

Reading Visual Representations of ‘Ndabeni’ in the Public Realms

SIPOKAZI SAMBUMBU

Department of History, University of the Western Cape

This essay outlines and analyses contemporary image representations of Ndabeni (also called kwa-Ndabeni), a location near Cape Town where a group of people became confined between 1901 and 1936 following an outbreak of the bubonic plague in the city. This location was to shape Cape Town’s landscape for a little less than thirty-five years, accommodating people who were forcibly removed from the Cape Town docklands and from District Six. Images representing this place have been produced, archived, recovered, modified, reproduced and circulated in different ways and contexts. Ndabeni has become public knowledge through public visual representations that have been produced across a range of sites in post-apartheid Cape Town. I focus on three sites: the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront, the District Six Museum, and the Eziko Restaurant and Catering School. In each case I analyse the processes through which the Ndabeni images in question have been used and reused over time in changing contexts. I analyse the ‘modalities’ in which these images have been composed, interpreted and employed and in which knowledge has been mediated. I explore the contents and contexts of the storyboards and exhibition panels that purport to represent Ndabeni. Finally, I discuss potential meanings that could be constructed if the images could be read independent of the texts.

Introduction

In 1901, the Cape Town government hastily constructed a location of small corrugated-iron houses, lean-to huts and canvas tents on a state-owned farm called Uitvlugt, which was situated near Maitland. The purpose was to accommodate people who were forcibly removed from the Cape Town docklands and from District Six, following an outbreak of bubonic plague.¹ The location, which became known as Ndabeni or kwa-Ndabeni, being the only official ‘natives location’ in Cape Town at that time, became a highly regulated space. Its inhabitants were constantly monitored and studied by government officials, commissioners and visitors,² ‘armed’ with various items from batons and guns to notebooks and cameras. Photographs were taken and drawings were made, for purposes ranging from illustration of the progress of construction, scale and topography, to documenting living conditions and government intervention programmes. Many of the images that this article

1 The bubonic disease was spread by the rats that came out of the European ships that docked at the Cape Town harbour. Africans who worked and lived at the docklands were the first to be infected and affected, causing a racially coloured moral panic among white people in Cape Town who stigmatised them as diseased and demanded that Africans be removed from the city. For more on the plague and its effects, see M. W Swanson, ‘The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909’, *Journal of African History*, 18(3), 1977, 387-410.

2 Some government officials resided in the location for the duration of their assignments.

analyses were produced during such activities and are here considered as items that have built up the 'colonial archive'.

From the construction of the location in 1901 until its final demolition in 1936, images representing the location were periodically produced, filed or published in newspapers and magazines along with sketchy captions or in detailed reports and articles.³ Some of the newspaper articles that were published with images reported on the manner in which people were evicted, 'marched' and transported from various quarters to the new location.⁴ The emergence of social history in the 1970s and 1980s, and the accelerated public history and heritage ventures of the 1990s, brought about a different kind of use for the images of the location.⁵ While new images and other illustrations such as maps were produced, many of the images that were used in books, articles, films, exhibitions and posters were sourced from archives and libraries. The same images of the early 1900s were revised and used in different contexts. In these new texts and audio-visuals, the location was presented as an embodiment of broader political, social and economic issues such as migration, urbanisation, racial segregation, forced removals, land loss and poverty.⁶

The name Ndabeni was not only 'resurrected' from the archives to grace the academic historical literature, but also began to feature prominently in public histories of Cape Town. By the end of 1994, the 1901 forced removals to Ndabeni were represented in story-boards at the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town, which at that time was the major tourist attraction in the country.⁷ By the end of 2000, Ndabeni had featured in the *Setting Apart* exhibition at the Castle of Good Hope, the *Digging Deeper* exhibition at District Six, the *Langa Histories* exhibition at Guga S'thebe Arts and Cultural Centre, and in story-boards and panels displayed at Langa Museum and Eziko Restaurant and Catering School.⁸ Many of these public representations consisted of images, captions and texts that carried the name Ndabeni.

It also occurred that as meanings, narratives, histories and heritages were constructed with images and the texts, the use of the name Ndabeni sometimes inter-

3 In 1927, the residents of the location were again forcibly removed to Langa Township, a move that was finally completed in 1936 when the last buildings were razed.

4 See for example, *Cape Times*, 12.3.1901, 13.3.1901 and 16.3.1901, *The Graphic* 13.4.1901 and *Cape Argus Weekly* 29.3.1905.

5 For social histories written about the location, see Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome'; C. Saunders, 'Segregation in Cape Town: The Creation of Ndabeni' in *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, vol. 1 (Cape Town: Centre for African Studies, 1978), and N. Barnett, 'Ndabeni 1901-1910: Towards a Social History of the first ten years of Cape Town's first official location' (Unpublished B.A. Hons Thesis, University of Cape Town, 1985).

6 For example, in the film *Ndabeni: The First Forced Removal* produced in 1987 by the Teaching Methods Unit of the Cape Town History Project of the University of Cape Town, the story of Ndabeni was told to illustrate an occurrence that was later repeated in other parts of the country but at varying intervals.

7 See N. Worden, 'Unwrapping History at the Waterfront', *The Public Historian*, 16(2), Spring, 1994; N. Worden and E. van Heyningen, 'Signs of the Times: Tourism and Public History at Cape Town's Victoria and Alfred Waterfront', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 36, 1996, 215-236.

8 The *Setting Apart* exhibition was an installation by Hilton Judin in partnership with Mayibuye Centre and the District Six Museum. For more see T. Morphet, 'Review: Setting Apart. An Installation by Hilton Judin in the Castle, Cape Town' in *Social Dynamics*, 21(1), 141-148; K. J. Goodnow, J. Lohman and J. Bredekamp, *Challenge and Transformation: Museums in Cape Town and Sidney* (Paris: UNESCO, 2006), Chapter 5. For more on the *Digging Deeper* exhibition, see C. Julius, 'Oral history in the exhibitionary strategy of the District Six Museum, Cape Town' (Master's Mini-Thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2007) and C. Julius, 'Digging [D]eeper than the eye approves': Oral histories and their use in the *Digging Deeper* exhibition of the District Six Museum' in *Kronos: Southern African Histories*, 34, Nov. 2008, 106-138. For more on *Langa Histories* exhibition, see L. Dondolo, 'The Construction of Public History and Tourist Destinations in Cape Town's Townships: A Study of Routes, Sites and Heritage' (Master's Mini-thesis, University of the Western Cape, 2002).

ferred with the way the former residents of the place in particular viewed the visual representations. While the name Ndabeni had been used so much in documents that it had become ‘official’, the name kwa-Ndabeni still prevailed in narratives that the former residents and their descendants constructed and communicated by word of mouth. This became more evident during their most nostalgic moments as when images of their long-lost location were being viewed.

What Is in a Name?

