's return from exile to South Africa, and her beloved Jack's death.

In December 1999, Ray's story had covered what would be nine chapters: in five months we had taped, transcribed, collated and compiled approximately 250 pages of text. It would take another two and a half years to complete her

---

6. Thanks go to Lindsay Clowes, Jennifer Marot and Claudine Raffray, all of whom struggled to transcribe Ray's unfamiliar accent. Lindsay Clowes also stepped in at a moment's notice when I had to be elsewhere for a few weeks, in 1999.

story from the mid-1950s through to the present: another 100 pages, more or less. During the December holiday, Ray suffered a fall and concussion, which marked the transition from bi-weekly taping to pockets of memory, to very little taping, and research – Ray trusted the *Guardian* and its later incarnations implicitly, and we used that as a key source, both to nudge and to supplement her memories. Over the next few years, there would be days when Ray's memory was sharp, and others where it was clouded. I would compile and we would revisit the manuscript thusfar – I would read it to her, and she would edit it verbally. For this reason, I feel that the earlier part of the book is closer to the story Ray wanted to tell than the later sections. The final photograph reproduced in *All my life* evokes the process as it had developed by 2002.

Ray's most precious possessions traveled with her throughout her life, from Latvia to Cape Town to the UK to Lusaka and back to Cape Town: photographs and documents, both personal and official, that signposted her journey. Beautifully reproduced in the book are some of these photographs; each chapter begins with a poignant image, and glossy photographs are collected in different sections of the book. Some images close to Ray's heart are not there, most notably one of her family at her father's graveside: the first photograph she ever showed me. Other images in the book evoke the writing process, in particular, the final photograph, facing 349, which has the caption 'Ray Alexander at her house in Vredehoek, Cape Town 2002.' On the table before her are the elements of the ritual enacted by us bi-weekly: a jar of honey, a mug, and a dishcloth. Before we began talking, or taping, or reading, or attending to medical matters, my job would be to wash and dry her mug, and then prepare a hot beverage for her, sweetened with honey. Behind Ray are some of her awards and personal photographs, and on the wall a portrait of Jack Simons painted by Gregoire Boonzaier, and a photograph of Comrade Bill Andrews. Ray, then, is framed by two of the key men in her life. An out-of-focus photograph behind her, is of another, her son Johan. Also behind Ray, on the bookshelf, is a pile of papers – unsorted, uncatalogued, but only *seemingly* chaotic, one of many similar piles in her office, each containing nuggets of value to Ray, and a future treasure awaiting her future biographer/s. For most of the time we worked together, Ray knew what each pile represented.

As the days of our working together drew to a close, the story of the death of her beloved Jack dominated every meeting. More than anything, the story needed to be told of Jack's insistence, on the night before he died, that he and Ray repeat their wedding vows. Ray was anxious that the book detail the process of Jack's dying and commemoration. The poignancy of their last hours together after 54 years of mutual devotion is preserved in this book; Ray would not have been disappointed. As an evocation of grassroots activism, the trade union movement in South Africa in the twentieth century, and the indomitable life of a veteran of the liberation struggle against race, class and gender discrimination, this book is invaluable. In my view, as one unashamedly attached to the author and 'our book', I think it should be required reading for South African history classes, including but not exclusive to courses that focus on labor and women's and gender history, to be read as an important primary source.

Public Memory and the English Language: Reading and Re-reading South African Contemporary High Culture

ANITRA NETTLETON
University of the Witwatersrand

History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa. By ANNIE COOMBES. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003, 366 pp. ISBN 0-8223-3072-5 and *South Africa in the Global Imaginary*. Edited by LEON DE KOCK, LOUISE BETHLEHEM and SONJA LADEN. Pretoria and Leiden: University of South Africa Press and Koninklijke Brill NV, 2004. 286 pp. ISBN1-8688-8260-8

Reading the significance of high culture in the no-longer-so-new South Africa is at best a process of contesting partisan politics and at worst a major fight against pre-conceived notions of 'art' as something that is refined to the point that it is beyond the reach of life and politics altogether. Two books published relatively recently raise a number of issues for me as an historian of visual arts and form an anchor to which I can tie a number of problems in response to their readings of contemporary cultural formations in South Africa. I prepared to review the ways in which both books grapple with South Africa's cultural images in the global arena against the background of a museum 'debacle', widely reported in the national press and on a local radio talk-show:

> Outrage has greeted the detention of the management of South Africa's internationally renowned National Museum of Military History, and the confiscation of four armoured vehicles. The debacle threatens to cause South Africa untold international embarrassment...[1]

The incident in question saw the arrest of three members of the Museum of Military History on Thursday 13 January for 'illegal' possession of armoured cars as well as arms and ammunition, some of which had been in the museum since its opening in 1947 by General Jan Smuts. The subsequent public reaction to these arrests and the confiscation of material from the Museum speaks directly to issues raised by the books under review, for it emerged, particularly in talk-show

