STORY CLOTHS AS A COUNTER-ARCHIVE: THE MOGALAKWENA CRAFT ART
DEVELOPMENT FOUNDATION EMBROIDERY PROJECT

by

Dorothea Maria van der Merwe

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Supervisor: Prof K.L. Harris
Co-supervisor: Prof L. Kriel
“to know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women” (Rozsika Parker)
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PREFACE

In South Africa there has been a growing recognition of community craft projects in previously marginalised communities. They are acknowledged for their artistic merit, and for the fact that they serve as a means of economic empowerment for especially black South African women. This study goes beyond this and identifies the embroidered story cloth projects as serving as potential archives for the communities in which they are situated.

The embroidered story cloths produced by the Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation (MCADF) are considered as a relevant practical example of the counter-archival discourse in the archival process. This Foundation is situated in a remote area of the Limpopo Province, South Africa, close to the Botswana border. Founded in 1994 in an effort to alleviate poverty and unemployment in this community, this project has grown into a unique archive, which documents various aspects of the women’s everyday life.

This project encompasses a number of aspects highlighted by the counter-archival discourse. The embroidered story cloths constitute archival sources that previously would not have been considered part of the conventional nineteenth and twentieth century archive as they involve oral tradition and material craft art practices. Furthermore, the choice of subjects documented by the participants of the MCADF project, which include everyday life situations, as well as rituals and rites of passage, moves the focus of history away from the dated “grand narratives of progress” of the Western world to include the voices from outside the political realm. This aligns with elements of the community archive which have an important role to play in terms of democratising the archival record, decentralising the archives as public institution as well as giving previously or currently marginalised people a voice. In this case it is women who, due to their gender, their inability to express themselves in written form and the previous discriminatory political dispensation in South Africa (apartheid), would not have been included in traditional archives.

KEYWORDS

Counter-archive; community archives; embroidered story cloths; oral tradition; material culture; material craft practices; marginalised communities; economic empowerment; colonialism; apartheid; memory studies; gender studies; identity studies.
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>ABBREVIATIONS</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>ANC</td>
<td>African National Congress</td>
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<td>ARV</td>
<td>Anti-Retroviral</td>
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<td>BEE</td>
<td>Black Economic Empowerment</td>
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<td>BMS</td>
<td>Berlin Missionary Society</td>
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<td>CALS</td>
<td>Centre for Applied Legal Studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>DTI</td>
<td>Department of Trade and Industry</td>
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<td>FIFA</td>
<td>Fédération Internationale de Football Association</td>
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<td>GEAR</td>
<td>Growth, Employment and Redistribution</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIV/AIDS</td>
<td>Human Immune Deficiency Virus Infection / Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome</td>
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<td>MCADF</td>
<td>Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation</td>
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<td>MEAA</td>
<td>Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non Government Organisation</td>
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<td>PAC</td>
<td>Pan African Congress</td>
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<td>RDP</td>
<td>Restructuring and Development Program</td>
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<td>SADF</td>
<td>South African Defence Force</td>
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<td>SAHC / Decorex</td>
<td>South African Handmade Collection Décor Exhibition</td>
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<td>TAB</td>
<td>Transvaalse Argiefbewaarplek</td>
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<tr>
<td>TRC</td>
<td>Truth and Reconciliation Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation</td>
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<td>UNISA</td>
<td>University of South African</td>
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<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of American</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>WNC</td>
<td>Women’s National Coalition</td>
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<tr>
<td>ZAR</td>
<td>Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek</td>
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<td>ZCC</td>
<td>Zionist Christian Church</td>
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CHAPTER I
DRAWING THE THREADS TOGETHER

The emergence of a counter-archival discourse over the past few decades has been seen as a direct challenge to the perceived notions of the role and nature of archives in society as well as the historical profession. This challenge has specifically come from postmodernist writers who have started to address archives directly in their writings and whose image of archives has differed substantially from the traditional one the profession had of itself. The questioning of the archival institution, in the wake of the two world wars in particular, comes out of a general questioning of accepted knowledge systems in Western society. In order to counter the dominant historical discourse, postmodern scholars have proposed that the focus be moved away from using the “nation-state [of the Western world] as unit of analysis”, to a history from the “bottom up” that focuses on the complex “diversity of human experience by recovering the marginalized voices”. The latter included women, the working classes and minority ethnic groups who fell outside the ambit of prevalent Western historiography.

Postmodern scholars have turned their attention to the source of information used by professional historians, namely the archives. As the proponents of a counter-archival discourse they are not against the archival profession and neither do they deny the role that archives have to play in society. Rather, they point out that traditional archives do not form a basis for an all-inclusive national history, but rather serve to “reap rewards and tell the tales of imperial interest”. Furthermore, the absences created by the exclusion of certain groups’ memories have not necessarily been neutral nor voluntary.

4 Cook, “Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth”, p. 17.
In order to address the dilemma of locating marginalised voices in archival collections, scholars have turned their attention to the methods and strategies of the production of archives and the social and political conditions that shaped these processes. They have recognised that in order to address the paucity of records on the previously disadvantaged communities, the parameters of what would ordinarily be considered the “historical archive” have to be enlarged to include a variety of sources other than written documents, as well as collections brought together by communities and groups outside the archival discipline.8

Due to the exclusionary practices of colonialism the world over and apartheid in a South African context, it was very difficult, if not impossible, for black South Africans to be part of an “official” remembered past.9 According to Hernandes Roque Ramires to “try to find records and memories of people of colour .... in institutionalized archives is simply a leap of faith bound to encounter historical absence”.10 Therefore, in South Africa, acknowledging the gap in official archival collections and recognising the legitimacy of records created outside the “walls of the archival institution” that challenge the interpretations of mainstream history, is of particular importance in the construction of a national narrative and collective memory.11

In this thesis, the embroidered story cloths produced by the Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation (MCADF) will be used as a practical example of the counter-archival discourse on the archival process. As departure point the presumption will be made that the creation of story cloths can provide a community with a collective memory for potential archiving that could serve as an archive for the community in which they are produced, and more specifically, can be considered an alternative or counter-archive. In other words, this study proposes that story cloths should be considered not merely as creating a collection of embroidered cloths, but as offering a means and a space for previously marginalised groups to establish an archive to preserve their stories and memories. The

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9 Archives at the Crossroads 2007. Open report to the Minister of Arts and Culture from the Archival Conference “National System, Public Interest” held in April 2007 and co-convened by the National Archives, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Constitution of Public Intellectual Life Research Project, p. 10.
content of the story cloths will not be analysed, as the focus of this thesis is to consider the way in which such an archive is brought together. The remainder of this first chapter will briefly outline the adopted research approach and then consider the various threads that the study draws upon: the archival, theoretical, cultural, post-colonial and feminist dimension. They are fundamental aspects necessary to contextualise the MCADF project and its place within the archival domain. They are addressed in separate subsections, but are, to some degree, intertwined.

The director of the Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre, Elbé Coetsee, established the Mogalakwena Research Centre on her property, acting on her strong conviction that research in the region should be encouraged. Prospective researchers have to apply and sign a form outlining the Centre’s Code of Ethics\(^\text{12}\) (See Appendix A). Through this they commit themselves to do research with scholarly integrity and excellence; with social, cultural and ecological sensitivity and responsibility; with respect for the dignity and self-esteem of the individual, for basic human and animal rights, and for the welfare of humans and animals; and with reference to clearly specified standards of conduct and procedures ensuring proper accountability by the researcher. As regards the women’s involvement in this research project, I prepared a letter of informed consent specifically for this study, which was also translated into Sepedi (See Appendix B). Oral interviews were conducted with the help of an interpreter, Sam Moifatswane, who has almost forty years’ experience working at the National Cultural History Museum (now Ditsong Museum) and whose services were retained even after his retirement age was reached. Being from Limpopo province, he is familiar with the dialect of this particular region and has intimate knowledge of the various aspects of these people’s lives. He could, therefore, advise on significant aspects of importance as well as taboos. He has also done fieldwork in this specific area\(^\text{13}\) and has published articles on the cultural practices.\(^\text{14}\) The interviews were held at the Craft Art Centre while the women were carrying on with their daily activities. This not only put them more at ease, but enabled me to observe how they go about making the story cloths, in other words, the actual construction

\(^\text{12}\) Personal information: Dr. E. Coetsee, Director, Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre, 2011-03-07; written information: Dr. E. Coetsee, Director, Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre, 2013-06-18.
process of the story cloth archive. The interviews were of a qualitative nature with the aim to obtain the opinions and views of the MCADF craft artists and to produce a more personalised account of the situation within which they find themselves and lead their daily lives. These were informal, open-ended interviews conducted as “open conversations (unstructured in-depth interviews)”\(^{15}\) and in a group setting. This type of interviewing not only affords the researcher time for personal contact with the respondents, which is a helpful aspect in qualitative data collection, but overcomes the formality of structured individual interviews which may prove intimidating.\(^{16}\) The craft artists of MCADF also indicated that they are more comfortable being interviewed as a group,\(^{17}\) an aspect concurred by Coetsee.\(^{18}\) At the Craft Art Centre the women work in three different groups, determined in part by the type of work that they do, but also by friendships. It is agreed elsewhere that this method gives the researcher the opportunity to observe the group dynamics and to obtain different perspectives, as the same questions were repeated for each group.\(^{19}\)

Kathryn Keim, Marilyn Swanson, Sandra Cann and Altagracia Salinas endorse the usefulness of the focus group format where low literacy\(^ {20}\) and limited knowledge of the language of the focus group, in this case Sepedi, were going to be issues. In conducting ethnographical research amongst rural black South Africans in the same area as the Craft Art Centre, anthropologists Chris Boonzaaier and Loudine Philip also found that in a focus group each participant gets the opportunity to make comments and to respond to the comments by others. They also emphasise the importance of being interviewed in a group context, as it contributes to the “spontaneity with which the participants contributed to the discussions, as the people tended to be reluctant to reveal information when they were interviewed individually.”\(^ {21}\) They further point out that the interviewees expressed their preference to be interviewed in a group context.\(^ {22}\)


\(^{17}\) Personal information: MCADF craft artists, Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre, 2013-01-14.