Kwa-Ndabeni in Xhosa means the place or the house of the man called Ndabeni.⁹ Ndabeni means where the news, speaking or conversation is. Ndabeni is derived from the root word *ndaba*-, which means news, whereas *-eni* is a suffix that makes the root word representative of a place rather than just a noun. However, the prefix *kwa*- changes *ndabeni* to mean not just a place itself, but that which belongs to the man called Ndabeni. Therefore, the implication of omitting the prefix *kwa*- is that place changes from being the place of Ndabeni the man into being Ndabeni the man himself.¹⁰

In 1902, the location acquired the name Ndabeni through a process that was led by the Reverend Elijah Mdolomba, an influential resident of the location. Ndabeni was the nickname that the residents had given to Walter Stanford, ‘their chief’ in the Native Affairs Department.¹¹ Having been convinced that the name literally meant the place of speaking and conversations, the Prime Minister agreed to incorporate it into the Locations Bill. Nevertheless, the prefixed version kwa-Ndabeni remained the most commonly used among the residents.¹² To them the location was Stanford’s place, a white man’s making which they at that time did not regard as a potential place of permanent residence. Hence when former residents of Ndabeni or their descendants construct memories of the location through images, they generally refer to the place as kwa-Ndabeni rather than Ndabeni. As they do that, they usually do not dispute the use of the name Ndabeni in captions or in the accompanying texts. They recognise the name as the ‘official’ name of the location or as the ‘name used in the books’, but they have a different name for the location.¹³ Thus as narratives and further knowledge are constructed and communicated verbally at the site of the image or somewhere beyond the site, the texts accompanying images become modified. While texts play a role in the way these particular visual representations are read, language and the identities of the viewers have a significant effect too.

9 It would be unusual for the name Ndabeni to be given to a female. The female version would be NoNdabeni or MaNdabeni.

10 For instance Gugulethu, another Xhosa township name, means ‘our pride’, but kwa-Gugulethu would mean the house or place belonging to someone called Gugulethu.

11 See C. Saunders, ‘Segregation in Cape Town: The Creation of Ndabeni’, 56. Stanford had chaired a commission that recommended the establishment of the location in Uitvlugt. He also led a team that constantly investigated the affairs of the location in the early 1900s. The name Ndabeni has a derogatory meaning if used in a context where it refers to the nosy and loud-mouthed one who pries into the affairs of others, and who is always found where news and gossip are.

12 Interview with former residents of the location Phyllis Fuku, 24.9.2009 and Doris Zimemo-Ngobeni, 1.4.2010.

13 The assertion I make here is informed by an interview with Zamide Makupula, a tour guide at Guga S’thebe Arts and Cultural Centre, 10.5.2010.

Ndabeni at the V&A Waterfront

The Victoria and Alfred Waterfront displays in its various public alleys and galleries about 32 story-boards that represent selected aspects of histories of the Cape Town harbour, in ways that seek to link such histories to broader histories of Cape Town. The story-boards were produced and installed between 1992 and 1994 by members of the Cape Town History Project (CTHP), most of whom were social and urban historians based at the University of Cape Town.¹⁴ The team was commissioned by the Victoria and Alfred Waterfront Company (Pty) Ltd to design representations of the past that would address the growing criticisms and concerns that the Waterfront had lost its 'historical fabric', that it was too commercialised to attract tourists and that it did not represent the 'social and political realities of Cape Town and of South Africa'.¹⁵

Driven by a social history agenda to 'recover suppressed pasts' and to represent experiences 'from below', the team from the CTHP sought to use the story-boards to 'bring back people to the heart of Cape Town's history, especially those who [were] conventionally written out of it'.¹⁶ Themes such as industrialisation, migration, racial discrimination, dispossession and forced removal were central to the academic work of the CTHP and subsequently featured in the story-boards created for the Waterfront project. The Waterfront Company and some business operators at the site apparently rejected or replaced some of the story-boards for fear that certain themes and topics could negatively affect business and tourism. However, 'mention of past injustices which have no relation to existing players at the Waterfront were accepted, if not always enthusiastically, as necessary'.¹⁷ Among those that remained was story-board number 23, which represented among other things forced removals to Ndabeni.

Story-board number 23, entitled 'The South African War 1899–1902', is attached to the wall and railings that run between the Wharf Shopping Mall and the harbour. It faces the public walkways and the benches that overlook the harbour and Table Mountain. The board exhibits a collage of five images related to events that took place in Cape Town and at the harbour between 1899 and 1902. The largest of the images is a photograph captioned *Table Bay during the SA War*, followed at the bottom-right corner of the board by a drawing captioned *The Removal of Africans to Ndabeni in February 1901*. The remaining images are photographs of equal size captioned *The Arrival of Lord Kitchener*, *Offloading Military Equipment* and *The Rat Catcher's Cottage*. Together with the images is a text that reads:

14 The CTHP members who took part in the Waterfront project included Vivian Bickford-Smith, Bill Nasson, Elizabeth van Heyningen and Nigel Worden. For more information on the project context and their contribution, see N. Worden and E. van Heyningen, 'Signs of the Times', *Cahiers d'Etudes Africaines*, 36, 1996, 215–236.

15 Worden and Van Heyningen, 'Signs of the Times', 224. On its formation in September 1988, the V & A Waterfront Company (Pty) Ltd undertook projects that sought to restore and conserve the historic harbour buildings as Cape Town's heritage, while also developing the area to promote business, residential tourism, and harbour activities. See also N. Worden, 'Unwrapping History at the Waterfront', *The Public Historian*, 16(2), Spring 1994, 33–50.

16 Worden and Van Heyningen, 'Signs of the Times', 227. Paraphrased. See also *Studies in the History of Cape Town*, Vols. 1–VIII, (Cape Town: UCT Press, 1979–1994).

17 Worden and Van Heyningen, 'Signs of the Times', 227.



Figure 1: Photograph taken by the author at the V&A Waterfront, February 2010.

Across the water you can see the South Arm of Victoria Basin. When war broke out between the British and the Boer republics in 1899 the South Arm was given to the British army for its exclusive use.

For two years the bay was a hive of activity. At times over 200 ships lay outside the harbour.

Harbours import many things. In February 1901 workers on the South Arm noticed rats staggering about in the open. The plague, commonly called Bubonic Plague, had come to Cape Town. It was probably brought by rats in hay imported from the Argentine to feed horses used in the war.

It was a sad time. Dock workers went on strike because they were not allowed to go home to escape the disease. Africans thought to be the main source of the epidemic were forcibly removed from District Six to locations at Ndabeni or the docks.

The British army stopped landing troops in Cape Town. In the end 766 Capetonians fell ill and 371 died from plague.