1. C. Hooper-Box, 'Disbelief at arrests of war museum staff' *The Sunday Independent* 15 January 2005, 3.

responses on the local Radio 702 on the John Robbie and the Tim Modise Shows on the following days, that most South Africans have no idea of the purpose of the Museum at all: one caller suggested that, if the police could raid homes in Soweto for arms, there was no reason why these whites in Parktown should be treated differently. That this attitude can be read as one of crass reductionism, where all is ascribed to racial difference, is troublesome, a view reflected in a number of letters to *The Star* newspaper.[2] It is part of a depressing ignorance about the purpose of museums, one apparently shared not only by the brains at Military Intelligence in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF), but by national government ministers as well. The Military, the national Minister of Arts and Culture, as well as the Director General of his department, appear to have been spooked, according to some sources, by the fact that the museum had in its possession some military hardware 'that worked', including some 'live ammunition', quoted in one newspaper report as being sufficient to flatten Soweto.[3] The military raid went down despite the fact that the SANDF sends more than 30 tour groups to the National, flagship Museum annually, suggesting that someone in the SANDF, at some time, had some idea of the educational value of the museum. Museum staff have since been cautioned not to speak to anyone about the matter.[4]

One of the letters to *The Star*, by Mark Wilkie, a military historian, suggests that this episode will have 'harmed South Africa's image abroad', an alarm reiterated by Mike van Graan in his column in the *Friday* section of *The Mail and Guardian* of the week of 28th January.[5] In the same issue of *The Mail and Guardian* is a preview, by Brenton Maart, of a major (posthumous) retrospective of the work of Dumile Feni at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, an exhibition which has been accompanied by a large amount of hyperbole, from the press-releases to the Executive Mayor of Johannesburg's claim that this is the 'greatest' show ever held in Africa (opening speech 30th January) and that Feni is the 'greatest' 20th century African artist, a title to which there are, of course, many eminent aspirants.[6] At the opening of this exhibition only English was used in the addresses by Steven Sack, Mayor Amos Masondo, Minister Pallo Jordan and others. Only English was used in the labels, and in the titles given to the works by Feni himself. The works themselves were all drawings, coloured drawings, a few watercolour paintings, all on paper, thus all media associated with 'art' in the west, and a few sculptures in bronze, which could claim a more African pedigree in a modernist lineage. In other words, the show and the works were both grounded within the parameters of an international understanding of contemporary Fine Art, expressed in a global, public language.

---

2. M. Marsh 'Poor Intelligence is our big threat', *The Star*, 18 January 2005, 8 and M. Launspach 'Well, we'll all sleep sounder now', *The Star*, 18 January 2005, 8.
3. Hooper-Box, 'Disbelief'.
4. Hooper-Box, 'Disbelief'.
5. M. Wilkie, 'Raid on museum harms SA's image', *The Star* 18 January 2005, 8 and M. van Graan, 'Tanks a Lot', *The Mail and Guardian*, 28 January-3 February 2005, 10
6. B. Maart, 'Hard living the fast life', *The Mail and Guardian*, 28 January-3 February 2005, 4.

The audience comprised a public who are generally, at least minimally, conversant with the niceties of gallery-viewing behaviour; and most participants in conversations on which I eavesdropped, were able to talk about the style of the works, and the power of the draughtsmanship, although it seemed to me that few were able to admit to the humour of some of Feni's images. The general mood was one of sombre seriousness in the face of 'great art'. The public was, in other words, cosmopolitan, significantly racially mixed, educated and aspiring to, if not already inducted into, the serious business of middle class modernity; they are Africa's elite. The way in which the exhibition endorses western ideas about subjectivity and the extraordinary qualities of the individual artist-genius (who is here black, but still male) forms another foil against which to set the arguments made by the authors of the two books under consideration here.

These two books, published on South African cultural formations, Coombes's *History After Apartheid* in 2003, and De Kock, Bethlehem and Laden's *South Africa in the Global Imaginary* in 2004, make for interesting comparison in relation to the ways in which South Africa is represented, or is projected, both to itself and 'out there', by both outsiders and insiders. The etic view from Coombes is primarily concerned with, to borrow a phrase from the book's subtitle 'visual culture and public memory in a democratic South Africa', that is, South African *institutional* visual culture after Apartheid. Coombes discusses many aspects of contemporary debate about culture and identity being written, spoken, acted and visualised within South Africa at present. She concentrates particularly on heritage and representivity as expressed in monuments, museums and, with one exception only, in the case of the visuals from *Loslyf,* fine art practice. She thus crosses a number of the same lines of debate as the authors of the anthology of essays in the second book reviewed here. Edited by De Kock et al, this work traverses aspects of English language and literature studies in South Africa, comprising a largely emic view. The essays consider a large range of material, most of it based in verbal expressions in high or popular literary, but all print, modes, in which 'the image[s] of South Africa within a wider global imaginary is[are] located and explored'. These authors, too, are concerned with issues of identity, particularly the ways in which South African identities are represented in different 'high' literary (and two other rather 'token' popular literary) forms.