\(^{18}\) Personal information: Dr. E. Coetsee, 2011-03-06.


\(^{20}\) The term “literacy” is problematic and a discussion on this follows further on in this chapter. In this study terms such as “illiterate”, “low literacy” and “pre-literate” will be used.


\(^{22}\) Boonzaaier and Philip, “Community-based tourism and its potential to improve living conditions”, pp. 28-30.
In addition, a wide range of primary and secondary sources was consulted to establish the historical and theoretical underpinnings and the various academic disciplines that have informed the counter-archival debate. Furthermore, the practical implications of this debate on the archival practice have to be considered. A wide range of sources informed the contextualisation of this embroidery project as an example of the impact of colonialism, segregation and apartheid on black communities in South Africa as well. These sources include academic publications, journal articles, theses, research reports, anthologies and surveys.

Over the past few decades a number of embroidery projects have been established in previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa, focusing specifically on the most marginalised of the marginalised, black South African women. These include the Kaross Workers and Tambani situated in the Limpopo Province; Mapula in the North West Province; Intuthuko Sewing group in Gauteng; Isiphethu in Kwazulul-Natal; the Keiskamma Art Project in the Eastern Cape and the Bethesda Arts Centre situated in Nieu Bethesda.23 Although many of the communities involved enjoy worldwide recognition for their work, as well as economic benefits, there are certain aspects that need to be addressed.

Questions – or concerns – therefore arise as to whether or not these projects, as part of community rehabilitation programmes, have the transformative potential which will benefit the communities in the long term. Proponents of these programmes claim that the benefits go beyond economic empowerment and that the construction of story cloths involves the active participation of a specific community in not only documenting and making accessible the history of their particular group and/or locality on their own terms, but more importantly, in providing them with previously denied participation in the archival process. If this is the case, could these story cloth projects be considered “community archives” which allow communities to exercise some control over the representation and construction of their collective memory? Furthermore, when considering Maurice Halbwachs, the French philosopher and sociologist’s concept of collective memory as an active past that shapes identities in society, could the collective memories housed in these “archives” support the process of identification and identity construction?24

23 These will be considered in Chapter III.
right that has the power to influence and inform society, the contribution that community archives could make to demonstrate “the value of the archive in a social dynamic in which all voices are represented” should also be considered. These would include the previously silenced and marginalised indigenous women, who due to cultural differences, language barriers and a lack of education have not always had the means to communicate. If story cloths do provide a means to add their contribution in the writing of a more inclusive history, could these cloths have the potential to add another perspective to the history of South Africa and possibly democratise the historical record? Lastly, if so, does it imply any agency on the part of these women or are they being co-opted, thereby reiterating their limited options?

Archival thread

The term “traditional archives” that is used to juxtapose archival institutions of the past with emerging trends in archival methodology and theory can be problematic, as the term “traditional” has varied meanings depending on the context in which it is used. In an archival context the term ‘traditional’ is used to denote a “practice of long standing,” “as contrasted with modern or new practices.” Although relative latecomers to the counter-archival debate, archivists agree that traditional archival theory can no longer provide a basis for development in archival practice.

Due to its original purpose and traditional nature as legal and administrative record-keeping repositories, the most common definition of the term “archive” refers to the notion of a “storehouse of juridical evidence, governmental arsenal of administration, or where treasures of imperial conquest could be kept for posterity.” The authenticity and reliability of the records housed in these repositories were therefore considered essential. This in turn directly influenced the nature of archival work and of the archivists employed in these institutions.

30 P. Amad, Counter-archive. Film, the everyday, and Albert Kahn’s Archives de la Planète. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 140.
Tom Nesmith points out that archivists were not seen as authors, which would imply a measure of imagination and personal involvement or intervention, but as “men of letters”. He states that the emphasis on simplicity of archiving and the self-effacement of archivists was indicative of the longstanding assumption in the West that the archives, as a means of communication, was neutral and objective.\footnote{31} It is interesting to note that in the nineteenth century Western world, women’s ability to communicate well, as well as their “punctuality, neatness, precision, dexterity of hand and eye” made that they became to be considered “especially suited for record-keeping duties”.\footnote{32} As possibilities to be educated opened up for women, professions such as journalism, teaching, librarianship and clerical work became feminized.\footnote{33} However, the professionalisation of the historical and archival professions in the late nineteenth century led to the exclusion of women.\footnote{34}

With the rise of the nation state and more representative forms of government in the late nineteenth century, archival holdings became recognised for their cultural or historical value and came to be considered as “national memory banks” that could support informed citizenship. Consequently, archives could provide historians with the necessary sources to construct national histories. In turn, with the democratisation of society, archives as state funded institutions would get new purpose through history.\footnote{35} It is ironic, however, that even though both historiography and the archival institution received a more culturally orientated mandate that stood in contrast with the preceding values of the Enlightenment, the ideal of “objective scientific endeavour” was not discarded.\footnote{36} This was partly due to the professionalisation of archives when a fixed concept of public archives was defined as sites of sober, scientific work that could give complete, objective and neutral information on the history and development of nations.\footnote{37} It was, therefore, maintained that the use of archival material could enable historians to give an objective representation of the past. In the words of the nineteenth century German historian, Leopold von Ranke, “wie es eigentlich gewesen
“- as it actually happened.”38 This concept was in line with the rational and empirical ideals of the time which endeavoured to develop archives as “scientifically organized depositor[ies] for documents”39 where the “application of rigorous techniques concerning the inventory of sources and the criticism of documents”40 could create an “indispensable laboratory of historical research”.41 The collections housed in these “laboratories” would consist of written records only which, unlike human memory, were fixed and therefore less amenable to distortion and were considered as “objective and authentic”.42

Therefore, instead of serving as “heritage places with documentary records that embody historical memory and humanist culture”43 and aligning themselves “with subjectivity or cultural expression, where diverse perspectives or individual variation are acknowledged”44, archivists appropriated a “professional discourse”. This was characterised by an “objective approach and normalized practice, with systems and methodologies that present themselves as value-neutral”.45 Thus, archival institutions became even more burdened with the weight of preserving “authentic” and “legitimate” primary evidence,46 leaving little room for openness, creativity and for the storytelling evoked in the voices of the record creators and users.47

Proponents of an alternative approach to archiving point out that many of the “self-evident” assumptions of the role and place of social institutions, and archives in particular, are in fact “familiar, unchallenged and unconsidered modes of thought”.48 The aim is therefore to be a “challenge to the positivist archive’s sacred myths of order, exhaustiveness, and objective neutrality” and “... its attraction to the everyday fragment as the history of the present, [should stand] in direct contrast to nineteenth-century archives’ dedication to the political

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39 Amad, Counter-archive, p. 145.
40 Amad, Counter-archive, p.146.
41 Amad, Counter-archive, p.145.
43 Cook and Schwartz, “Archives, records, and power”, pp. 173, 181
44 Rowat, “The record and repository as a cultural form of expression”; p. 198.
45 Rowat, “The record and repository as a cultural form of expression”; p. 190.
document as the history of the past.” The objection of supporters of the “archival turn”, or counter-archival criticism, is that archives as institutions of social memory have, for the better part of the twentieth century, been trapped in the nineteenth century idea of the archives as an organ of government and the cornerstone of professional historians’ “craft or ‘science’” where they can engage with quantifiable facts in order to produce scientific reconstructions of the past. This in turn has entrenched the preference for political history and written sources, as opposed to the “history of everyday life” and non-written sources, which according to the counter-archival criticism has led to an incomplete history of humankind being put forward. As a result, they reject the notion that traditional archives serve as national memory banks that could contribute to the construction of representative collective memory and national identity. They call for a history that sees “heterogeneity over purity, diversity over unity, the local over the universal, and popular over elite culture of high art”.