Here the medley of images and texts achieves one of the CTHP's specific objectives, that of 'placing the history of the Waterfront within the context of the

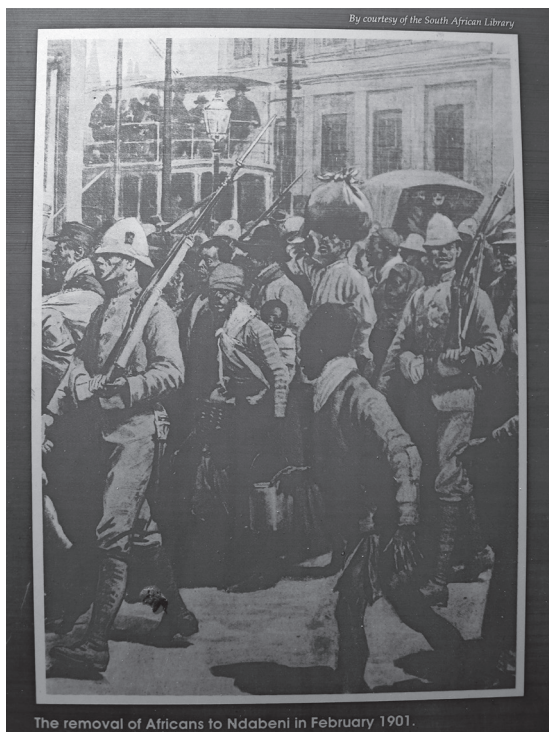


Figure 2: Photograph taken by the author at the V&A Waterfront, February 2010.

larger processes of South African history'.¹⁸ The images in the board have been made to convey meanings that relate to the episodes mentioned in the text. The text here is made into a linear and coherent narrative that coheres with the meanings given to the images. For example, in relation to the bay which the text refers to as 'a hub of activity' with over 200 ships docked at a given stage, there is a photograph of *Table Bay during the SA War*. In relation to the South African War and its impact on Cape Town, there are images of *The Arrival of Lord Kitchener* and *Offloading Military Equipment*. In relation to the rats, the Bubonic Plague and the actions following the outbreak of the epidemic, there is the drawing captioned *The Removal of Africans to Ndabeni February 1901* and the photograph captioned *The Rat Catcher's Cottage*. However, the drawing captioned *The Removal of Africans to Ndabeni February 1901* in particular seeks to achieve another specific objective of the CTHP (see Figure 2 above).

This drawing, according to the context of the text, depicts people being 'removed' or 'marched' by uniformed officials as they are evicted from Cape Town. Those being 'marched' out are 'African' people, while the officials are white people. The 'Africans' are overburdened with the luggage they are carrying with their hands and on their heads, shoulders and backs, while each of the armed officials is carrying a rifle. All the 'marchers', including those who are marching others, appear to be absorbed in the march as they look ahead, while only one uniformed man and one 'African' woman carrying a baby on her back have their faces to the viewer as they stride forward. The woman's facial expression, eyes and posture de-

18 Worden and Van Heyningen, 'Signs of the Times', 227. Paraphrased.

picts anger or terror and panic, while the uniformed man's eyes, facial expression and posture convey a sense of confidence and pride. Overlooking the street on the road-side is a tall building whose top section fills the image with people standing on the balcony, appearing to be watching the march below them.

The drawing highlights certain past injustices against 'Africans' that can be associated with Cape Town's harbour and city. It particularly brings back 'Africans' to the heart of Cape Town's history, especially since the sponsors thought it was important to show 'Africans'.¹⁹ In order to achieve this objective, the frame of the drawing in this particular representation is carefully cropped to include just the 'Africans' as evictees, the uniformed officials as the evictors and those on the balcony as the 'unaffected bystanders'.²⁰ Apart from the text, the image caption as well as the indication that the image was provided by the South African Library, the story-board provides no information about the technological and compositional modalities of the image. The story-board does not identify the painter, the curator of the drawing and the intended audience. In that regard the scope provided by the story-board may not be wide enough to allow the audience beyond the site of the image, into the sites of composition and production of the image and of the representation.

Nonetheless, the board and its contents were designed to 'interest the passing stroller', and to stimulate the audience to construct meanings out of what they see and read.²¹ Images and texts were particularly selected for their potential to stimulate curiosity. While there are a limited number of surviving images representing the 1901 forced removal to Ndabeni, none has had a more exaggerated effect in representing this than the drawing at the V&A Waterfront, which in effect represents a caricatured or stereotyped image of the process.²² Attention to matters such as aesthetics, appeal and exaggeration has provided no guarantees in this case. At the buzzing V&A Waterfront I observed over a few days in August 2010 the responses of numerous visitors to story-board 23. Many walked past the story-board without noticing it. Some looked at it briefly and walked on, while others sat on the bench that faces it and read it.²³ Those who walked past without noticing had their eyes fixed on the surroundings with which the board competed. Such 'distractions' included the performances at the Amphitheatre, the tall and imposing Wharf Mall, the appealing decor of restaurants and their tantalising food displays, people, birds and other harbour activities. Those who browsed and walked on often said that they could 'not make much sense of the contents', or that they 'got a sense that it was about the Anglo-Boer War', or thought it was 'not so interesting'.²⁴ Some might have been put off by the fact that the level at which the board is placed is lower than that of the average eye. The bench that is placed to face the board also caused those not intending to sit, to walk even further away from the board.

19 Worden and Van Heyningen, 'Signs of the Times', 227, 231. Paraphrased.

20 There is a version of the image that includes people that are not included in the version used at the V&A Waterfront. That version was published in *The Graphic*, 13.4.1901. See Figure 3.

21 Worden and Van Heyningen, 'Signs of the Times', 230.

22 Many of the photographs I refer to show the evictees being transported on trains to Uitvlugt.

23 I spent the week of the 1.8.2010 to 6.8.2010 from about 11h00 to 16h00 observing and speaking to visitors and staff at the Waterfront about Story-board Number 23. Anonymity has been respected.

24 Responses by an Italian gentleman with his South African friend, an African gentleman from Mthatha in the Eastern Cape, and a young boy from Singapore who was with his elder brother.

Conversely, those that got to sit on the bench were compelled to look at the board as it blocked their view of the water. The V&A Waterfront staff who sat on the bench to have their lunch on a regular basis described the content as ‘interesting’ or ‘informative’, although few of them offered any detailed comments.²⁵ Some complained that the colour of the drawing that represented the forced removals to Ndabeni had faded, and that without the text it would be difficult to understand the historical relevance of the drawing. ‘I never knew there were Africans in Cape Town in 1901, let alone in this Waterfront. I thought they only came later, well, until I read this thing and saw the photo. But I’ve been wondering, where is this Ndabeni?’²⁶

As I conversed with those that took time to read the board, it became apparent that this was a site of continuous meaning and knowledge construction. It caused the viewers to allow their imaginations to go beyond the frame if they were to make meanings about Ndabeni. It prompted them to share knowledge and to ask questions. It triggered narratives about issues such as injustice and incited people to narrate their individual experiences in relation to general occurrences of injustice. One gentleman ventured to tell me how his family was ‘mistreated’ by the owner of the farm on which they lived near Kimberley. ‘We were evicted in the same way as these people here, I’ll never forget that,’ he said pointing at the drawing representing the forced removals to Ndabeni. Others, including tourists from foreign countries, were already well informed about the history of forced removals in Cape Town although very few knew about the particular removal represented by the drawing. They had read about forced removals and had visited museums engaging with this aspect of South Africa’s history, like the District Six Museum. Such people generally expressed their disapproval of racism and discriminatory political systems like apartheid. They also associated the experience with loss of land and property as well as with a perpetual struggle for survival.

It is interesting to compare the story-board image of Ndabeni at the Waterfront with the original drawing from which it has been cropped. This was a drawing by H.M. Paget. It was published in *The Graphic* of 13 April 1901. The drawing was presented with the following brief article titled *The Plague at Cape Town: Removing Natives from an Insanitary Quarter*:

Owing to the appearance of the plague at the Cape, strong measures had to be taken to render the town as sanitary as possible. In one district of Uitvenge [Uitvlugt] Forest Reserve a proclamation was issued declaring that all natives not provided with official permission to remain were to be removed to the natives’ location. In pursuance of this order preparations were made for the immediate transfer of those intended for a reason to be isolated. Horstley Street [in District Six] being the worst in the neighbourhood, and the most in need of cleansing, its tenants received first attention. Between 800 and 1,000 men, women and children were collected together, and marched under an

25 Many of these were employed in various restaurants at the Waterfront.

26 This African lady from Khayelitsha had never heard of Ndabeni or kwa-Ndabeni before.



Figure 3: Drawing by H.M. Paget, *The Graphic*, 13.4.1901. Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of South Africa.

escort of armed police, a company of the Depot Battalion, and a company of the Town Guard to the Early Morning Market Railway Siding. They were followed by a large crowd, the coloured section of which viewed the proceeding with great disfavour.