What does not come under consideration in the De Kock et al, and in strong contrast to Nuttall's and Michael's *Senses of Culture*, is oral literary forms such as contemporary poetry performance, song lyrics or other forms of popular performance.[7] The genres examined in De Kock et al are thus similar to those Coombes considers in terms of their class bias: both are essentially concerned with the material and literate culture of the educated middle classes in South Africa and beyond, a literate (or aspiring to be literate) culture which is mod-

---

7. S. Nuttall and C.A. Michael (eds.), *Senses of Culture* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 2000).

elled on that of the European bourgeoisie, whose modernity is defined through its stakeholders' individual subjectivity.[8] The centrality of individual subjectivity is stressed by many of the articles in De Kock et al, as they deal with individual writers, and by Coombes, both in her construction of the production of public memory, and in her examination of individual fine artists' agency in their critique of South African society.[9]

Only in one instance is the same (or even similar) subject matter explored in the two books; this not only an index of the extent to which South African cultural studies, like those elsewhere, are confined to particular disciplinary boundaries, but also, and conversely, a result of the notoriety that this particular subject has attained, namely the *Miscast* exhibition (South African National Gallery April 1996).[10] Perhaps embedded in this exhibition was the generic root common to all contests of representation and identity, culture and heritage, imperial, colonial, apartheid, resistance and post-apartheid, in the South African lexicon. It stands at the beginning of the De Kock et al anthology, because, says the editor, it shows how South Africa's 'seamed condition [one in which 'the incommensurate are sutured'] ineluctably came into play the moment an attempt was made to rescue something of the near destroyed culture [of the San]' (22). But I would argue that it is allowed to stand at the beginning of the discourses around identity and language, because of the originary role that San cultures play in South African debates about history and indigeneity.

Both Skotnes's account of *Miscast* in this volume and Coombes's (236-242) interrogation of it in her discussion of South African museums, deal with the problematics of representation and identity within a multi-cultural context, in which the San have been placed beyond the pale of civilization, without land and outside history. Skotnes's curatorial account of *Miscast* as a challenge to the trope of 'Bushman' is much more apologetic than Coombes's outsider critique which sees little or no redemption in the exhibition. Both accounts focus on the question of representation and the concomitant, but now inevitably predictable, quandary of racial and cultural othering is equally pressing for both. Both Coombes and Skotnes write with a politically correct affirmative sentiment, but neither takes on the real issues of power at stake here The contest is rooted in power relations in which curators, and, in the case of San, early ethno-linguists, Bleek and Lloyd (raised by Skotnes as having provided an alternative 'way in' to Bushman/San beliefs and culture) are able to paint their pictures as they please, and in the judgements that are made of these representations in the name of different communities afterwards.[11] The originary status of San culture and easy access to, or

---

8. It has been argued that the space for individual subjectivity has only been available to black South African subjects since the demise of apartheid and the airing of its atrocities through the TRC, ended the need for communal identification of these subjects with the cause. See M. Flockemann, 'Watching Soap Opera' in Nuttall and Michael , *Senses of Culture*,141-154, citing Sfiso Ka Ncube.
9. See for example De Kock, Bethlehem, Crewe, Attwell and Klopper in this volume.
10. Skotnes herself refers to some of this controversy in another article, not dissimilar from the one in the De Kock et al, where she ends by acknowledging the inadequacies of the exhibition as a determinist form of signification. See P. Skotnes 'The politics of Bushman representations', in P.S. Landau and D.D. Kaspin (eds.), *Images and Empires: Visuality in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 253-74.
11. Similar issues are discussed in the essays in M. Szalay, *Der mond als Schuh:Zeichnungen der San. The Moon as Shoe: Drawings of the San* (Zurich: Scheidegger and Spiess, 2004), but in much greater detail. See also Skotnes, 'Politics'.

usage of San culture in South Africa, is evident in the way San imagery has been co-opted as the most neutral, but also the most 'authentic' expression of African identity within out national coat of arms.[12]

Both Coombes, and the essays in the De Kock et al, present a set of critical arguments about representation (imaging here being understood as a form of representation) from the point of view of theoretical paradigms common in contemporary cultural criticism, including postcolonial critique. But it is a set of arguments which, for all its vaunted criticality, retains certain institutions and identities as naturalised, retains ideas about style, about genres, and above, all about who the public is, and about origins which are assumed to be given. Nowhere in the Coombes, for example, is the local, South African, post-apartheid, appropriateness of the museum as a storehouse of inactivated, neutralised artefacts, or cultural agendas, seriously challenged.[13] Although Coombes discusses the issues encountered in political agendas and representivity in museums like the South African Museum, the District Six Museum, the Robben Island Museum and even the eco-Museum at Tswaing, not only is their being simply accepted, the rightness or necessity of their being is endorsed. Their potential audiences are seldom fully discussed: the fact that the 'San' audiences for *Miscast* existed at all was a result of social and political transformation, but that they were not homogenous is something one only gleans from Skotnes's essay in De Kock et al.