Some sections of the archival profession saw the criticism as nothing more than a left-wing political ideology dressed up in academic respectability, typical of the post-modernists who always tear down, but never build up. It was held that these critics thereby undermined the very foundations of archival practice, namely the authenticity and therefore the credibility of the records in archivists’ care. However, it is important to note, as Paula Amad does in her study of the Albert Kahn photographic archive, that the terms “counter-archive” or “alternative archive” do not imply “anti-archive” in the sense of being against archives as social institutions. The use of the term “counter” is in the sense of “in opposite direction” and conveys the idea of being actively engaged with traditional archives. She explains that these counter-archives develop in conversation with or in resistance to traditional archives in order to provide different or alternative narratives to the dominant historical record. Furthermore, these critics do not propose an overthrow of archival methodology. Rather, they propose that the archival practice be placed within a framework that allows for an understanding of both a

49 Amad, Counter-archive, pp. 4, 14, 17, 21-23.
53 Cook, “Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth”, p. 16.
54 Cook, “Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth”, pp. 15-16.
55 Amad, Counter-archive, pp. 4, 14, 17, 21-23.
technical and a social nature thereof and to situate archival research theory as a scientifically recognised discipline which, at the same time, can address the cultural aspects of human activity.\textsuperscript{56} This, they propose, will enable archives to realise fully their important role in society. Barbara Craig describes this role as follows:

The historical archives of nations and of society's various organizations, both large and small, are among the most consistent of our tangible links to the past. Archives are a form of public memory comprising documents consciously preserved because of their vital links to contemporary experience. The purpose for keeping these materials is to provide the Future with roots in the Past. Memories are as important to society and to its various groups as they are to each of us as individuals. Bereft of a connection to what has gone on before, people soon lose a sense of their unique identity and with it their orientation to the uncertainties of the future. The fundamental importance of a remembered past is a truism acknowledged by psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and, of course, by historians.\textsuperscript{57}

This role of archives is of such urgency that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) issued a Universal Declaration of Archives in 2011 in which archives are defined as “crucial elements in democratic accountability”. This declaration emphasises that access to archives enriches knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens’ rights and enhances quality of life. For that reason the preservation of collective social memory, the memory of individuals and communities, should be considered as an important heritage resource which should be passed on to future generations.\textsuperscript{58}

**Historical thread**

It is however important to note that the emergence of a counter-archival debate is not the first time that the archival institution has come under scrutiny. Some of the first voices for a more inclusive approach in archival work, in terms of subjects and source material, can be directly linked to the changes that occurred in historiography. The aftermath of the French Revolution (1789) and the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815) saw the rise of nation states and of growing nationalism. Instead of the cosmopolitan approach and the ideal that lessons could be learned


from history, as proposed by historians from the Enlightenment, history was now seen as a means to serve the state in creating a national identity and culture and instil a sense of pride and belonging. This was particularly due to the establishment of large nation states that incorporated various ethnic groups which needed to be welded together.\(^59\)

With the Industrial Revolution gathering momentum from the early nineteenth century and events such as the February Revolution of 1848 in which the workers took part en masse, voices from within the historical profession who recognised the disjuncture between archival theory and practice, spoke out in favour of a more inclusive national historiography. Hereby the focus would move away from politics or wars, to the daily lives of ordinary people, culture, religion, literature, art and the economy.\(^60\)

James Wilkinson points out that the role played by nineteenth century cultural historians - such as Jacob Burckhardt, Wilhelm Dilthey and Johan Huizenga who could be considered as the founders of modern cultural history - has also to be taken into account. He proposes that their new approach to cultural history is necessary to fully understand the impact of the so-called “cultural turn” that has taken place in human and social sciences and how this subsequently came to influence the archival discourse.\(^61\) These cultural historians argued that as history was concerned with the diverse forms of human expression and communication, a different methodology to that of the natural sciences was necessary. Their aim was to find new methods of historical analysis that could achieve a similar degree of reliability to that accorded to the natural sciences, as well as the recognition from both history and cultural history of their respective shortcomings.\(^62\) Furthermore, they recognised that the historian’s individual perception and subjectivity played a significant role in the construction of accounts of the past.\(^63\) Historical representation was by nature interpretive, subjective and provisional and the historian at best could only provide a tentative and subjective, as opposed to an


objective reconstruction of the past.\textsuperscript{64} They saw the role of history and of cultural history specifically to demonstrate the “constantly varying shapes and effects in different ages and different lands”\textsuperscript{65} and to understand and find meaning in the “ideas and interest of a whole generation, sometimes in many different societies and to trace their manifestations in the whole fabric of history”.\textsuperscript{66}

Despite the efforts of cultural historians, in the aftermath of the German unification (1871) the role of history was still seen to support nationalism in Europe, as well as the expansion of the colonial empires of these nation states. Therefore historical research returned to the modernist, Rankean approach which viewed history as “primarily a diplomatic and political record of the ‘kings and battles’”\textsuperscript{67} and archival collections continued to support their “traditional” endeavour.\textsuperscript{68} However, a firm foundation had been laid for future scholars to question the notion of archives as being representative of society at large.

The First World War (1914-1918) and the appearance of a more industrial and urbanised society brought about enormous social, economic and cultural changes in the Western world. Many of the technological advancements made during the wars were translated more positively into the development of modes of transport and long range communication systems. As the world literally shrunk, a “growing awareness of other voices, other stories, other narratives, other realities” developed that differed radically from what those in power traditionally held up as the truth.\textsuperscript{69} Between the two world wars one of the most significant schools of thought concerned with the inability of political history to address new questions arising from these changes and with the exclusion of politically marginal groups from mainstream historical accounts, was the French Annales school.\textsuperscript{70} The Annales scholars’ interpretation and theorisation of cultural history have been a key influence on the proponents of the “archival turn”. The aim of the Annales school was to write a “histoire totale” that could encompass values, beliefs and attitudes. Lucien Febvre, one of the founders of the

\textsuperscript{64} Green, \textit{Cultural history}, pp. 14, 19, 64-65.
\textsuperscript{65} Green, \textit{Cultural history}. p. 25.
\textsuperscript{67} Wilkinson, “A choice of fictions”, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{69} Cook, “Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth”, pp. 22-23; Lowenthal, “Archives, heritage, and history”, p. 193.
Annales School, saw human experience as central to historical research and proposed a “histoire humaine”, a type of historical anthropology as a means to include society at large. Together with his colleague Ferdinand Braudel they developed a three-tiered model that introduced the notion that history moves on different planes - the “plurality of social time” to achieve a “total history” and “recapture human life in all its variety”. The long-term economic trends, the “immobile history” such as geography, demography and biology, constitute the first register or tier. The second register encompasses the medium-term economic, political and social forms of societal organisation and the “third level” of historical experience, constitutes the socio-psychological history and the analysis of cultural systems, named mentalités. Through this endeavour they essentially advanced the establishment of a methodology to study everyday life.71

The fact that many of these new subjects of study had been under-represented in or excluded from formal archives lead another early Annales scholar, Marc Bloch, to expand the definition of the historical archive to include non-written documents. This included the “almost infinite variety of historical evidence” since “everything human beings have said or written, everything they have made, everything they touch, can give evidence about them.”72 The work of these historians would lead to a “levelling or inversion of the traditional subject hierarchy that allows the silenced – women, children, criminals, and the ‘lower orders’ in general – now to be centre stage and with them new sources, some freshly discovered, some read with new eyes”.73

The early Annales scholars were therefore very significant in widening the scope of historical research and methodology by advocating an interdisciplinary approach that would allow history to “add to its subjects and methods by borrowing from neighbouring disciplines”. This would then meet the conditions required for the “fullest understanding of social phenomena”. As a result, some historians broadened their range of possible research topics and adopted a “‘bottom-up’ history which [gave] a voice to the ignored, illiterate and disempowered people”74 as opposed to the top-down history of those in power.

71 Amad, Counter-archive, pp. 55, 167.
73 Wilkinson, “A choice of fictions”, p. 82.
The early scholars devoted their attention, for the most part, to the first two registers: the economic and social aspects of the Braudelian model of analysis. Then from the 1960s onwards subsequent generations of Annales historians, such as Le Roy Ladurie, Pierre Renouvin and Jacques Revel moved away from these two tiers and focused more on the third tier with the aim to investigate significant short-term events in history. They referred to this as the “collective mentality that regulates, without their knowing it, the representations and judgements of social subjects”. The fourth generation of Annales historians, led by Roger Chartier, would in turn concentrate on the analysis of the social history of cultural practices. In particular, it would show how these practices and social processes are used by people to communicate meaning, make sense of their world, construct their identities, and define their beliefs and values. Coupled with these developments was a growing distrust in academic circles of the ways in which the past had been represented in Western historical writing and how it had been used to shape national identity. Postmodern scholars in the 1960s and 1970s pointed out that such a modernist interpretation only gave a “truncated view of human nature”.

Although it was only in the 1990s that a sustained debate on the impact of criticism from Annales and postmodernist scholars would be undertaken within the archival domain itself, the Annales school’s influence on the counter-archival debate provided the groundwork on which subsequent scholars could build. According to Revel, the shift to a more cultural approach in the Annales school was not so much the exploration of “a sort of third level of knowledge” as it was “the raising of a new set of questions”. Historians started to take a far more expansive look at society to include all aspects of life and significantly the daily culture of ordinary people. Towards the end of the twentieth century social history with a material base came to the fore. It allowed for “significant historical evidence to include non-written

sources, [and] new media technologies,” that fell outside the traditional archival domain of
written sources, to be considered as valuable sources. 79

The work done by the Annales scholars in terms of levelling or inverting the traditional
subject hierarchy would be further accelerated in the post Second World War era by a group
of younger Marxist historians and from the 1970s onwards by academics from disciplines
other than history, including anthropology, ethnography, geography, philosophy, sociology
and psychology. Scholars from these disciplines started to subject all aspects concerning
archives, including archival institutions, records, collective memory and archives as a social
phenomenon, to a “detailed critique such as it has never before experienced.” 80

If one then looks at the main arguments of the counter-archival discourse, one of the most
profound influences is that from the Marxist school. The Marxist scholars were amongst the
first to critique the focus on cultural homogeneity at the expense of the conflicts and
differences that shape history. These scholars emphasised the need to recognise the
distinctions between “cultures of social classes, cultures of men and women, cultures of
different generations living in the same society” which is in line with the counter-archival call
to recognise the “complexity of human motivation” and the fact that history is “fraught with
strife, obscurity and tragedy”. 81

In the 1970s the work of the English Marxist historian E.P. Thompson on the English
working class would also fuel the interest in the history of culture. Thompson rejected the
metaphor of base or superstructure that dominated earlier Marxist and Annales studies and
turned his focus to the “cultural and moral mediations”. 82 He would consider “the way these
material experiences are handled in cultural ways / terms: embodied in traditions, value-
systems, ideas, and institutional forms”. 83