The frame of the original drawing (as reproduced in *The Graphic*) included the 'coloured crowd' to which this accompanying text referred. The drawing appears to have sought to depict the event reported in the *Cape Times* of 13 March 1901 when

armed mounted police, a company of Depot battalion and a company of Town Guard, marched residents to the Early Morning Market railway station siding at the Cape Town Station. A large crowd of Coloureds followed objecting to the removal ... The Coloureds jeered and hooted in protest.²⁷

If the original drawing was produced to represent the mid-March 1901 forced removals from Horstley Street, some manoeuvring was necessary to make it represent the forced removals from the docks in February 1901 to which the story-board

²⁷ For more on the response of 'coloured' people to the 1901 forced removals see, N. Barnett, 'Ndabeni 1901-1910: Towards a Social History' and J.V. Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*, (Cape Town: Wits University Press, 1995).

text at the Waterfront alludes.²⁸ Objects that had ‘nothing’ to do with the docks and the harbour were excluded from the frame. The drawing at the Waterfront was then cropped to remove the ‘coloured crowd’ of protesters. Such an excision, however, wrote off the agency of the ‘coloured crowd’ that protested and centred the agency in this particular forced removal on the uniformed men.

Gillian Rose argues that there are three sites through which images are produced or three modalities through which image production can be understood.²⁹ By modalities, Rose refers to the technological, compositional and social modalities which can be employed in understanding the processes taking place at the sites in which images are produced, presented, viewed, modified and reproduced. Understanding the technological and compositional modalities that come into operation at each site involves understanding the actual apparatus, equipment and tools used, as well as their adjustment and positioning to produce images of specific genres and appeals. It is unknown whether Figure 3 here was the original drawing that Paget produced. However, in the case of Figure 2, the drawing became a ‘commodity’, a product of a chain of operations that remain hidden from the ‘consumer’ at the V&A Waterfront. One wonders what would have been the case if those who went through the experience represented here were still alive to engage with such representations, or if their descendants, who possibly have alternative oral historical knowledge of the occurrence, were frequent visitors to the Waterfront.

Ndabeni at the District Six Museum

The District Six Museum in Cape Town also features within its *Digging Deeper* exhibition a visual representation of Ndabeni. The exhibition was the culmination of a series of research projects, meetings, workshops, consultations and exhibitions that began as far back as 1992 and were spearheaded by the District Six Museum Foundation Trust.³⁰ It emerged as the District Six Museum was seeking to achieve a non-racial character and to demonstrate that the District Six heritage project was not a ‘Coloured people’s project’ as critics perceived it.³¹ In its Memorial Hall the District Six Museum exhibits in four colourful story-boards mounted on the wall ‘the story of Ndabeni’ told within ‘The Story of Horstley Street’.³² The board that appears to be specifically ‘dedicated’ to Ndabeni presents a combination of text, photographs and a cartoon, all related to Ndabeni and Horstley Street.

28 Although a possibility that forced removals from the docklands began in February 1901, the Gazette to enforce the removal of Africans from Cape Town was only issued in March 1901. The *Cape Times* began documenting forced removals with the ones that took place between the 12th and the 15th of March 1901. For more information on this, see M. Palse, ‘Forced Removal, District Six: based on articles published in Cape Times’ (Paper produced for the District Six Museum, 1999).

29 See G. Rose, *Visual Methodologies* (London: Sage, 2001).

30 The trustees included Terence Hendricks, Vincent Kolbe, Lucien Le Grange, Les van Breda, Bill Nasson, Irwin Combrinck, Ruth Cookson, Stan Abrahams, Peggy Delpont, Andre Odendaal, Mathokoza Nhlapo, Sid Kannemeyer, Basil van Rensburg, Fenner Kadalie, and Elaine Clark. Many of the trustees were professionals and ‘experts’ in various fields. In 1993 a team of archaeologists led by Martin Hall was also consulted to carry out archaeological excavations on Horstley Street.

31 The District Six Museum was established in 1994. The Museum has since its establishment sought to achieve a non-racial character. For more, see C. Beyers, ‘Land Restitution in District Six, Cape Town: Community, Citizenship and Social Exclusion’ (D Phil. thesis, University of Sussex, 2005), Chapter 2 and C. Soudien, ‘District Six and its Uses in the Non-Racial Discussion’ in Z. Erasmus, ed., *Coloured by History Shaped by Place*, (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2001).

32 Horstley Street is a street in the old District Six in which large numbers of Africans lived as tenants and from which they were evicted in 1901.

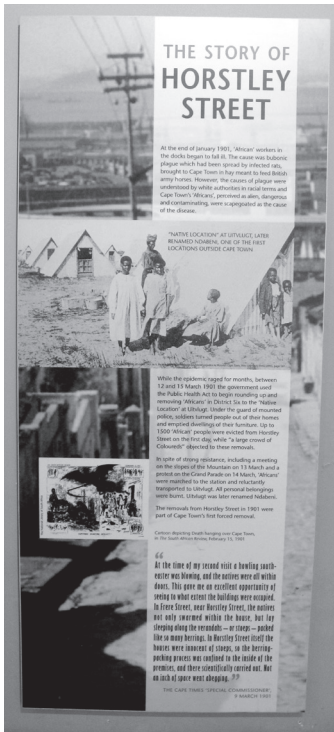


Figure 4: Photograph taken by the author at the District Six Museum, May 2010.

The text, designed to create an illusion of a strip pasted over images, reads:³³

At the end of 1901, ‘African’ workers at the docks began to fall ill. The cause was bubonic plague which had been spread by infected rats, brought to Cape Town with hay meant to feed British army horses. However, the causes of the plague were understood by the authorities in racial terms and Cape Town’s ‘Africans’, perceived as aliens, dangerous and contaminating, were scapegoated as the cause of the disease.

While the epidemic raged for months, between 12–15 March 1901 the government used the Public Health Act to begin rounding up and removing ‘Africans’ in District Six to the ‘Native location’ at Uitvlugt. Under the guard of mounted police, soldiers turned people out of their homes and emptied dwellings of their furniture. Up to 1500 ‘African’ people were evicted from Horstley Street on the first day, while ‘a large crowd of Coloureds’ objected to these removals.

In spite of strong resistance, including a meeting on the slopes of the Mountain on 13 March and a protest on the Grand Parade on 14

33 The content of the text is largely based on E. van Heyningen and A. Malan, ‘Twice Removed: Horstley Street in Cape Town’s District Six, 1865-1982’ (Unpublished paper, 1998), and Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*.

March, 'Africans' were marched to the station and reluctantly transported to Uitvlugt. All personal belongings were burnt. Uitvlugt was later renamed Ndabeni.