The museum as an institution is something peculiarly suited to an economy which values the accumulation of wealth, often in the form of material goods, and in which the public is defined, following Habermas, as a particular class of interrogative, intellectually-equipped individuals.[14] It is this public, literate, but variably visually educated, which is addressed by literature in its many written forms and by museums in their, always similar, formations. It is significant however, that only a small minority of this 'educated' public is even vaguely aware of the kind of artistic intervention in cultural politics and creation of public memory which so interests Coombes and which underpins the critical enquiry at work in the De Kock et al.[15] In assessing strategies of museum display in relation to the South African context Coombes assumes that museums in their present form are a given, that it is simply a matter of changing or challenging what goes on <u>inside</u> them, their modes of display and ideology of representation that will effect trans-

---

12. Ease of access may be ascribed to the lack of significant numbers in San communities with a link to historical art heritages who could mount objections to such usage as the running figures in the South African Olympic team flag, for example, or, even more significantly, in much advertising.
13. Questions around museums and their functions are discussed by numerous authors. Amongst the most useful are those by Pearce. See S.M. Pearce, *Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992) and S.M. Pearce, *On Collecting: An Investigation into Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995).
14. The ways in which Habermas's theory of the public domain interlink with they rise of museums and their publics is explored by T. Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London: Routledge, 1995).
15. For example, issues around heritage are embedded in articles such as those by Attwell, Bethlehem, de Kock, and especially Lewis, both in their interrogation of the use of English and in their interrogation of the use of style. That language remains one of the contested areas in which public communications and histories may be communicated is evident in all areas of South African life. Calling Pietrsburg Pholokwane erases more than just the Apartheid past. Yet, as Gerrit Brand has claimed, Afrikaans and Afrikaners are not going to be erased. See G. Brandt, 'Afrikaans is here to stay', *Mail and Guardian* 18-24 February 2005, 27.

formation.[16] Similarly, in the essays in the De Kock et al, the literary genres discussed; short stories, novels and even the educational comic books are highbrow, they, significantly, exclude or occlude (except as a cross-reference) the comic books and graphic novels read by many; the only truly middle-class popular genre that makes its appearance here is 'black' magazines. There seems to be an assumption even here that changing the modes of writing, working with experimental forms will create a new identity, even while the language and the genres remain embedded within particularly European traditions.

Running throughout this pair of books, and sometimes challenged, is the idea that Africa, or at least 'real' African culture is rural, and in some sense premodern, that the modern is essentially embedded in Western political and social institutions, in Western economics and contemporary technology.[17] But there is today, in South Africa, still a limited understanding and appreciation, among the general public, no matter what their origin or cultural affiliation, of historical African arts, and there is limited taste for exotic, modern, high-brow, metropolitan, and global cultural institutions as was attested by the recent raids on the National Military Museum and the popular response to this. General public ignorance is further exacerbated by the fact that most township, and almost all rural schools, never send scholars on the kind of mandatory museum outings common in Europe and the United States. At the risk of re-stating the obvious, the genres of museum display, of monuments and art production considered by Coombes, all follow precedents set in Western heritage practices, and the genres considered by the authors in the De Kock et al, from novels to psychoanalytic documentary and comic books and magazines are no different. This is, of course, because there is, in fact, no difference, in terms of the genres employed, between the engagements of Africans with cultural modernity, and engagements by others with modernity elsewhere.

Some of the arguments in both books run to an examination of particularly 'African' elements of the stylistic modalities used in these genres in South Africa. But, for example, Laden's attempts (in De Kock et al) to locate contemporary magazines such as *Pace* within a peculiarly, traditionally-based form of public debate in the *Kgotla/khoro,* is based on a backward-looking form of nostalgia which raises numerous difficulties in the translation of 'tradition' into modern institutions.[18] African modernity is based in African history as much as it is in Western modernity, but this does not mean that, to be 'African' this modern identity must always be referred back to a primitivist paradigm, something

16. But, as is made clear by both C. Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London: Routledge, 1995) and M. Bal, *Double Exposures: The Subject of Cultural Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1996) in their analyses of museums as cultural institutions, most of the behaviours expected in museum are deeply embedded in western notions of civilization and art.

17. Something of this sense of modernity is to be found in African attitudes to the realism of the photograph. Historically there were very few African traditions that used realism as a mode of representation, especially not in the visual and performative fields. The impact which photography had on African notions of modernity is encapsulated n the valorization of realism as a mode of presentation. See for example H.S. Mustafa, 'Portraits of Modernity: Fashioning selves in Dakarois popular photography' in Landau and Kaspin *Images and Empires*, 172-192 and C. Bell, O. Enwezor, D. Tilkin and O. Zaya (eds.), *In/sight: African Photographers, 1940 to the Present* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1996).

18. An almost reverse process can be seen in some aspects of popular culture where modernity is incorporated into living traditions and historically-based practices. See J. Charlton, A. Nettleton, and F. Rankin Smith (eds.), *Engaging Modernities: Transformations of the Commonplace* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Art Galleries, 2003) for a discussion of this in relation to African art.

reflected in Pallo Jordan's remarks, made at the opening of the retrospective of Feni's works at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, where he claimed Dumile Feni's Africanness as essentially and importantly modern and contemporary.[19]

This retrospective exhibition, which, while it sadly did not include a large number of large bronze sculptures which Feni made in exile in London and New York, was enormously impressive in terms of the number of works on display.[20] It has led one commentator to suggest that it may lead to a 'different history of African modern art, one that moves away from anecdote and focuses on the development of critical principles of analysis'.[21] However this optimism is somewhat dampened by the show's curator's claiming that, because Feni had not studied art (itself something of a myth), 'his work was not premised on Eurocentric art teaching', and that Feni's work was therefore not able to be critiqued using 'Eurocentric' art principles.[22] The suggestion here is that if something is considered to be African, one would have to use African principles to critique the works, but as these principles have to be distilled from historical traditions it is likely to lead us back to a primitivist discourse.