79 McGill, “Coherence and incoherence in historical studies”, p. 220; Amad, Counter-archive, p. 153; Cook and
Schwartz, “Archives, records, and power”, p. 193; Van Jaarsveld, Westerse Historiografie en
Geskiedenisfilosofie, pp. 84-85.
80 Cook, “Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth”, p. 21; L. Hunt (ed.), The new cultural history,
81 Olick and Robbins, “Social memory studies”, p. 133;
history, p. 2.
82 Hunt (ed.), The new cultural history, pp. 4-5.
83 Hunt (ed.), The new cultural history, pp. 4-5.
Furthermore, Marxists scholars championed the role of the working class and how a study of the lives of these ordinary people could contribute to a better understanding of the past. This “history from below” approach is in line with postmodern scholars who propose the move away from a history from the top, to enable the voices of the previously marginalised to be heard. In South Africa specifically, radical Marxist scholarship from the late 1970s would influence the research undertaken by social historians into the lives of those people marginalised by the colonial and apartheid systems.\textsuperscript{84}

Therefore, building on the work of the Annales and Marxist scholars the counter-archival discourse is summarized by Alana Kumbier in her doctoral study as follows:

Like the narratives they collect and preserve, counter-archives can focus on issues of concern for under-represented communities and can construct alternative realities to those constructed through social institutions of dominant culture. Counter-archives can draw attention to the limits of archival records housed in dominant cultural institutions by collecting materials that represent experiences and populations not documented elsewhere. These archives articulate “alternative realities,” in relation to a dominant culture, and by doing so, recognize that “multiple realities or truths [...] share the same social or philosophical space”. The multiple realities or truths offered by different archives may contradict each other, but in doing so, they open events, experiences, histories to interpretation and investigation that wouldn’t be possible otherwise. .... Traditional archives select materials based on professionally and institutionally defined criteria, whereas counter archives collect material objects, or items that fall into the miscellaneous category when catalogued.\textsuperscript{85}

This view relates to what numerous other studies have also concluded and entails opening up to alternative, often hidden, perspectives to the mainstream historical narrative. This is more democratic as it allows voices from below to be heard\textsuperscript{86} enabling the production of alternative histories or modes of knowledge\textsuperscript{87}, providing alternative ways of dealing with the past and


\textsuperscript{85} Kumbier, “Ephemeral material”, pp. 58-60.


alternative forms of historical documentation and of transmitting historical knowledge\(^88\) and creating alternative and independent spaces of archiving.\(^89\)

In terms of this study a number of aspects highlighted by the counter-archival discourse will be investigated. This entails a move away from the archival process as being research-orientated, focused on the collection of documents and quantifiable facts, to a more community-orientated approach with the aim of enabling neglected voices a space for potential collection of memory. The embroidered story cloths constitute archival sources that previously would not have been considered part of the conventional nineteenth and twentieth century archive as they involve oral tradition and material craft art practices. Furthermore, the choice of subjects recorded by the participants of the MCADF project, as well as in other embroidery projects, which include everyday life situations, as well as rituals and rites of passage, moves the focus of history away from the linear and dated “grand narratives of progress” of the Western world to include the voices from outside the political realm. In this case it is the women who, due to their gender, their inability to express themselves in written form and the previous discriminatory political dispensation in South Africa, would not have been included in traditional archives.

**Theoretical thread**

Apart for postmodernism, post-structuralism was another ideology that would have a profound influence on the development of an encompassing counter-archival theory. Post-structuralism and deconstruction can be seen as the theoretical formulations of postmodernism. Post-structuralism departed from the claims to objectivity and comprehensiveness made by structuralism and emphasized instead plurality and deferral of meaning, rejecting the fixed binary oppositions of structuralism and the validity of authorial authority. A post-structuralist approach argues that to understand an object (in this case an archival institution or collection), it is necessary to study both the object itself and the systems of knowledge that produced the object, as these systems are subject to historical and

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cultural conditioning. In the post Second World War era the French philosophers and post-structuralists Jacques Derrida and Michael Foucault would specifically challenge the notion of the archives as resistant to change, corruptibility and manipulation and as an unproblematic and neutral means of access to objective representations of reality and the implications thereof. Derrida emphasised that far from being simple, stable and uncontested, as proposed by positivist scholars, the word “archives” is the least reliable and the least clear. Using as a point of departure Halbwachs’s observations that remembering and forgetting cannot be properly understood without taking into account the “social functions they fulfil and cultural web in which they are integrated”, Derrida and Foucault, as well as other counter-archival scholars, point out that the selection and interpretation of sources are always “arbitrary”. Foucault used the concept of episteme to explain how a culture obtains and organises knowledge in a specific period of history. The episteme binds all detached discourses (religious, scientific, historical, etc.) in a coherent structure built on a set of shared assumptions deeply entrenched in the human consciousness, a consciousness which forms part of the archivist’s frame of reference.

Rather than merely reflecting reality, the archival process or archivisation influences the making of records which convey what we take to be reality, or according to Derrida, help “produce the event”. Although archival appraisal is described as offering “comprehensive evidence of societal actions and conditions”, the selection and interpretation of sources are inevitably arbitrary. Contrary to the conventional or traditional idea that archivists play a passive, incidental and self-effacing role and simply document or mirror the world around the archives in a neutral, inconspicuous and factual way, archivists are seen as key mediators

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95 Derrida used the term archivization, namely the consigning or inscribing of a trace in some external location or space outside. An archives is public because it is located and cannot be kept inside self, because then not an archive. (E. Ketelaar, “Tacit narratives: The meanings of archives”, Archival Science, 1, 2001, pp. 131-133; Nesmith, “Seeing archives”, p. 30.)
who actively co-create and shape the knowledge available in records, and thus help to form society’s memory.\textsuperscript{96} In her study of record-keeping in modern organizational culture, Ciaran Trace concurs with other counter-archival scholars who positioned record production and maintenance as human activities and not a scientific endeavour.\textsuperscript{97} As archivists contextualise their records and work, their personal backgrounds and social affiliations, and their professional norms, self-understanding, and public standing, shape and are shaped by their participation in this process. As they selectively interpret their experience of it, archivists help fashion formative contexts for their work, which influence their understanding of recorded communication and position particular archives to do particular things. This contextualizing of records and roles subtly directs their principal goals and functions. It governs their selection of archival material; determines how they describe or represent it to make it intelligible and accessible; prompts their commitment to its indefinite retention and the special measures they take to preserve it over the long term... \textsuperscript{98}

In line with this Foucault therefore saw archival records not as “natural, organic, innocent residue of disinterested administrative transactions, but value-laden instruments of power”.\textsuperscript{99} He maintained that archives had become the yardstick of what could and could not be said, creating “conditions and vocabularies that allow us to name and participate in the current moment”, “the main criteria by which we judge, map and justify our interactions”.\textsuperscript{100} Archival records therefore have influence over the direction of historical scholarship which, in turn, impacts on the construction of a collective memory and national identity. Far from being representative of all members of society, a national identity is a negotiation between what is known of past and present political agendas and “the societal processes of remembering and forgetting, inclusion and exclusion”.\textsuperscript{101}


\textsuperscript{97} Trace, “What is recorded is never simply ‘what happened’”, pp. 139-155.


\textsuperscript{99} Nesmith, “Seeing archives”, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{100} N. Holm, “Forget capitalism. Everyday life as the archive of capitalism”, p. 7.

\textsuperscript{101} S. McKemmish, A. Gilliland-Swateland and E. Ketelaar, “Communities of memory’ Pluralising archival research and education agendas”, \textit{Archives and Manuscripts}, 33, May 2005, p. 147.
Throughout history information institutions have wielded the power to shape the accepted definitions of collective identity and memory. Archives are foremost among these institutions as they have been considered as: "vehicles of communication and interaction; facilitators of decision-making and continuity; repositories of experience and accountability; and evidence of identity, rights and obligations". As a result they are perceived traditionally as providing stability and social cohesion, and have attained positions of prominence and authority.

Derrida traced the term “archives” back to its Greek and Latin roots. The term archon or magistrate and archivuum or residence of the magistrate points to the original purpose and nature of archives as “storehouses of juridical and administrative evidence”. Therefore, from their earliest establishment these institutions have been political sites of contested memory and knowledge. Rather than being objective raw material, archival documents express the past (or present) society’s power over memory and therefore over the future. Both Derrida and Foucault recognised that the control of the archive is at the heart of political power.

In his study of the role of archives in colonial empires, Tony Ballantyne points out that the status and power of the archives, especially in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, were produced and reinforced by an entanglement of buildings and documents. In other words, the physical space in which the archives have been situated play a definite role in the way archives are perceived by society. This point is reiterated by the former Dutch National archivist, Eric Ketelaar, who agrees that the “actual sites of archival performance”, namely the buildings and the architectures, are “heavily laden with expressed desires and values”.

See also Fritzsche, “The archive and the case of the German nation”, p. 186; Holm, “Forget capitalism”, pp. 6-7; Rowat, “The record and repository as a cultural form of expression”, p. 198; Cook, “Archival science and postmodernism”, p. 8 on the way in which archives have excluded certain sectors of society in favour of those in power.

