



“It wasn’t raining when Noah built the ark,” safeguarding and reimagining Africa's scientific and cultural memory at risk

Fiesole Retreat

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Define tomorrow.

UNISA



library &
information services



Roadmap



Cracks in cultural memory preservation



Displaced cultural and historical information



Infinite problems: fire, floods, loss, rapid deterioration, inaccessible



Closing the cracks before the flood



Conclusion and way forward

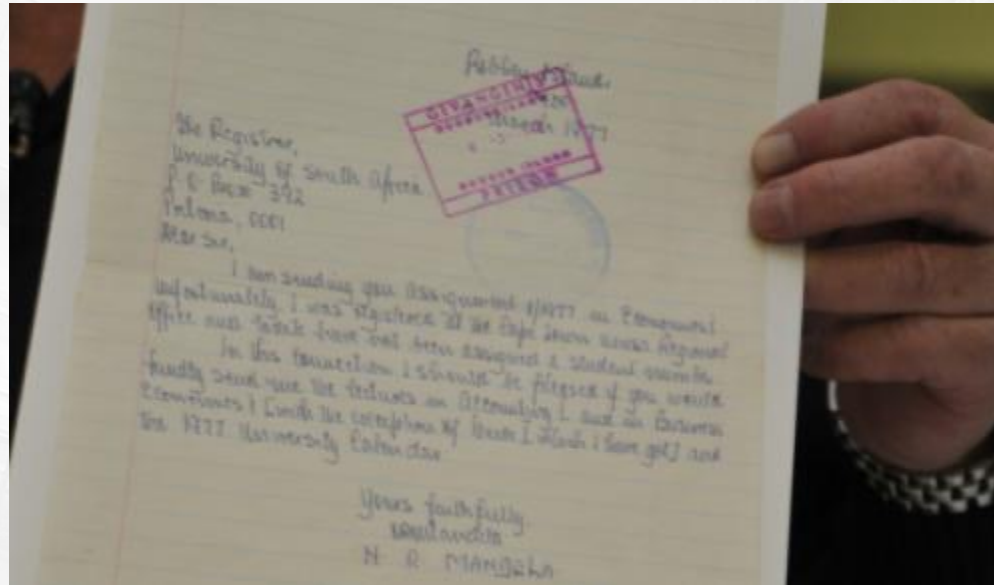
The problem: cracks in cultural memory preservation

- [Displaced memory, diasporisation and repatriation of memory](#)
- Cultural memory in private hands
- Conscious sanitation of memory during apartheid
- Unconscious sanitation of memory in democratic SA
- Implications for sanitation and removal of cultural memory

Cultural memory in individual hands

- Rivonia Trial records – how they ended up in the black market is anybody's guess
 - Nonetheless, the records were returned to SA through the intervention of the Openheimer family and NMF
- Percy Yutar files - had sold his records to the Brenthurst Library
 - The records have since been microfilmed and returned to NARSSA
- The sale of a copy of Freedom Charter in London by Leon Levy, former president of the South African Congress of Trade Unions
 - The Liliesleaf Trust, together with the former UK ambassador to SA bought the document and return it to SA

Letter by President Nelson Mandela



Autopsy of Steve Biko



229. BEKO STEVE: (1946-1977) South African Anti-Apartheid ActMst. Beko, ideologically an African Nationalist and African Socialist, was at the forefront of the grassroots anti-apartheid campaign known as the Black Consciousness Movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. Richard Attenborough's film *Cry Freedom* (1987) was inspired by Biko's life, which was to end in a controversial death in a South African prison hospital at the age of 30. An extremely rare T.L.S., B S Biko, one page, 4to, King William's Town, 29th October 1973, to The Chief Magistrate ('Dear Sir'). Biko writes to his correspondent following a discussion that had taken place that morning and states 'I would like to make a formal application to you to allow me to visit my wife at St. Matthew's Hospital just outside Ketskammahock', further explaining 'There is some very urgent family business which I would like to discuss with her if possible this evening.' Biko adds that if his request is granted he proposes to travel by car in the late afternoon 'and hitch-hike or take a bus back in the morning' and concludes his letter 'For your information my wife is employed as a staff nurse by the said hospital'. Autographs of Biko are of the utmost rarity in any form, not least as a result of his early death and posthumous fame. With four file holes to the left edge, not affecting the text or signature, and a brief ink annotation at the head of the page in an unidentified hand, about EX **£2000 - 3000**

Nantsikelela 'Ntsiki' Mashalaba (1946-) South African Nurse and wife of Biko from 1970 until his death. The couple were married in December 1970 at the Magistrate's Court in King William's Town (to where the present letter is addressed) after Mashalaba had fallen pregnant.