European Modernism's foundation in primitivism (most famously in the visual arts, but also in some literature) and postmodernism's rejection of the canons of Western tradition in favour of more radical primitivisms, all of which raided non-western iceboxes, to borrow a phrase from Peter Wollen, in some senses stole a march on the visual artists of Africa who now, turning to examine their own historical traditions to create something in the experimentalist mode of contemporary postmodern fine art practice, find that ground colonised by the West and its global expansion.[23] It is impossible to make modern or contemporary art without an awareness of western art principles because they are at the very foundation of all fine art and even all aesthetic practice, however primitivising they may be, and even if an autodidact status is claimed for the artist.[24] It is interesting to note here that Pallo Jordan emphasised, in his opening address, that the artist had, in his time in London, become fascinated by things Japanese, earning him-

---

19. The politics of primitivism pervades twentieth century culture studies in literature, music, drama and fine arts , but its nostalgic force keeps it alive and well in various forms (see D. Root *Cannibal Culture: Art, Appropriation and the Commodification of Difference* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996) and S. Errington *The Death of Authentic Primitive Art and other Tales of Progress* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) for some discussion of this). The big challenge in making new claims to national culture lies in not succumbing to sentimental primitivisms which deny modernity.
20. One of these sculptures *History*, however, is something of a conundrum because it has bee repatriated to South Africa as an 'enlarged version of a work that was in the care of Dr Cyril Khanyile, with whom Dumile lived in Harlem, New York' (E. Maurice, 'Repatriating cultural treasures: Sekoto and Dumile', *Art Talk*, vol. 6, no.1, 2005, 7), and was cast by two other artists – not by Dumile himself. This of course raises issues of authenticity and the ways in which we are inventing our grand traditions of artists.
21. Maart, 'Hard living'.
22. Dube cited in Maart, 'Hard living'
23. P. Wollen, Raiding the Icebox: Reflections on Twentieth- Century Culture (London: Verso, 1993). See also J. Clifford, 'Histories of the tribal and the modern' in J. Clifford (ed.), *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 1988) essay on the politics of the New York MOMA 1984 'Primitivism' show and its further implications
24. This argument is one that should be pitched against attempts by some African scholars who claim that art made by African artists does not have to follow western prescriptions in order to be 'legit' (see S. Ogbechie, 'Contemporary African Art in Western Spaces', H Net List for African Expressive culture. [H-AFRARTS@HNET.MSU.EDU] 09 March 2005). The fact that they make fine art is something that arises out of Africans' contact with Europe via colonialism. What kind of 'art' they make is a direct result of an acceptance *á la* Modernism, that art is universal, but that western fine art is more universal than any other forms.

self the nickname ‘Samurai’ among his fellow exiles. This Japoniste fascination is evident in the forms of stylisation which he developed in London, ones which recall Japanese woodblock prints and calligraphy, although Feni’s marks are constructed to look calligraphic rather than actually being calligraphic. In this usage Feni becomes truly cosmopolitan, a global player in the high art world of borrowing and quotation, a postmodernist.

Feni’s use of Japanese forms does not render him less African, but it does bring into question the notion of ownership of cultural identities. Merrington (in De Kock et al) argues that the adoption of Egyptological signs, symbols and images by the British colonial power, both links that power to the ancient sources of civilization in Egypt, renders them ‘contested motifs of global British imperialism’ and thus removes them from the sphere of the African; which is, of course, why Bernal and Diop have spent so much ink trying to recover them for Africa.[25] In contrast, while Coombes contextualises the Voortrekker Monument and the Robben Island Museum against their political histories within South Africa, and draws parallels between them and museums and memorials in Europe and America, in order to point up both the particular qualities of the South African examples, as well as their place within a global arena of common practice, she does not attempt to claim an historical, peculiarly African quality for them. She rather attempts to define their modern significance as part of a public, national historical consciousness, one which belongs in the realm of the twentieth century and does not allow for a discourse of authenticity to develop.

Similarly, debates about realism as the predominant mode of representation within black South African writing in English in the twentieth century, foregrounded in the a number of articles in the De Kock et al, mask issues, which are fundamentally rooted in questions of ‘authenticity’, behind political and revolutionary imperatives. One of these, as discussed by De Kock, is that political imperatives in the time of Apartheid required, or were perceived to require, that African subjects of colonial powers acquire a modernity which would qualify them for ‘civilised’ status. This modernity was rooted in the epistemological and linguistic apparatus, if not the ontological underpinnings of Western society as offered, first by missionary and, later, by state educational institutions. Such modernity was opposed to the supposed ‘primitiveness’ of ‘authentic’, indigenous African cultures, excluding Egypt, because of its originary status in the construction of a lineage of civilization, as discussed by Merrington. Bethlehem and Attwell debate the imperatives of realism vs modernism in South African ‘black’ novels in English, but their emphasis is on the politics of realism as a tool for revolution versus the perceived irrelevance of modernist or postmodern literary strategies.[26] The politically charged question of these writer’s African identity is again referred backwards to African traditions, but not to African formations of

---

25. M. Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (London: Free Association Books, 1987) and C.A. Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (New York: L Hill Duncan, Carol, 1974).
26. It is interesting to note here that none of these authors takes on the issue of South African ‘black’ theatre in English, where struggle theatre dominates yet realism is eschewed in favour of symbolic and metaphorical structures of dialogue and imaging.

story telling, or history-writing, the form remains the novel, the structure remains Western. It is as though English as the medium of expression demands the novel as its vehicle.