102 McKemmish, Gilliland-Swateland and Ketelaar, “Communities of Memory”, p. 147.
103 Brockmeier, “Remembering and forgetting”, p. 17.
105 Amad, Counter-archive, p. 145.
If this inference and the definition of archives by the Society of American Archivists as “buildings or public places located wherever it is important to retain indefinitely the records of an organisation and the people around it” are taken at face value, the fact that archives in the nineteenth century were built in the capital cities of major colonial empires is very telling. It not only distanced the colonial subjects from the records pertaining to them, but by implication actually restricted access to these records. Furthermore, the choice of a building style, often inspired by Classical Greek architecture, was deliberate in order to communicate its authority and power. Ketelaar refers to the comparison of archives with temples and churches which through their architecture convey the idea not only of worship and sacredness, but of safe-keeping and power. This point is reiterated by David Lowenthal who describes them as serving “symbolically as temples shielding an idol from the gaze of the uninitiated, guarding treasures as a monopoly for the priesthood, and exercising surveillance over those who are admitted”. The Archivo General de la Nacion of El Salvador and the National Archives of the USA are given as examples of archives being built as classical temples, whereas the Public Record Office in London and modern French archival buildings have the appearance of churches and cathedrals. Ketelaar also quotes American President Herbert Hoover who, at the laying of the cornerstone of the country’s archives, likened it to a “temple of history”.

The counter-archival criticism against traditional archival institutions and archival practices has led to much of the archival discourse in recent years being dominated by a dichotomy. This dualism exists between those in the profession that have embraced this criticism as opposed to those who see this as undermining the very foundations of archival practice, namely the authenticity and therefore the credibility of the records in archivists’ care. The American archivists Richard Cox and Lucinda Duranti represent a substantial group of promoters of the more traditional record-keeping paradigm, who favour a positivist approach which has dominated the archival practice since the nineteenth century. Positivism is based on the notion that the universe can be “objectively observed and experienced” as it is

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110 Lowenthal, “Archives, heritage, and history”, p.194.
111 E. Ketelaar, “‘The panoptical archive’ in Blouin and Rosenberg (eds.), *Archives, documentation and institutions of social memory*, p.147.
112 Ketelaar, “The panoptical archive”, p.146.
113 Cook, “Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth”, p. 16.
governed by natural laws.\textsuperscript{114} It can therefore be measured and become knowable through the application of empirical methods and deductive reasoning by means of collecting and analysing quantitative data. In terms of archival research, positivism uses as departure point the objective and fixed nature of records, as well as the impartial and neutral roles played by archivists in the arranging and description thereof.\textsuperscript{115} These archivists therefore feel that the historical and cultural uses of archives are accidental by-products of the true purpose and role, namely preserving institutional transactional evidence. They argue that the only way to serve cultural memory is to exclude it from the archival domain. Duranti maintains that any historian worthy of the name would never use source material that would not satisfy legal requirements of evidence, such as (she asserts) oral history.\textsuperscript{116}

However, due to the counter-archival criticism, “new societal ideas about evidence and accountability, representation and reality, history, and memory” have developed over the past decades. This more interpretative approach uses as departure point the fact that the social world is ever changing, constantly being “interpreted or constructed by people, and therefore different from the world of nature”.\textsuperscript{117} The focus is on the interpretation of social meanings and personal sense-making and therefore there is no objective reality, but “multiple realities which are socially and individually constructed”.\textsuperscript{118} This approach has brought to the foreground the cultural importance that archival records play in offering citizens a sense of history, culture, identity and locality and provide them with personal and collective memories.\textsuperscript{119}

In 1972 F. Gerald Ham, President of the Society of American Archivists and one of few archivists who at that time acknowledged the criticism lodged against traditional archival institutions, suggested that the primary responsibility of archivists should be to provide the future with a representative record of human experience in our time. Rather than continuing to “document the well-documented”, and producing “a biased and distorted archival record”, he argued that archivists should become the research community’s “Renaissance man” who

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\item \textsuperscript{114} M. Greene, “The Power of meaning: the archival mission in the postmodern age”, \textit{The American Archivist}, 65(1), Spring - Summer 2002, p. 46.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Harris, “Claiming less delivering more”, p. 132; Gilliland and McKemmish, “Building an infrastructure for archival research”, p. 165.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Greene, “The Power of meaning: the archival mission in the postmodern age”, pp. 46-47.
\item \textsuperscript{117} Gilliland and McKemmish, “Building an infrastructure for archival research”, p. 165.
\item \textsuperscript{118} Gilliland and McKemmish, “Building an infrastructure for archival research”, p. 165.
\end{itemize}
“must know that the scope, quality, and direction of research in an open-ended future depend
upon the soundness of his judgment and the keenness of his perceptions about scholarly
inquiry”. In addition, he suggested that “if the archivist is going to fill in the gaps he will
have to become ... ‘a historical reporter for his own time’” which, in turn, should spur
archivists on to collect “data that would yield a ‘historical explanation of the major issues of
our time’”.

New archival institutions will therefore not be defined only by the contents of their
collections, but by the role they play in the community. Leading South African archivist
Verne Harris states that the archives can no longer be considered a quiet retreat or an ivory
tower for archivists and researchers, but are, in fact, a “crucible of human experience, a
battleground for meaning and significance and a Babel of stories”. By providing a
platform which enables different voices to be heard, archives will not only document the past,
but also serve as a way which enables communities to negotiate and celebrate their
difference. This will empower the community the archives serve, as well as giving the
archives a recognised mandate as guardian of society’s memories.

Cultural thread

If one considers the definition of cultural history proposed by Ute Daniel, namely that it
“questions the past by asking how people at the time perceived and interpreted themselves,
what material, mental and social motivation respectively influenced their forms of perception
and production of sense, and the effects such forms produced”, this resonates with the
vision that Ham had for the archives. In order to be a “gift from one generation to the next”
and to act as a “powerful cement for each society, as it carries its history and transmits values
from one generation to another”, counter-archival scholars propose that a more cultural or
interpretivist approach be adopted. Interpretivism, with its emphasis on subjectivity and

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121 Ham, “The archival edge”, p. 9
123 Cook and Schwartz, “Archives, records, and power”, p. 183.
126 Blouin and Rosenberg (eds.), *Archives, documentation and institutions of social memory*, p. 255. See also
Johnston, “Whose history is it anyway?”, pp. 213-215 who echoes the sentiments of Blouin and Rosenberg
concerning the role of the archives in society.
shifting meaning, uses inductive reasoning, and contrary to positivism, works from the
particular to the general. This implies the collection and analysis of qualitative data to “form
rich pictures of particular instances”. This notion of the conditional nature of the world is
also applied to the archival practice and records are examined from a perspective of a diverse
and ever-changing context in which they are created, managed and used, as well as an
awareness of the subjectivity of the archivists responsible for these records.127

Due to the pervasiveness of the rigorous modernist notion of objectivity, certainty and the
unchanging nature of archives, the acceptance of a more cultural approach to archival work
was unsettling for many of those within the profession. This was partly because, as Richard
Johnson points out, the “cultural process does not correspond to the contours of academic
knowledges, as they are”, but is rather about the “subjective side of social relations”.128
Antoinette Burton refers to an “unsettling move toward culture as a site of intellectual
enquiry” which threatens to replace more seemingly rigorous approaches and will lead to the
collapse of existing explanatory paradigms.129 According to Burton, culture is a “compelling
and legitimate site of analysis, an analytic category as well as a methodological tool” through
which the archives can be studied. She maintains that the archives should be viewed as a site
of knowledge-production, a process of development, and a domain whose boundaries often
are in flux due to the “givenness of circumstances within which individuals make choices,
their lives, their histories”, rather than the effect of determinant historical conditions.130

A cultural approach is therefore an “essential critical tool” when studying marginalised
groups and being confronted with the paucity of official archival records. It recognises that
the context in which human actions take place is multifaceted and ever changing,
“heterogeneous and plural social formation, a dynamic process of representation and
interpretation, rather than a fixed ensemble of meanings and beliefs”.131 This also implies
that finality and certainty are therefore highly elusive, thereby challenging the notion of a
stable and neutral archival record with a definite meaning and a single appropriate context.132

128 Dirks, “Is vice versa!”, p. 19; A. Burton, “Thinking beyond the boundaries: Empire, feminism and the
129 Burton, “Thinking beyond the boundaries”, pp. 61-62.
130 Burton, “Thinking beyond the boundaries”, pp. 61-64.
131 S. Mullaney, “Discursive forums, cultural practices: History and anthropology in literary studies” in
McDonald (ed.), The historic turn in the human science, p. 165.
Harris however urges archivists to move beyond the binary oppositions posed by the abovenamed two dominant research paradigms in social sciences, namely positivism and interpretivism. According to him there “is an extreme danger in a reason which gives no space to mystery, ...to allow the local and the indigenous to be destroyed in a globalising world”. He feels that the opposite is conversely also true and within the realms of “the mystery” there should be space for reason and the local should not exclude the global. Rather he proposes that “it is in the both/and, the holding of these apparent opposites in creative tension, that there is liberation.... a liberation for the indigenous in being open to engagement with the dynamics of globalization. A liberation for the global in respecting the indigenous.” Records and record-keeping therefore need to be placed within a framework that allows for an understanding of both the technical and social nature thereof. In addition, archival research theory has to be recognised as a scientifically acknowledged discipline which can at the same time address the cultural aspects of human activity.