The present letter is written following the South African Government placing a banning order on Biko, which had come into force in March 1973 as a result of the Government's concern that the Black Consciousness movement presented a subversive threat. Under the terms of the banning order Biko was prevented from leaving King William's Town magisterial district and prohibited him from speaking either in public or to more than one person at a time and also banned his membership of political organisations. Biko was to break his banning order in 1977 when he travelled to Cape Town, an action which ultimately led to his arrest and death.

We can find no records of a letter (or any other form of autograph) by Biko ever having

Civil society and cultural memory

- Civil society organisations such as SAHA tested the parameters of PAIA
 - Military records, nuclear records, TRC records and gay & lesbian records
- Building up an archive of material released to the public in terms of PAIA
 - SAHA has a growing collection of materials released under PAIA as they are in a public domain
 - Scanned and digitised
 - Records are exempted from copyright laws
 - Provenance of the records is ensured through cataloguing
 - Access to these records is available to researchers free of charge
 - SAHA offers guidance and assistance to those wishing to make requests for access to records.

Conscious sanitation of memory: TRC Report Vol. 1 Chapter 8

- Former government deliberately and systematically destroyed state documentation
- This process began in 1978, when classified records were routinely destroyed
 - The then prime minister ordered the destruction of classified records of the police, intelligence and defence force.
- 1988 - the bulk of the classified records of the South West Africa (Namibia) were destroyed
- By the 1990s the process was coordinated and sanctioned by the Cabinet
- 1991 – Tape recordings of the meeting between Nelson Mandela and PW Botha destroyed
- 1993 - Cabinet approved guidelines for destruction of sensitive records
- 1995 - a moratorium on the destruction of records was introduced
 - resulted in government departments keeping receipts for everything from toilet paper to food

Unconscious sanitation, e.g., liquid communication

- No control over disposal
 - deleted at users' own discretion
 - when IT instructs them to delete
- No access to corporate knowledge contained in e-mail communications
- Not kept in record-keeping systems
 - legal admissibility
 - evidential weight
- IT approach
 - Blanket cut off after 60/90/120 days
 - Very simplistic
 - Very wrong in the eyes of the law
- Records approach
 - Disposal framework determined by national and provincial archives
 - More cumbersome
 - Subject classification is a pain
 - More precise and specific
 - Records are more discoverable on demand
 - More acceptable in the eyes of the law

Implications of sanitation and removal of cultural memory

- The mass destruction has had a severe impact on SA social memory
 - Any attempt to reconstruct the past must involve the recovery of this memory
- The vast amounts of official documentation, particularly around the inner workings of the state's security apparatus have been obliterated Moreover, the apparent complete destruction of all records confiscated from individuals and organisations by the security branch has removed from SA's heritage a valuable documentation of extra parliamentary opposition to apartheid
- The work of TRC has suffered as a result of wholesale destruction
 - Numerous investigations of gross violations of human rights were severely hampered by the absence of documentation
 - The TRC may have been wrong in some of its conclusions due to lack of documentation
- Ultimately, all South Africans have suffered the consequences, in that the process of reconciliation and healing through a disclosure of the past has been deliberately curtailed
- The loss of digital memory is enormous as not even a sliver of e-record is preserved

Implications of sanitation and removal of cultural memory . . .

- Mozambique's records detailing how the sewage system of that country was laid out were taken by Portugal when the country gained independence.
 - Mozambique is prone to flooding, and the country now has no records to use in detecting where flooding could impact the sewage system.
- Likewise, because Belgium took the colonial-era records of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, formerly Zaire) when the DRC gained independence, the country could not even establish a national archives until 1989.
 - Even now, the Institut National des Archives du Congo has many gaps in its holdings, which has created a huge gap in the country's national memory.

Closing the cracks

- [Replicate the success story of SA and Namibia repatriation](#)
- DSAC should investigate cultural memories that are of historical and cultural significance for SA and might be held elsewhere, e.g. In Italy
 - Location of documentation
 - Bilateral / mutual cultural heritage arrangements
 - Repatriation of archives or surrogates
- Oral history projects
 - Royal Bafokeng Digital Archive
 - Gauteng Provincial Archives project
 - “I want to be remembered as the first black man to receive Springbok colours although I receives the jersey 10 years after it was awarded,” Joseph Leserwane
 - The first black athlete to officially receive Springbok colours was Mathews Batswadi in 1977 and then Titus Mamabolo same year.
- [Murals and rock art paintings as cultural heritage](#)
- [Capturing memories of major events](#)
- Encourage individuals who are in possession of files to sell/donate to the state
- Investment in infrastructure for preservation of cultural heritage
 - Digitisation projects (sustainability is key)

Concluding statement

- It matters because Africa's knowledge system should also contribute to the global system
- Let us build the ark now and not wait for the rain