The removals from Horstley Street in 1901 were part of Cape Town's first forced removal.

'at the time of my second visit a howling south easter was blowing, and the natives were all within doors. This gave me an excellent opportunity of seeing to what extent the buildings were occupied. In Frere Street, near Horstley Street, the natives not only swarmed within the house but lay sleeping along the verandahs – or stoeps – packed like so many herrings. In Horstley Street itself the houses were innocent of stoeps, so the herring-packing process was confined to the insides of the premises, and there scientifically carried out. Not an inch of space went abegging.'

The Cape Times 'Special Commissioner', 9 March 1901

The design of this board, the text and the images used here are products of a series of modifications that took place over numerous design sessions held between 1999 and 2000.³⁴ For example, the first drafts of the text included lines that were later removed or modified such as:

Horstley Street was the site of both the first and the last forced removals in District Six. First in 1901 an outbreak of plague resulted in its African residents being relocated to Ndabeni. The Street survived apartheid-era removals until the early 1980s.

One photograph has become the sole visual representation of Ndabeni location among many images that passed through all selection stages. This photograph (see Figure 5) is presented with two captions. One provides the source of the photograph while the other identifies the photograph as that of Ndabeni, a 'native location'.³⁵ The photograph depicts people next to a corrugated-iron A-shaped lean-to hut. A woman and four children stand facing the camera while one child sits with her face turned against the camera while facing the woman. Although the people in the photograph appear to be the main focus of the photographer and of the camera, the frame also includes about five other huts in the background.

The text and the photograph here effectively insert 'African' people into the myriad images, texts and artefacts displayed in various parts of the museum, that make no reference to the existence of 'African' people in the 'old District Six'.³⁶ This enlarged photograph, which in its design magnifies six 'African' bodies and

³⁴ See the *Digging Deeper* exhibition drafts, District Six Museum.

³⁵ The source is identified as: *The Graphic*, 13 April 1901, reproduced in Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*, 161.

³⁶ The only exceptions are an installation called *Nomvuyo's Room*, which is a recreation of a room that an African family shared in District Six, as well as a few posters and laminated newspaper cuttings that mention a few celebrated Africans like activists, musicians and sports stars.

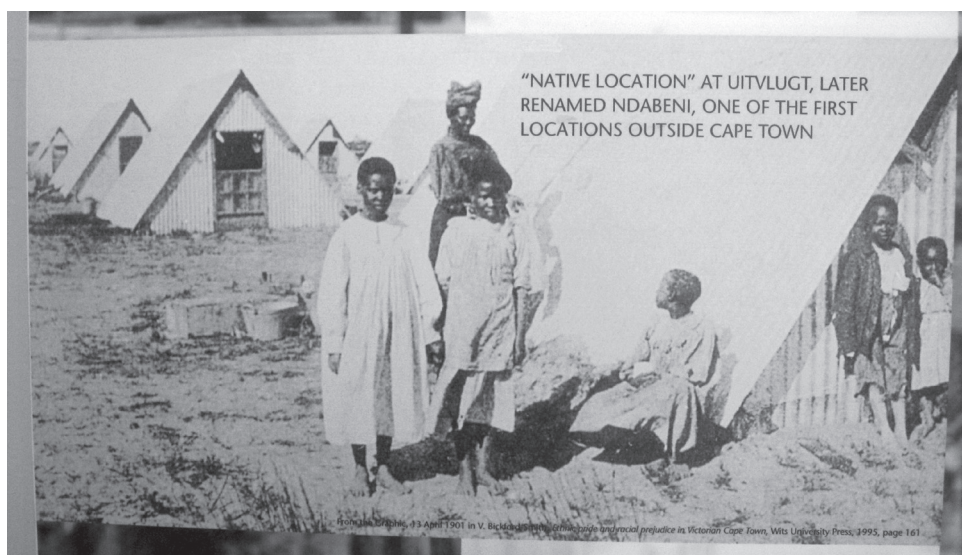


Figure 5: Photograph taken by the author at the District Six Museum, May 2010.

‘breaks the text apart’ in the panel, is conspicuous enough to capture attention (see Figure 5). The text also plays a role in unveiling more about the location than the contents of frame of the photograph depict. According to the text, ‘Ndabeni’ was a product of forced removals following the outbreak of bubonic plague, the forced removals which people resisted although with no success. The text also alludes to the fact that overcrowding in District Six was by 1901 already a matter of concern for the government, particularly in regard to Horstley Street. Studied in conjunction with the text, the photograph therefore becomes an illustration of the conditions under which a people, whose belongings had been burnt, were made to live. By doing this, the photograph also demonstrates the character of the state as the authority that perceived certain groups of people as ‘aliens’, whom it ‘scapegoated’ as the cause of a disease which it had failed to prevent or control.

Nonetheless, the photograph is itself a site on which meanings and knowledge could be constructed regardless of the text. In *The Graphic* of 13 April 1901, no details are provided about the photographer and those photographed, but the photograph still incites imaginations and evokes memories. At face value the photograph has a ‘reality appeal’ that denotes the social conditions of the location. The huts are small and pitched hastily on a rugged and unprepared ground. The woman and the five children could be read as occupants of the small hut that they surround, possibly sharing it with a male figure, the father of the children who is ‘missing’ in the picture. At the same time, the children could belong to two families that share the small hut they surround, thus making the missing people three instead of one (a father, another mother and another father). The image also gives no indication of the availability of food and water sources like fields, gardens, shops, markets, taps, rivers and dams; neither does it indicate the availability of schools and playgrounds for the children. Although the woman and the children are all clothed, none appear to have shoes on, and although they are all gazing back at the photographer, none appear to smile. The photography could therefore be read as a

representation of harsh conditions, poverty and distress. Hence the social historian Bickford-Smith has used it as a social record: an exposé of the ‘appalling conditions in Ndabeni’.³⁷

However, Pierre Bourdieu argues: ‘Only a naive realism sees the photographic representation of reality as realistic; if it appears objective, it is because the rules defining its social use conform to the social definition of objectivity.’³⁸ This looks like a posed photograph, with the possibility of a prior arrangement of objects, technological adjustments and a premeditated positioning of the camera. The people in the photograph could have come from other huts in or out of the photograph, and even from playgrounds or activity sites not included in the photograph. The exclusion of the door of the hut that the people stand and sit next to could have been a deliberate exclusion of other people or other activities taking place around it. The intention could have been to isolate this particular group of six and their lack of activity, placing the children around one woman in order to create an impression of a high birth rate and overpopulation.

John Tagg argues that the nature of photography as a practice, its function and its products depend on the institutions and agents that define and set it to work, and what must be investigated is ‘not the power of the camera but the power of the apparatus of the local state which deploys it [the camera]’.³⁹ In 1901, the year in which this photograph was taken, kwa-Ndabeni was one of the spaces that were under constant surveillance by government in Cape Town. Its population was increasing rapidly and had by the end of 1901 almost doubled its ‘original’ number.⁴⁰ Overpopulation and the deteriorating living conditions in the location were major causes for petitions and boycotts by residents, causing the government to set up a commission to investigate the location. Photographs like this were most probably produced for the purposes of documenting social conditions as well as to make recommendations to the state. The intended audience for these would have been government policy-makers and the citizens exposed to print media, for whom the government sought to validate its actions.