In order to find a balance between the scientific and the cultural, Elizabeth Kaplan suggests that “cross-disciplinary comparisons can help to view the field in a larger context, shedding new light, reorienting towards a broader intellectual climate”. She highlights the fact that anthropology and archives share certain critical features, namely the representation of people, cultures, events, and ultimately history and memory. From within the archival profession Anne Gilliland and Sue McKemmish concur with Kaplan and point out that employing “anthropological thinking about records as cultures of documentation and ways in which the archive that shape it and worldviews made manifest in systems of classification” could be a way of overcoming binary oppositions. Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg agree that “archives as an institutional totality has to be read ethnographically” as does Ann Laura


138 “Introduction” in Blouin and Rosenberg (eds.), Archives, documentation and institutions of social memory, p. viii.
Stoler who describes archives as no longer “sites of knowledge retrieval, but of knowledge production, as monuments, as well as sites of ethnography”. ¹³⁹

The roots of ethnography lie in the field of anthropology which has a long research tradition of living with and studying non-Western cultures. More recently, anthropology, sociology and ethnography have started to include a wider range of “cultures”, including those found in urban, modern work cultures which reflect a “new understanding of culture and community”.¹⁴⁰ An ethnographic approach combines a number of qualitative data collection techniques, including participant observation and focus group interviewing. It also includes content, document or discourse analysis and entails a “process of enquiry that draws data from the context in which events occur, in an attempt to describe these occurrences, and as a means of determining the process in which events are embedded and the perspectives of those participating in the event.”¹⁴¹ Ethnographic fieldwork is therefore well-suited for studying “socio-cultural phenomena such as structures, processes, and interactions among members of a defined community”¹⁴² and is helpful in “uncovering and collecting data on tacit knowledge, unstated practices and norms shared among community members.”¹⁴³

Other archival practitioners, such as Terry Cook, Joan Schwartz and Tom Nesmith, have also voiced their support for an ethnographical approach and see the value of an anthropological and ethnographical methodology in that it addresses the “inherent conflict of the detached versus the participant observer”.¹⁴⁴ They maintain that ethnographers realise the need to document, “self-consciously and explicitly”,¹⁴⁵ their position as researcher vis-à-vis the phenomena being studied, therefore being consciously aware of their “personal backgrounds and social affiliations, and their professional norms, self-understanding, and public standing, [that] shape and are shaped by their participation in this process”.¹⁴⁶ But in addition, by becoming immersed in the milieu of the research subjects and gaining a cultural perspective of the “archival communities” responsible for creation, collection, care and use of records, by

¹³⁹ Stoler, “Colonial archives and the arts of governance”, p. 90.
¹⁴⁴ Cook and Schwartz, “Archives, records, and power”, p. 179.
¹⁴⁵ Cook and Schwartz, “Archives, records, and power”, p. 179.
“seeing events and activities as they see them”, rather than through idealised conceptions of archival theory, “archival ethnographers” have the opportunity to “identify, analyse, articulate the ‘insider’ perspective”.\(^{147}\) They then develop a sense of how the content, context and structure of records creation together form a reflection of the community of provenance.\(^{148}\)

In terms of how the methodology of anthropology and more specifically ethnography can be applied to archival research, Karen Gracy has done a comprehensive study on “archival ethnography” as she terms this method of research. This is also referred to as ethnology record-keeping in some texts. Ethnology is a “cross-cultural, comparative study of the everyday practices and beliefs of contemporary or past cultures” and in particular, “the study of the ways in which people use social interaction to make sense of or understand their situation and create their own reality”.\(^{149}\) In terms of archival research it entails the “studies of cultures of documentation, forms of records and archives, the record-keeping and archiving processes that shape them, the worldviews made manifest in their systems of classification, the power configurations they reflect, and associated memory and evidence paradigms.”\(^{150}\) Gracy maintains that by employing ethnographic methods, researchers can immediately expand the scope of archival investigation to include socio-cultural realms of record creation and management, thus defining the record in direct relationship to communities of individuals who generate, accumulate and preserve documentary evidence.\(^{151}\)

In practical terms such an approach would entail that the methods and strategies of the production of archives and the social and political conditions that have shaped these processes, the “complex motives and the complex debates that are stuff of real lives and struggles”,\(^{152}\) be looked at, rather than the content of archival collections. The aim is not to reach consensus, but to expose ongoing processes of “production, negotiation and the delimitation of social meanings and social selves” that are “continually renewed, recreated, defended and modified, because [these facts are] being continually resisted, limited, altered,

\(^{149}\) Gilliland and McKemmish, “Building an infrastructure for archival research”, p. 183.
\(^{150}\) Gilliland and McKemmish, “Building an infrastructure for archival research”, p. 183.
This makes it possible to focus on the “value in stories more than structures, the margins as much as the centres, the diverse and ambiguous as much as the certain and universal”\(^{154}\). The limitations of the more “traditional” notion of archives can be expanded beyond the physical constraints of official archival buildings in order to include a greater variety of sources other than written documents so that those who have previously been marginalised due to their gender, race or class, could be heard.\(^{155}\)

The implications of the aspects highlighted by the post-structuralists would have a profound influence on how archives, as institutions of memory, are viewed and archival collections used in research and scholarship in the late twentieth century. Amongst the disciplines, and specifically pertinent to this study, are the post-colonial and feminist historians whose interest in ethnic minorities and women, has turned their attention to those who have been left out or made invisible by Western historiography. This also aligns them closely to the Marxist approach. The disciplines of post-colonialism and feminism in turn have been instrumental in developing new ways to use archival sources, such as reading these sources “against the grain” as well as “along the grain”.\(^{156}\) In addition, hampered by the paucity of archival and published sources, they would open up the possibilities of moving beyond the physical limitations of the archival institution as “sole proprietor of social memory and the written word as the only legitimate source of historical information” to include a broad variety of non-written documents. Over the past fifty years a shift has taken place in the historical fraternity from the heavy reliance on written documents and scientific data, to anthropological data, material culture and even popular culture. In the research of African women’s history in particular, the study of their material culture has proven to be fecund sources of information.\(^{157}\)


\(^{154}\) Cook and Schwartz, “Archives, records, and power”, p. 182.

\(^{155}\) Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd, “Whose memories, whose archives?”, pp. 71-86

\(^{156}\) Stoler, “Colonial archives and the arts of governance”, p. 92.

Post-colonial thread

As already indicated the concept of using archival institutions as “instruments of repression” is closely linked to the growth of Western colonial powers in the nineteenth century. Characterised by tremendous changes on political, economic and social levels due to the Industrial Revolution, the democratisation of society and the competition for and need to control their expanding colonial empires, the notion of mastery through forms of social discipline such as participant observation and ethnography, has become very attractive.¹⁵⁸

Jeanette Bastian points out that the “imperial belief in power of knowledge” included the belief that “intricate knowledge of the colonized was crucial to the ability to control”.¹⁵⁹ This was achieved by employing the model of eighteenth century empiricism which maintained that reality consisted of observable events and facts that could be reduced to general laws through systematic and scientific inquiry. Scientists believed that if a complex system, such as the world, could be named and placed within systems of classification, it could be mastered. Colonial records therefore “perversely opened a window on the possibility to know the colonized”.¹⁶⁰ Bastian refers to Benedict Anderson who in his work *Imagined communities: Reflections of the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, shows how the colonial state “aspire[d] to create, under its control, a human landscape of perfect visibility; the condition of this ‘visibility’ was that everyone, everything had a serial number. Product of technologies of navigation, surveying, photography and print”.¹⁶¹

The ability to create records that are used to regulate transactions and events depends on a number of social, political and economic factors. Throughout history certain groups have therefore been better equipped to produce and maintain records leading to situations in which certain views and ideas about society have been privileged at the expense of others. Unlike memory practices, such as oral history, which are ephemeral and disappear as they occur, text-based documents, being resistant to change, have been deemed preferable as they have been seen as “a valuable means of extending the temporal and spatial range of human communication”.¹⁶² The “fixed” nature of written sources lends itself to analysis and

¹⁵⁸ Burton, “Thinking beyond the boundaries”, p. 69; Bennett and Watson, *Understanding everyday life*, pp. xii-xiii.
¹⁵⁹ Bastian, “Reading colonial records through an archival lens”, p. 271.
¹⁶⁰ Bastian, “Reading colonial records through an archival lens”, p. 271.
¹⁶¹ Bastian, “Reading colonial records through an archival lens”, p. 271.
comparison, but also to manipulation. Furthermore, the impassive nature and insistent repetition of the written word has made it difficult for groups without a written culture to challenge.163

According to Foucault, being text-based and “immunized against alterability”, archival memory has a particular kind of authenticity. Stephan Nichols counters the eighteenth and nineteenth century notion of “stable” records that “faithfully reflect the original work conceived and executed by the author”. He points out that these “authoritative texts” were “produced at a specific moment in a precise context of cultural history” and therefore “bristle with critical apparatuses” such as physical, material, temporal and perceptual aspects that form part and parcel of the creation and reading of texts, thereby negating any belief in a fixed record. He cites as an example of a “mobile” written text the illustrated or illuminated manuscripts produced by scribes and illustrators in the Middle Ages where “[t]extual flux in the form of interpolation, annotation, omission, and even rewriting took place according to the cultural and societal demands of the time”. For that reason, a manuscript could never be a “neutral space” or a “representational imperative” and that “textual instability was neither simply a function of an imperfect or inefficient means of reproduction”, nor accidental or a “consequence of bad technology, but intentional”.164 In her study of colonial archives and the recognition of oral history as legal documents, Adele Perry makes a related point as she refers to the “tight binds between literacy, archives and the colonial authority in making of history”.165 By the end of the nineteenth century the absence of written records was used to validate colonial claims, an aspect that Perry refers to as the ontological link between “literacy and civilization” as opposed to “orality and savagery”. She therefore describes the absences created by the exclusion of certain groups’ memories as not having been necessarily neutral nor voluntary, but “borne of and perpetuated by violence and radical inequalities”.166

Saul Dubow points out that in the South African context knowledge and knowledge-centered institutions from as early as 1820, “served to underpin white political ascendancy and claims to nationhood”.\textsuperscript{167} The creation of a “commonwealth of knowledge” helped to unite white Afrikaans and English people to “develop a sense of pride, gain acceptance both locally and globally, create personal happiness and inject morale” and to “‘decipher’ (or misunderstand and misrepresent) indigenous knowledge and provide hard evidence for the development and entrenchment of scientific racism”.\textsuperscript{168} Diana Taylor adds her voice to this debate and views the separation between the written and the spoken word as only one aspect of repression of indigenous embodied practice as a form of knowing as well as a system for storing and transmitting knowledge. Non-verbal practices - such as dance, ritual, cooking - that long served to preserve a sense of communal identity and memory were not considered valid forms of knowledge and those who dedicated their lives to mastering cultural practices were no longer acknowledged as experts.\textsuperscript{169} Another non-verbal practice that has been closely linked with the notion of identity and collective memory is material culture which includes crafts and art such as embroidery.