An interesting parallel with this, and one not dealt with in these books, is the polemic in favour of realism/naturalism as *the* formal stylistic means of expression among black artists working in modern genres and media in the colonial and apartheid eras in South Africa. This polemic is reflected in Durant Sihlali's deliberate assumption of a realist mode as a form of documentary, as opposed to Dumile Feni's use of exaggerated distortion for expressive purposes, and Esrom Legae's expressive use of line as a symbolic code, refined fully in his post-Biko drawings.[27] In all these instances, what defines these works, what gives them a particular identity, is their locatedness within particular moments in South African, and, by extension, African colonial history. It is thus ironic that Kruger and Watson-Shariff are unable to locate the stylistic identity of the images used in their educational comic strips within this tendency towards realism. The photo-story books they discuss as well as the graphic comics all fall within the realist paradigm and use its polemic in the construction of didactic images.[28] The authors suggest that the styles of representation in the comic book are important to the question of self-identification with characters and the ways in which recognition is contingent upon context and location.

Attwell raises the irony of the *dislocation* of rural subjectivities of migrants to the cities who were settled in the townships called *'locations'* and the ways in which this located *dis-location* impacted on black South African writing. In both the realist novel and in so-called 'township art' locatedness is signalled through their representation of recognizable subject matter, ie their figuration. In Fine art this (con)figuration is very different from the entirely abstract experimentation undertaken by an artist such as David Koloane and others who came out of the Johannesburg Art Foundation and Tulipammwe workshops, which was severely criticised by those who saw this as a sell-out to an aestheticism inappropriate to the political moment.[29] Realism here is not always social realism in a more or less Soviet or Chinese Communist ideological form, but often resides in those forms of stylised figuration which tie into early, primitivising modernism such as the early works of Kumalo and Legae.[30] Coombes discusses various artists' works as part of her project on public memory, almost totally disregarding realist, and accepting experimentalist, a term suggested by Attwell in preference to modern-

---

27. See E. Rankin, *Images of Metal* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994), 171-2 for a brief discussion of Sihlali's position with regard to the documentary function he felt art had to play during the struggle. His shift to the more abstract forms he was to become celebrated for after 1994 came before the end of the struggle however, as he began to engage with African mural traditions.
28. In all there is a very problematic understanding here of the complexities of the form of narrative visuals involved in the making of the comic and its transformations into art. Comics are part of a much larger discourse of visual and verbal communication and the ways in which they hang together in comics is a function of their history and their being as conventions. For a much fuller and more nuanced account of comics in Africa see N.R. Hunt, 'Tintin and the interruptions of Congolese Comics', in Landau and Kaspin, *Images and Empires,* 90-123.
29. See D. Koloane, 'Story from SA', in C. Deliss (ed.), *Seven Stories About African Art* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1995) and D. Koloane and I. Powell, 'David Koloane and Ivor Powell in conversation' in Deliss *Seven Stories,* 261-265 for a discussion of this issue.
30. See E. Miles, *PollyStreet: The Story of an Art Centre* (Johannesburg: The Ampersand Foundation and Trustees, 2004) for a discussion of the genesis of these forms at the Polly Sreet Art Centre in Johannesburg

ist/modernism, largely postmodern, interventionist installation forms, as something not only appropriate to, but also enabling of, a working through 'taboos and contradictions in a relatively "safe" space...', a safe space generally shared by all artistic forms that address an educated, largely middle-class audience. Attwell's analysis suggests a similar tension between tradition and modernity in his analysis of Njabulo Ndebele's more experimentalist writings. But this form of location is one largely unrecognisable to those uprooted from historical farms and ancestral meeting places in rural areas.

The problems of realism, however, extend far beyond these high culture genres into the world of museums and comic books. Coombes does not anywhere formulate a discussion of the sharp contrast between the kinds of installation and display that she deals with in the book. On one hand there is the kind of verist, detailed realism of the displays created by MuseumAfrika in their reconstruction of individual shacks from squatter camps such as Thokoza and a domestic worker's room from the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. On the other hand, lie the poetic non-realist, completely and clearly re-constructed imagery used by artists like Berni Searle, Tracey Rose and Senzeni Marasela, Coombes, however, appears to have accepted that realism, a realism which requires verism as a form of authenticity, is the necessary, or at least acceptable, mode for museum displays dealing with historical moments, while aesthetic and interrogative modes of intervention are appropriate for visual artists struggling with similar issues. Museums' didactic strategies are thus removed from the realm of the aesthetic, while artists= installations, often in exactly these same museum spaces, are all treated as non-didactic, yet political and aesthetic Yet Coombes outlines very clearly the problems with the verism of the 'Bushman' dioramas at the South African Museum in Cape Town, one of which is surely their lack of any visual aesthetic, of any sense of their own constructedness beyond the interventions made by the staff of the museum in the 1990s. That these displays have no forgrounded *style,* that they pretend to be *true*, and that this is ultimately what distinguished them from later interventions, brings us back to the argument about realism versus modernism/experimentalism in black South African literature in English.