Since the former residents of Ndabeni or their descendants who now live in townships like Langa hardly ever visit the District Six Museum, I took a copy of the photograph to show to some of them.⁴¹ None of ‘my viewers’ recognised the people in the photograph given that they were not yet born in 1901. Those interviewed could not relate to the Ndabeni in the photograph. Two of the women I spoke to commented as follows:

The kwa-Ndabeni I know was not like this, it had changed a lot. In fact I can’t see the places I knew here. Maybe this photo was taken there at the end, by the slaagpan.⁴²

37 Bickford-Smith, *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*, 206.

38 P. Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-brow Art* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), vi.

39 J. Tagg, ‘Evidence, Truth and Order: Photographic Records and the Growth of the State’ in J. Wells, ed., *The Photography Reader* (London: Routledge, 2003), 260.

40 For more, see N. Barnett, ‘Ndabeni 1901-1910: Towards a Social History’.

41 I showed it to two old women, Phyllis Fuku and Doris Zimemo-Ngobeni whom I met separately, each in her home, and alone. I had interviewed them before when I was doing my research for M.A. thesis.

42 Interview with Phyllis Fuku, 26.7.2010.

No. Our house was better than this. I think this was before the houses were raised. Yes, our parents told us that it used to be wet there. There were no floors you know, but not in our time.⁴³

These were instances when a photograph exceeded the ‘constraints of its production’ and challenged the defined ‘way of seeing’.⁴⁴ These women had told me before that kwa-Ndabeni was not a place of poverty like Langa is today. According to them kwa-Ndabeni was a good place. It was not far from the beach. It had good schools, churches and social clubs. They never went hungry because food there was cheap and clothes were cheap too. Contrary to what social historians have written about Ndabeni, there is a romantic perception of the location that surfaces especially when the location is viewed in relation to the present.

There are many factors that affect the meanings people make of the images they encounter and determine the extent to which people fall under the ‘spell’ or the power of visual representations. Age, gender, ‘identity’, ‘culture’, lifestyle, education and exposure to literature and various forms of media can be bases for one’s visual literacy, stimulation and comprehension. ‘Every act of perception itself is an acquired skill and hence a cultural skill. It is this ocular unconscious which both enables and modifies our vision of the world.’⁴⁵ The act of viewing images engages many senses, which collaborate to make meanings out of what is being seen and touched, as well as out of the sounds, smells and tastes that are being remembered. As much as texts and captions can foreground visual representations, senses play a significant role in shaping memories and narratives out of visuals. A sense of affiliation, association or even alienation that becomes triggered as the viewer sees, touches, feels or smells the image can be a pretext for oral history.

Although the women quoted above could not relate to the moment captured by the photograph, it still evoked their memories and stimulated them to tell me more stories about the place. Referring to it as kwa-Ndabeni and not Ndabeni, they even told me stories they had not told me since we first met in 2008 to talk about kwa-Ndabeni. As Elizabeth Edwards suggests: ‘We should consider photographs not as visual history but as a form of oral history’ for they instigate oral responses, initiate storytelling, revive oral traditions and further contemporary expressions.⁴⁶ Thus, as much as images are visual histories, they can also stimulate the further production of histories and heritages, which either confirm the meanings suggested by the images or provide alternative or counter-meanings.

Ndabeni at the Eziko Restaurant and Catering School in Langa

The Eziko Restaurant and Catering School, situated on Washington Street in Langa Township, has also constructed public visual representations of Ndabeni. These are in the form of images and text displayed in a large story-board placed in the

43 Doris Zimemo-Ngobeni, 26.7.2010.

44 See G. Rose, *Visual Methodologies* (London: Sage, 2001), 24.

45 R. Rohde, ‘How we see each other: subjectivity, photography and ethnographic re/vision’ in W. Hartman, J. Silvester and P. Hayes, *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 1998), 190.

46 E. Edwards, ‘Photographs and the Sound of History’ in *Visual Anthropology Review*, 2(1), 37.

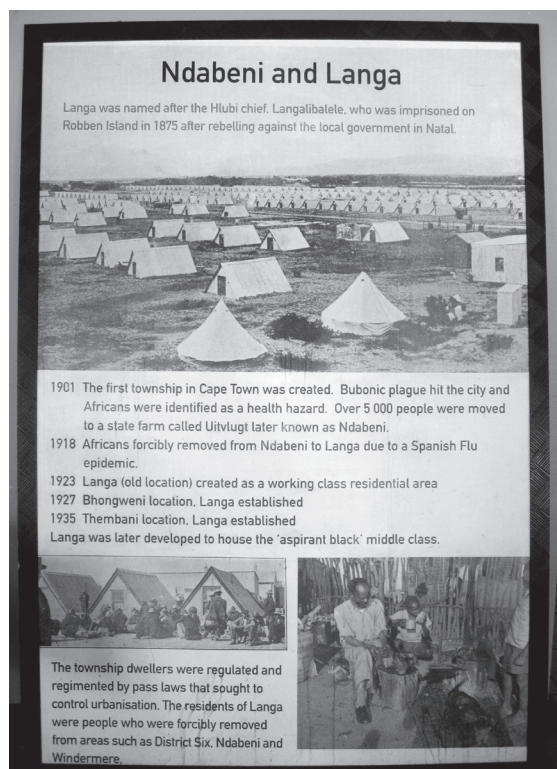


Figure 6: Photograph taken by the author at Eziko Restaurant, April 2010.

main dining hall (see Figure 6). The restaurant is a stop-over for many tour buses that transport droves of tourists in and out of Langa Township on a daily basis. It also runs its own township tours and hosts events such as workshops, meetings, parties and conferences. The story-board titled 'Ndabeni and Langa' is a commissioned installation by Musa, a freelance exhibition designer and curator from Gugulethu township. The owner of the restaurant, Victor Mguqulwa, a former Langa High School history teacher, realised that many people including Langa residents 'were ignorant of the history of African people in Cape Town'.⁴⁷ The story-board was designed to provide a brief explanation of how townships like Langa came into existence and also to hint at the injustices of the past. The content of the board was informed and shaped by the knowledge that the commissioned artist gathered from history books and from the photographic collection of the National Library of South Africa.

The story-board 'Ndabeni' and Langa' presents in images and text knowledge about Uitvlugt or Ndabeni and Langa, while also making reference to forced removals that affected places such as District Six and Windermere. There are three photographs placed alongside the text which reads:

Langa was named after the Hlubi chief Langaibalele who was imprisoned on Robben Island in 1875 after rebelling against the local government in Natal.

47 Interview with Victor Mguqulwa, 18.8.2010.



Figure 7: Ndabeni or Uitvlugt as photographed by T.D. Ravenscroft. Published in *Picturesque South Africa: An Album of Photographic Views* (1901) and reproduced courtesy of the National Library of South Africa.

- 1901 The first township in Cape Town was created. Bubonic plague hit the city and Africans were identified as a health hazard. Over 5 000 people were moved to a state farm called Uitvlugt later known as Ndabeni.
- 1918 Africans forcibly removed from Ndabeni to Langa due to a Spanish flu epidemic.
- 1923 Langa (old location) created as the working class residential area.
- 1927 Bhongweni location, Langa established
- 1935 Thembani Location, Langa established. Langa was later developed to house the 'aspirant black' middle class.