From this discussion it is clear that the question of literacy has direct bearing on the counter-archival debate. Jenny Cook-Gumperz points out that prior to the 1990s most researchers took an exclusively Western-centric view, thereby failing to take into account the true diversity of the world’s literate cultures. However, with a more non-Western dominant perspective of literacy there has been an appreciation of the many facets of literacy.\textsuperscript{170} As early as the 1970s the African anthropologist Niyi Akinnaso challenged the idealised view that the possession of literacy would “improve quality of life for individuals, social groups and even society as a whole”.\textsuperscript{171} He highlighted that by “allowing [Western notions of] literacy to dominate as the only pathway to social and economic change”,\textsuperscript{172} it not only

\textsuperscript{169} Taylor, \textit{The archive and the repertoire}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{172} N.F. Akinnaso, “The consequences of literacy in pragmatic and theoretical perspectives”, \textit{Anthropology and Education Quarterly}, 12,1982, p. 167.
devalued non-Western traditions, but distorted the idea of what it meant to be literate. He labelled the view that “societies lacking Western-style written literacy also lack potential for complex cognitive and social organisational accomplishments” as simplistic and pointed out that it had led to the “major misconception that education in non-literate societies either does not exist in terms of organized training or [it does not affect] the systematic transfer of knowledge”.

Both Cook-Gumperz and Akinnaso conclude that it is “our definitions of literacy that have had at their centre conflict between oral and written disciplinary traditions, which are directly traceable to our own cultural history”. From a post-colonial view oral and written literacy cannot be considered as opposites but as different and supporting ways of achieving the same communicative ends. In this study the craft artists of the MCADF will be defined as “illiterate” in terms of Western categorisation to highlight the fact that they have been excluded from “traditional” archives due to the insistence on written records.

**Feminist thread**

The insistence on written archival records also marginalised women. Only since the rise of the feminist movement in the 1960s have scholars, interested in the role of women, been eager to “write women back into the historical record”. One of the criticisms against conventional archives has been the paucity of records on women. Researchers generally agree that “[h]istorians searching the past for evidence about women have confronted again and again the phenomenon of women’s invisibility.” The construction and interpretation of archives have been remorselessly and intentionally patriarchal, to such an extent that

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175 Akinnaso, “Schooling, language and knowledge in literate and non-literate societies”, p. 69.
176 Cook-Gumperz, *The social construction of literacy*, p. 3; Akinnaso, “Schooling, language and knowledge in literate and non-literate societies”, p. 69.
177 Cook-Gumperz, *The social construction of literacy*, p. 3.
178 Manoff, “Theories of the archive from across the discipline”, p. 15.
women have not only been absent from the formation of societal memory, but have been “delegitimized by record-keeping and archival processes” and literally “erased from the historical record”.181 A lack of recorded information on women, the perceived notion of “no history without documents”182 and the fact that the “historical record is confirmed through archival evidence”183 have made women historical outsiders.184

The 1960s and early 1970s were marked by scepticism whether the female contribution to society at large should be studied. However, according to the publication Feminist Studies, already by 1977 women’s studies, as an academic discipline, had shown phenomenal growth.185 The “first wave” of feminists of the late nineteenth century focused on “Women Worthies”, that is women who were acknowledged in terms of a dominant male perspective and for the role they played in a male-defined value system. Unlike them, the later scholars argued that a history about women parallel to mainstream history was just as one-dimensional as a male-orientated view of women in history. It would further isolate women, leaving them “prisoners of that pernicious status of ‘other’ to which mainstream history has assigned”186 them. For that reason, they proposed to add women to history, rather than to add women’s history.187

In order to recognise women’s historical studies as an academic discipline, it has been essential to establish a methodology and theoretical framework, as well as uncover and preserve sources that can serve as “solid archival material”.188 The establishment of academic journals, such as Feminist Studies in 1972 and Journal of Women's History in 1989, provided a platform where scholars interested in women’s studies could discuss and develop methodologies that would make it possible to write women back into history.189 Feminist Studies was founded by scholars of women and gender studies who felt the need to create an academic journal with high scholarly standards that would provide an analytic forum to

189 Burton, Archives stories, p. 32; Manoff, “Theories of the archive from across the discipline”, p. 15.
engage the relevant issues. Four anthologies have been created from articles originally published in *Feminist Studies* providing a solid foundation for subsequent research. *Journal of Women's History*, on the other hand, is the first journal devoted exclusively to the international field of women's history. The aim of the journal is to explore multiple perspectives of feminism rather than promoting a single unifying form. This journal supports conferences on women’s history and from time to time publishes complete sessions from these conferences. It has therefore made a significant contribution to the field and has served as a benchmark for subsequent research.

In 1984 UNESCO convened an International Meeting of Experts on “Theoretical Frameworks and Methodological Approaches to Studies on the Role of Women in History as Actors in Economic, Social, Political and Ideological Processes”. A selection of the papers delivered at the meeting was published under the title *Retrieving Women's history. Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society*. This reflects on the role played by women in ancient, more recent and contemporary history and demonstrates the radical impact of including these activities in historical analysis.

The 2010 publication *Contesting Archives. Finding Women in the Sources* by Nupur Chaudhuri, Sherry Katz and Mary Elizabeth Perry focuses on the great variety of sources available and the diverse methodologies developed since the 1960s and 1970s to retrieve the obscured or lost traces left by women. The aim of this volume is to illustrate how a cross-section of divergent methodologies employed by historians of women and gender today can open up the varied and fragmented sources found inside and outside official archives and thereby broaden and enrich our understanding and analyses of the documents.

One of the reasons for the difficulty of finding traces of female activity within the official realm is that the majority of women’s lives have been confined to the domestic realm which has been scantily represented in official archival repositories. Being hampered by the paucity of archival sources, Ula Taylor points out that “intensive work in primary sources” will not

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191 Jay Kleinberg (ed.), *Retrieving women’s history*.
193 Chaudhuri, Katz and Perry (eds.), *Contesting archives*. 

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provide sufficient information to “fill in” the historical picture.\textsuperscript{194} Researchers have been challenged to move beyond the physical limitations of the archival institution as “sole proprietor of social memory and the written word as the only legitimate source of historical information”\textsuperscript{195} to include the quotidian environment of the household and the realm of private memory, “feminine desire and domesticated ruminations”.\textsuperscript{196} Sources generated within the confines of the domestic setting include memoirs, family histories, photographs, as well as folk tales, oral histories and cultural practices which have not been considered part of the conventional archive. This has consequently required researchers to develop a variety of methods ranging from historical linguistics, geography, the analysis of folktales and songs, as well as looking at the material aspects of women's everyday lives, such as textiles, pottery and other crafts, in order to retrieve historical information.\textsuperscript{197}

Burton is one of the strongest advocates for the recognition of sources not traditionally regarded as “solid archival material”. In the anthology Archives. Facts, Fictions, and the Writing of History\textsuperscript{198} she brings together sixteen essays by a range of historians.\textsuperscript{199} These essays give examples of how the definition of archival material can be expanded if researchers become aware of “alternative historical material available to us when we wander outside conventional ‘houses of history’”.\textsuperscript{200} Many researchers agree with Burton’s argument that in order to include women in history, the scope of historical research and archival repositories needs to be enlarged. In her work, aptly entitled Dwelling in the archive: Women writing house, home, and history in the late colonial India,\textsuperscript{201} Burton challenges the perceived notion of history and archives as “grand narratives” that represent sites of public, political and masculine thinking. She argues that women’s memories and writings of their lives in the domestic realm constitute legitimate, reliable and valuable historical archives as much as the “disciplinarily-sanctioned public offices” housing political history, state documents, property ownership deeds and tax records. She points out that both types of

\textsuperscript{194} Taylor, “Women in the documents”, p. 189.
\textsuperscript{195} Taylor, “Women in the documents”; p. 189; Chaundhuri, “Finding an Archive in Krishnokhabini Das’s Englelande Bangamohila”, p. 135; Daly Goggin and Fowkes Tobin (eds.), Women and the material culture of needlework and textiles, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{197} Livingstone and Ploof (eds.), The object of labor, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{198} Burton (ed.), Archives Stories.
\textsuperscript{200} Woollacut, “Women writing history”, pp. 185-186.
\textsuperscript{201} A. Burton, Dwelling in the archive: Women writing house, home, and history in the late colonial India, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).
“archives” involve processes of selection and interpretation in their creation and maintenance and that neither is more valid nor more important as a historical source than the other. She concludes that the site of public history can be enriched by the inclusion of these private female memories.202