If a truly modernist form of expression requires a self-reflexive subjectivity, then, probably, no realist forms could be considered modernist, in the sense of being experimental, even though they might be modern in the sense of being contemporary. To what extent does this dichotomy rear its head in the case of literature in Afrikaans in the early 20th Century in South Africa? In his essay on Breytenbach's 'treaso' Simon Lewis argues that Breytenbach occupied an ambivalent position in Afrikaans culture, at once the 'torchbearer for the expressive possibilities' of Afrikaans and the 'traitor' to Afrikanerdom. He suggests that Breytenbach's use of English (or a creole version thereof) in *Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* also constituted an act of rejection which 'drove a treacherous wedge into the once monolithic structure of white Afrikanerdom'. This reading depends on an understanding of Afrikaans as a literate language, a 'kultuurtaal', with a language history, such as the account given by Nienaber, taught to students of Afrikaans at South African universities in the 1960s and 1970s, which set this Afrikaans against the supposed creoles, or patois, spoken outside the academy

and beyond the pale of white Afrikaner 'civilization'.[31] It also set Afrikaans up against the colonial lingua franca, English, as a cultural sign worthy of its own monument, the *Taalmonument* in Paarl which commemorates the struggle of white Afrikaners/Boers against English domination, a struggle often claimed to bring black South Africans and Afrikaners closer together than English-speaking South Africans can be to either. Lewis argues that Breytenbach's betrayal is of the *language,* and therefore of the whole cultural edifice of white superiority which it came to represent.[32] But this betrayal is also one in which the realist frame of documentary narrative is, Lewis demonstrates, disrupted by a series of postmodern slippages. In its postmodernist strategy of decentring the canonical Afrikaans language, of both Breytenbach's own, and other progressive Afrikaner writings, Breytenbach's language usage also denotes a break from the imposition of a colonial notion of correct English in favour of an 'authentic' South African polyglot expression. In this sense he also makes a break with the civil imaginary which, De Kock suggests, lies at the base of black South African adoption of English as their preferred medium of expression.

It is, however, precisely this civil imaginary, which has to be questioned because of the very lack of a united civil body in South Africa. English is the lingua franca by default, the lesser of two available colonial evils, and the modernity adopted in the contemporary state is one entirely dependent on western notions of the citizen subject, and therefore one which is dependent on a naturalised and, therefore increasingly suspect, universalising psychoanalysis. It is interesting to note the number of authors in the De Kock et al, who invoke Lacan's schemas of infant development in dealing with the notion of the image and representation, an interest in psychoanalytic theory perhaps generally unusual in South African cultural criticism. But it may be that much of this psychoanalytic discourse is uncomfortable because it makes generalisations about stages of development in human personality without any reference to cultural differences, differences which manifest themselves in local practices of all kinds. Yet, because the narrative, following Todorov, can, by its existence, be seen as implying 'the valorization of its subject and therefore also .... a certain satisfaction on the part of its narrator', the use of Lacanian schemas appears to have some validity.[33]

This issue is discussed by Crewe in his article on Wulf Sachs' *Black Hamlet*, and it is implicit in the arguments in Kruger and Watson-Sharif's article on educational comic books. It is also broached by Klopper's analysis of the 'truth behind the lie' of Winnie Madikizela Mandela's appearance before the TRC, which he characterises as Madikizela Mandela clinging to an 'imaginary characterised by the conflation of the tribal and the revolutionary'. It, in other words refuses the linear narrativity on which all psychoanalytic development is predicated, because it conflates the past with the present, it brings the tribal

---

31. G.S. and P.J. Nienaber, *Die Opkoms van Afrikaans as Kultuurtaal: 'n Oorsig van die Geskiedenis van die Afrikaanse Beweeging* (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1943).
32. It could be argued, though, that Breytenbach's aligning himself with the liberation movement and his time in jail was another means of disrupting the appearance of normalcy that the Afrikaner community assumed about itself. For another view of writing from jail see D. Schalkwyk, 'Writing from Prison' in Nuttall and Michael, *Senses of Culture*, 278-297.
33. T. Todorov, *The Morals of History* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 64.

to the modern, it defies any evolution or development. The imaginary, the civil in Africa, is thus arguably held in suspension between its past tribality and its present ethnicity (hence the eleven official languages of South Africa) and hence its contemporary notions of fragmented community on one hand, and, on the other hand, its present nationhood of individual subjects, all speaking a single lingua franca (English in the case of South Africa and Nigeria, French in Cote d'Ivoire or Senegal, Portuguese in Angola and Mozambique) which is a second language for most of its speakers, but is generally the language of education in state schools. It is also the language with which we communicate to those on the outside.