The township dwellers were regulated and regimented by pass laws that sought to control urbanisation. The residents of Langa were people who were forcibly removed from areas such as District Six, Ndabeni and Windermere.

The largest of the images on the story-board is a photograph depicting an array of corrugated iron and canvas lean-to huts, pitched on what appears to be a flat, barren plane (see Figure 6). Except for the rows of huts portrayed here, there are very few people present in the frame of the photograph.

This photograph used here to represent Uitvlugt or Ndabeni was taken by the photographer T.D. Ravenscroft. It was published in *Picturesque South Africa*:



Figure 8: Photograph taken by the author at Eziko Restaurant, April 2010.

An Album of Photographic Views in 1901, with the following caption: ‘The black location, Maitland. All blacks are now compelled to live at Maitland [Ndabeni] where huts have been specially erected for them and all arrangement made for their comfort.’ The meaning that the caption adds here is that the photograph was constructed to profile the location by giving a topographic illustration and a depiction of the quantity and quality of the huts that had just been ‘specially erected’. The text also gives an indication of ‘huts built for comfort’, which may or may not be read from the image, depending on the viewers’ orientation and understanding of comfort.

The photograph at the bottom left of the story-board (see Figure 8) also represents kwa-Ndabeni. It depicts three corrugated-iron lean-to huts around which some twenty-five people, apparently men, stand or sit. The original source of the photograph is unknown but a valuable comparison can be made between this photograph and Figure 9, whose origin is known and whose meaning has been significantly constructed in at least one publication in the past.

At the Eziko Restaurant and Catering School, Figure 8 is employed to represent the settlement of over five thousand people in a ‘state farm called Uitvlugt later known as Ndabeni’, according to the accompanying text. The text creates an impression of serious overcrowding, if one considers that an average farm could barely accommodate 5 000 people in order that they live comfortably. This photograph could corroborate the notion of overcrowding if it is read in the context of the text used at Eziko Restaurant. The manner of congregation of the people in the photograph, as well as the number of huts that the frame includes here, could create an impression of shortage of accommodation and overcrowding. The people are too many for the number of huts included in the frame. They also do not seem to be engaged in any productive work, which could create an impression of unemployment too.⁴⁸

On the other hand, Figure 9 is a photograph that A.H.J. Hosking supplied to the *Cape Argus Weekly* of 29 March 1905. The *Cape Argus Weekly* captioned

48 Not unless their congregation is understood to be a meeting.

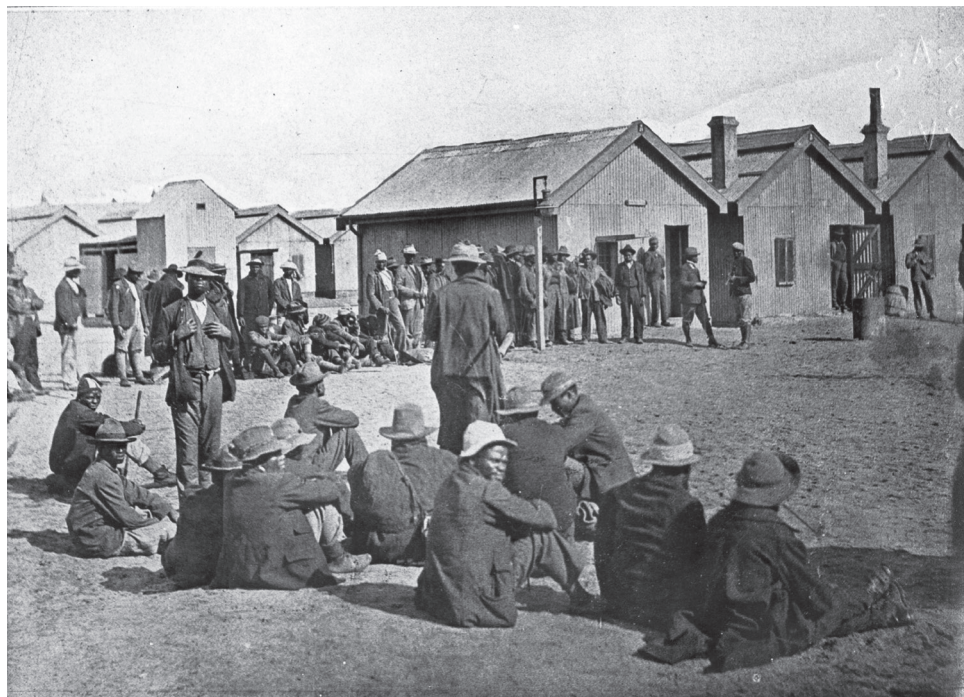


Figure 9: Photograph by A.H.J. Hosking, *Cape Argus Weekly*, 29 March 1905. Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of South Africa.

the photograph 'Native labour for Damaraland' and presented it along with the following text: 'Owing to the dearth of work in Cape Colony large numbers of natives are accepting service for South-West German Africa. Our illustration shows natives being recruited on the Ndabeni location, Maitland for work in the German territories.'⁴⁹

The photograph therefore, by appropriation, depicted a congregation for recruitment purposes. The place at which the men had congregated was a recruitment centre situated at Ndabeni. The men are therefore sitting or standing in a queue. They are not idle, as would be assumed if there was no accompanying text. Since Figures 8 and 9 are similar in composition, they could have been produced by the same photographer, under similar circumstances, or for similar purposes.

Unlike the V&A Waterfront and the District Six Museum representations, the one at Eziko Restaurant and Catering School does not seek to forge any collaboration between the text and the images. The images have no individual captions and are therefore more open to multiple interpretations. Hence the last photograph, which was not taken in Ndabeni, could easily be read to represent the interior of a hut in Ndabeni (see Figure 10).

Figure 10, the last photograph in the story-board represents a congested interior of a room in which a man sits roasting sheep or goat heads on a brazier, with

49 For more on recruitment of workers in the Cape to work in German South West Africa (Namibia) during the German war against the Herero and Nama between 1904 and 1907, see W. Beinart and C. Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890-1930* (London: James Currey, 1986), 185-186 and W. Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 67-68.

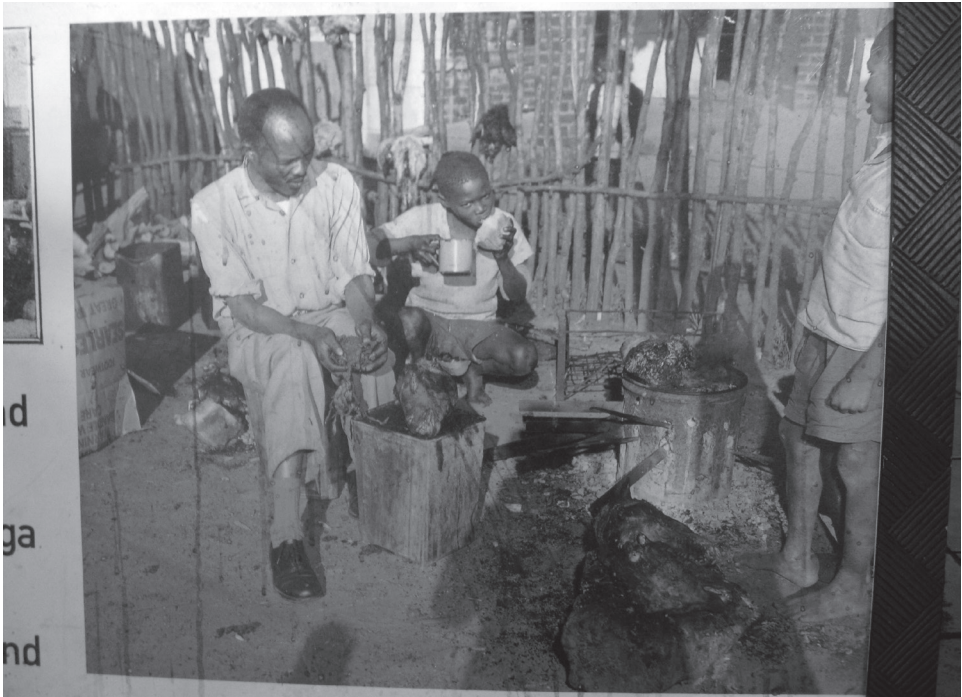


Figure 10: Photograph taken by the author at Eziko Restaurant, April 2010.