And this is why Coombes, for all her persuasiveness in individual chapters, appears ultimately not quite to plumb the depths of complexity that is more apparent from the emic view. Because it concentrates on particular case studies it does not really engage with the fuller contexts of politics and the construction of public history and memory in the South African cultural sphere. South African government policy on monuments and the kinds of public monuments being constructed, the vagaries of government policy on museums and the dire underfunding of these institutions, alongside the failure of nerve among many South African museum curators in dealing with the challenges of traditional material, is never broached. Coombes's selection of examples for discussion bears out this criticism quite tellingly. Of the apartheid monuments available for discussion, she selected the Voortrekker Museum, an obviously iconic selection, but instead of the Strijdom Head (now extinct but imaged on the book's cover) in Pretoria, the Shaka memorial in Ulundi could have been used to pose a number of more nuanced questions, including ones about the appropriation of European classicising forms in the representation of the 'noble savage', and the ways in which apartheid sponsored imagery is being used in contestations over ethnic political influence within South Africa. Robben Island Museum offers a prime site for discussing contestations over representation within and between the ex-liberation movements, but this could have been done with a greater acknowledgement of complexity by looking at the Hector Petersen museum in Soweto, in which the dominance of the ANC was to be diminished because it does not fall under their direct sphere of influence.

It is notable that Coombes deals with these institutions as collectives, not looking the individual curators who constitute the powerful voices in their production of knowledge. This is particularly the case with the sections on MuseumAfrika, Robben Island Museum and District Six Museum. But these curators and museum directors are persons with a subjective stance, an agenda often related to party-political (or opposed to them) ideological stance. Their individual voices are not allowed to be heard even though they are often and increasingly engaged in similar activities to those indulged by installation artists. This is particularly problematic given Coombes's early statement that her argument is 'premised on understanding that all memory is unavoidably both borne out of individual subjective experience and shaped by collective consciousness...'. In relation to this it also appears that the choice of fine artists included for their particular ways of dealing with history and memory is based on Coombes's whim

despite the fact that she outlines in some detail her criteria one of which reads as follows

> Their work engages the complications of inhabiting subject positions that are riven with conflictual, inherited histories but out of which they attempt to fashion new subjectivities appropriate for the new nation (245-6).

This and other conditions, such as being evocative of issues arising out of the TRC, could apply to a vast cross-section of South African artists active between 1994 and 2002. For example, Coombes examines Skotnes's part as a curator of *Miscast,* but fails to examine her role as an artist in the recuperation of San histories. A closer investigation of this might have thrown up other questions of representation and the ways in which artists use their individual subject positions to make collective statements. From an inside's view the choice of artists is predictable, they are almost all teachers in or graduates of two or three 'liberal' universities/institutions. It could be argued that the issue in the book is the dissection of the ways in which public memory is re-constructed as history through visual installations, but the view from the midst of the South African art-world is somewhat different from that painted by Coombes.

The De Kock et al can evade the issues of inclusiveness more easily because it does not claim to be comprehensive, but rather to be exploratory. It also rings more bells for those who deal with issues of language and representation on a daily basis. Heritage and public memory are in the hands of individual custodians, and are reflected in a myriad of voices, many of which are lost early, and lamented as in John Matshikiza's eloquent farewell to Phaswane Mpe and Sello Duiker.[34] But this too raises the question of who was chosen to represent and who was represented in the book – neither of these writers, nor other members of their generation were mentioned. There were no African names among the articles' authors – which does not mean that there were no African authors of course, only that the colour of the skins of most authors was white (more accurately pink). All the writers whose works are scrutinised in these articles work in western-derived genres from novels to magazines to educational comics, the poetic forms of Kgafela wa Magogodi were absent.

And this is ultimately an issue that neither of these books deals with overtly, the issue of race and real representivity in the academic debate about South African identity, the imaginary which suggests we are a 'rainbow nation', which is real in the arena of public culture, or pop culture, but is not evident in the reified spheres of the university and the museum. It is increasingly evident in the world of fine arts practice, and possibly in the world of writing, but not in the ways we are constructing public memory in monuments and museums.

These two books will be useful to those of us who teach public culture and arts, they encapsulate many of the arguments that have been circulating in the

---

34. J. Matshikiza, 'To burn so bright and die so young', *The Mail and Guardian* 18-24 February 2005, 28.

academic sphere over the past five years, but they are not new to most of us looking at the large picture from the South. I have the sense that they would not really be new to others in similar situations where no one is Abeyond@ the west, but where we might be one or two steps removed.[35]

To return, then, to the bungled raid on the Military History Museum, the individual curators there were manhandled, arrested, shackled, and handcuffed to their beds in the holding cells. Their work as historians collecting evidence and remnants and relics of the past, the objects of individual and public memory was seriously put at risk because the institution for which they work did not fit into some officials' version of memory and recording. The foreignness of the institution constituted its problematic status. On the other hand the Johannesburg Art Gallery has come into its own since the staging of *The Neglected Tradition* and is the favoured venue for an exhibition of the work of one of South Africa's lost sons, Dumile Feni whose resurrection as an artist genius for future generations is only partly contingent on his having been part of the liberation struggle, although a very peripheral one. It is equally dependant on his having been lionised by the liberal fine-arts public in South Africa prior to his departure, and to his favourable reception as an artist in London and New York which finally bestowed on him the status of 'artist', a term for which there is significantly no equivalent in indigenous African languages.[36]

---

35. See N. Thomas, *Possessions: Indigenous Art / Colonial Culture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999) for discussion of cultural interactions between ex-colonies and the west and for a clearly argued position against the notion that inter-cultural contacts result in standardisation.
36. S. Sack, *The Neglected Tradition: Towards an alternative South African Art History* (Johannesburg: The Johannesburg Art Gallery, 1999).