two boys around him. One boy sits facing the brazier while eating, and the other boy stands facing the sitting pair. The frame of this photograph has been significantly cropped compared with the original version (see Figure 11), which appeared in the *Cape Times* newspaper on 18 March 1957. The photograph was taken after a fire had consumed sections of Windermere, including 12th Avenue where the photograph was taken.⁵⁰ Although the fire had broken out in the afternoon of 16 March 1957, the *Cape Times* team visited the place to take photographs on the 18th. The two photographs which the *Cape Times* published, including Figure 11, supposedly depicted people ‘salvaging iron from the ruins’ as ‘more than 50 families were left homeless’.⁵¹ The context in which the photograph was published therefore made it represent a state of homelessness and desolation. However, there have been tensions between this use and other readings and uses of the same image, whereby the image has been made to represent a ‘life goes on’ situation.

The 12th Avenue site in Windermere consisted of brick houses as well as corrugated-iron and wood huts. The bricks can be seen showing in the grids between the sticks that fence the area shown in Figure 11. The space portrayed by the photograph is a working space on which sheep or goats heads are roasted for sale in an open meat market which is probably not far from this production space. Such an enterprise could be undertaken by any capable person irrespective of gender

50 Windermere, now Kensington and Fackreton, was a location that had a mixture of brick, wood, and corrugated iron dwellings.

51 *Cape Times*, 18 March 1957.



Figure 11: Photograph from the *Cape Times*, 18 March 1957. Reproduced courtesy of the National Library of South Africa.

and age. At least four animal heads are being roasted, thus indicating a potential income for what appears to be a family in the photograph.

Figure 11, the ‘original’ photograph, features a woman standing in the background. The upper part of her face is cut. This version of the photograph discards the impression of an enclosed space or interior that Figure 10 creates. Instead it creates the impression of a thriving business conducted in an outdoor environment, especially as it shows more sheep heads hanging on the wooden trellis. The apparel and attitude of the people in the photograph also contradict the idea of distress. In fact, Sean Field defines Windermere as a place where these kinds of enterprises thrived.⁵²

The reduced version (Figure 10) was scanned from the book *Lost Communities, Living Memories: Remembering Forced Removals in Cape Town*.⁵³ In the book Field uses the photograph in the context of informal business operations. Here the meaning of the image had changed completely compared with the context of the destruction of people’s homes by fire, described in *Cape Times* on 18 March 1957. In the context of the informal businesses described by Field, the reduced version was more appropriate than the ‘original’ one, given that the reduced version focuses more on the heads being roasted and on the business. Nonetheless, the scope of interpretation of the photograph at Eziko Restaurant remains wide. The photograph was scanned from a particular context in the book, a context which

⁵² He mentions meat and vegetables, beer brewing and *sheeben* businesses. See S. Field, ed., *Lost Communities: Living Memories: Remembering Forced Removals in Cape Town* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2001), 27–44.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 27.

was not necessarily carried over to the story-board at Eziko Restaurant. At the same time Langa Township offers a number of challenges and opportunities. It is a space where 'informal' businesses like open meat markets flourish. It is also a space that was in the past notorious for overcrowded migrant workers' hostels and still has serious shortages of accommodation. The photograph is versatile to insinuate meanings related to all these issues. Though it would be interesting to gather the meanings that township residents make of the photograph, they do not visit the space.

The tourists who visit the space are usually accompanied by tour guides who generally refer to all the images in the board as illustrations of meagre living conditions, suffering and desperation in the townships. This usually takes place after a walking or driving tour of Langa Township. The visual representation therefore becomes a continuation and confirmation of the suffering and struggle narratives delivered to them as they move from one place to another in the entire tour. Thus, when tourists take a closer look particularly at the Windermere photograph, they generally 'see' yet another illustration of suffering. They see people preparing food under primitive and underprivileged conditions. Ndabeni to them remains the epitome of the struggle, which becomes a confirmation of what they may have read, seen or heard through popular, social and other public histories.

Conclusion

I have not yet come across a public visual representation of Ndabeni that has been produced independently of academic historians. In the production processes of all the representations analysed in this article, academic historians have been utilised, either directly as consultants and expert advisers, or indirectly through their writings. The two modalities, text and images, have become inseparable in the cases analysed in this article. Even the story-board at Eziko, which appears to present images that do not cohere much with the text provided, has proven to be a collage of knowledge and images gathered and scanned from books, magazines and newspapers. The text, which in most instances has been drawn from academic writings, has had a major contribution in shaping meanings of these images. Images adopted from newspapers and graphic magazines have in these public spaces been employed in completely different contexts. Through certain transformations including significant cropping of images, meanings have changed significantly and forms of agency have shifted too. At the Eziko Restaurant for instance, an image that was produced to depict loss of property after fire, and that was changed to depict a sense of industry in Field's social history book, has through township tourism become constrained within a genre of overcrowding and poor township conditions.

Examining the representations at the V&A Waterfront, the District Six Museum and Eziko Restaurant and Catering School has made me realise the dominant role played by the written word in shaping the production of visual representations. As the production processes have not freed themselves from the framings proposed by academic historians, the products in the form of story-boards have also not managed to free the images from text. The images were captioned lest the

audience became confused, like the woman at the Waterfront who attested that she could not understand the image without the text. However, it has been interesting to note that separating an image from text provides an opportunity for the image to be viewed and read in ways that do not necessarily cohere with the text. For example, the former residents of Ndabeni could not relate to the 'bad' situation depicted in the photograph shown to them, although the presence of the image still stimulated them to talk about their 'good' kwa-Ndabeni. This article has attempted to highlight and to probe varying modalities through which the 'commodities' used in the representations analysed above can be understood. It has shown how these representations can easily collapse into themes related to loss and suffering, which have been dominant in popular and social histories of forced removals.

However, this study had certain constraints, which had to do with the fact that images were always accompanied by texts in the sites, as well as the fact that 'African' visitors were scarce in the spaces studied. This article has therefore not discussed in detail how alternative meanings could defy tendencies to subordinate images to text, and how images could be read against the backdrop of histories. I do believe that this can be achieved if these images could be allowed to speak for themselves and to facilitate meaning-making in ways that go beyond the mediations by scholarly texts or tour guides.