Although the above-mentioned writings differ from conventional archival sources, being created by women finding themselves in a domestic environment, they are still written sources produced by individuals with access to education. Therefore, with the exception of a small number of women in indigenous or native communities, a large percentage of the research done by female scholars has been confined to Western women and their experiences. As these women form part of a culture which for the most part produces written sources, it has therefore been possible to trace them through various conventional methods.203

Despite the fact that it has become clear that most of the research on the history of pre-textual literate societies,204 including rural African women, will have to be based on oral information, for a long time researchers still preferred to have the confirmation or verification of written sources.205 The sources holding clues to women of indigenous or native communities, however, are limited, tainted and/or virtually non-existent. “Scientific” research in the nineteenth century claimed native women to be “passive, childlike, needing guidance, irrational, sexually aberrant, and unpredictable” and of having “low brain weights and deficient brain structures [...] analogous to those of the lower races”.206 These negative portrayals led to them being “erase[d] as an insignificant ‘other’”.207 The few files on women specifically that are found in national and missionary archives throughout the world often only deal with those who were seen as “problematic” to the authorities and were captured in

203 Burton (ed.), Archives stories, p. 38; Manoff, “Theories of the archive from across the discipline”, p. 15.
204 The anthropologist Joanne Rappaport and the art historian Tom Cummins advocate a broad understanding of literacy, including not only reading and writing, but also interpretations of the spoken word, paintings, wax seals, gestures, and urban design. It is argued that pre-literate implies pre-textual literate, because all communities are visually literate in as far as they know what the landmarks, objects and practices in their communities signify. (J. Rappaport and T. Cummins, Beyond the lettered city, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).
records pertaining to legal transgression. These include the prostitutes, the “witches”, as well as those who spoke up against social and economic injustices.\(^{208}\) Scholars see these women as having suffered “double colonialism” as they have been oppressed in their own patriarchal societies and then marginalised again by the colonising authorities.\(^{209}\)

Studies on these indigenous women have grown tremendously over the past few decades, but still critics point out that these have for the most part been confined to the “non-historical” disciplines of anthropology and ethnography.\(^{210}\) As a result, very little development has taken place in terms of establishing a historiography of women outside of the Western realm.\(^{211}\) The edited volume *Expanding the Boundaries of Women’s History*,\(^{212}\) on the other hand, is a collection of essays focusing specifically on women’s history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Middle East. These countries form part of the Developing World where limited access to Western style education and literacy pose specific challenges in terms of the availability of archival material. Contributors to this volume discuss the possibilities open to researchers when using sources focusing solely on the domestic situation of these women. This volume is therefore an important contribution in giving the “silenced native”\(^{213}\) woman the opportunity to be heard.

With the decolonisation of Africa which started after the Second World War and especially from the 1960s onward, the indigenous women of the former colonies started to make their voices heard. However, this process initially did not include the black women of South Africa due to the apartheid system. From the late 1970s, research gradually started to appear on urban black women, such as prostitutes, beer-brewers, domestic servants and factory


\(^{210}\) Chaudhuri, Katz and Perry (eds.), *Contesting archives*, p.192; Burton (ed.), *Archives Stories*, p. 32; Taylor, “Archival thinking and the wives of Marcus Garvey”, p. 133.

\(^{211}\) In this context the phrase “women outside the Western realm” is used to denote women, who due to the exclusionary nature of modernist history, were not considered as legitimate subjects of study by historians, but would rather be studied by anthropologists.


\(^{213}\) Manoff, “Theories of the archive from across the discipline”, p. 15.
workers\textsuperscript{214} and histories on pre-industrial South Africa have been revisited to represent more inclusive readings of aspects such as slavery and frontier life.\textsuperscript{215} Although this was a positive start, Margaret Hay points out that this research was limited by the fact that the archival sources used in the research rarely included oral testimony of the women themselves and on their own perceptions of their own roles as wives and mothers, but was largely based on mission and archival sources.\textsuperscript{216} Furthermore, a point that Linzi Manicom\textsuperscript{217} also raises, the majority of the research was done by white historians, “reflecting the patterns of racial exclusion and hierarchy that structure South African academic institutions”.\textsuperscript{218} Hay also voices her concern over “[b]road generalizations about the exploitation or subordination of women in another culture” as it “always raise[s] questions about the writer’s biases, and it seems to me particular care should be taken to focus on women’s own testimony of their situations and not to put words in their mouths.”\textsuperscript{219}


\textsuperscript{216} Hay, “Prostitutes and peasants”, pp. 436-437.

\textsuperscript{217} Manicom, “Ruling relations”, pp. 441-465.

\textsuperscript{218} Manicom, “Ruling relations”, p. 442.

\textsuperscript{219} Hay, “Prostitutes and peasants”, pp. 436.
This thesis is aligned to the above-mentioned research which attempts to “[l]ocate the voices of the silenced native”\textsuperscript{220} woman in the archival discussion and focuses on the oral tradition of the community, as well as their embroidery as an example of the material aspect of their lives. This means going beyond archival sources to find sources in which women’s agency is evident. By expanding the parameters of historical enquiry as well as the scope of the sources used, this study aims to shed light on the new perspectives these previously marginalised voices could bring to our understanding of the social, economic and political conditions that shape history.\textsuperscript{221}

**Selecting the threads**

This study comprises five chapters. As an introduction, this chapter presented the topic and outlined the field of study. In the second chapter the domain of the counter-archive will be discussed which will set out to unpack and explain the counter-archive in detail. The third chapter will contextualise the MCADF project as an example of an archive that allows for the voices of previously marginalised women to be heard within the broader South African historical landscape. The fourth will look at how the archival process within the MCADF takes place. Aspects such as the creators of the records and the archives; the type of information conveyed through the sources and the methods employed to create the records will be addressed. In conclusion an assessment will be made of the MCADF embroidered story cloth project and the contribution it can make to the counter-archival debate and the broader South African historical landscape.

\textsuperscript{220} Manoff, “Theories of the archive from across the discipline”, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{221} A. Botha, “Amazwi Abesifazane, Reclaiming the emotional and public self” in Livingstone and Ploof (eds.), *The object of labor*, p. 136; Fidelis, “Recovering women's voices in Poland”, p. 120, Chaundhuri, “Finding an Archive in Krishnobhabini Das’s Englande Bangamohila”, p. 135
CHAPTER II
COUNTER-ARCHIVE REVIEW

The embroidered story cloths produced by the MCADF project encompass a number of aspects relevant to counter-archival discourse. The aim of this chapter is to discuss in more detail some of the aspects that have been highlighted in the literature on the counter-archive as well as the counter-archival debate. It also considers the literature that focuses on the practical implications of enlarging the parameters of the traditional archive to include communities and groups who fall outside its ambit and the sources they create in order to capture their stories as well as their histories.

In the first place, counter-archives are for the most part not created and housed in what would have been considered a conventional archival repository. Instead, community archives have emerged over the past number of decades as a means for especially disadvantaged communities to safeguard their memories. Furthermore, the choice of subjects documented in counter-archives moves the focus of history away from the “grand narratives of progress” to include the voices from outside the dominant political realm as well as the everyday life situations in which these ordinary people find themselves. In contrast with the emphasis placed on written sources in more traditional archives, a wide variety of sources in different formats are included in the counter-archives. This study focuses specifically on embroidered story cloths which involve oral tradition and material craft art practices. In this overview of literature on the counter-archives, only contributions specifically relevant to this study will be included. There are the counter-archive, the community archive, orality, the study of the everyday, material culture, needlework and story cloths as alternate historical text. Aspects such as the role the counter-archival debate plays in new approaches to records management and the impact of new technology on the archival process will therefore not be included.

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1 It is acknowledged that many communities, whether or not they are marginalised, wish to take responsibility for establishing an archive for, and within their community, themselves.
3 Cook, “Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth”, p. 17; Ballantyne, “Mr Peal’s archive”, pp. 103-104; Perry, “The colonial archive on trial”, p. 345.
Counter-archives

As mentioned in Chapter I, the initial response from the archival profession to the postmodern and post-structural challenge was slow. However, starting with solitary voices in the 1970s and 1980s, by the last decade of the twentieth century an active debate had started, touching on all aspects of the archival profession. One of the earliest voices from within the archival profession was the Australian archivist Tom Nesmith who recognised the profound impact social history not only had on the way in which history was studied, but also on the relationship between archives and academic historical research. Some archival practitioners felt that some of these changes had strained the “traditional alliance” between historians and archivists. One of the reasons for this was that archivists were, for the most part, no longer as familiar with historiography as they once had been. In his 1982 article, “Archives from the bottom up: Social history and archival scholarship” Nesmith presented an overview of changes in the research environment and suggested that these new conditions made it “necessary and possible to strengthen the relationship by encouraging an approach to archival scholarship somewhat different from the one many historians are acquainted with or, for that matter, most archivists are committed to”.4

A decade later Theresa Rowat asked whether a more cultural philosophy could be applied to archival practice as a “step towards inserting archives as a visible layer in the continuum of cultural production”. In order to achieve this she proposed that the appraisal of documentary records should be as cultural constructs, rather than being concerned with “distinctions of legitimacy and authenticity”.5 This, she argued, would entail “blurring the distinctions between non-fiction and fiction” as well as including a “broader range of formats that reach well into the realm of ephemera and popular culture”.6

Shortly thereafter Caroline Heald also contributed to the discussion on the impact of postmodernism on the archives: in terms of historical research moving away from “grand historical narratives”, the exploration of the nature of records and “the mission of the archival profession to furnish an understanding of the documentary evidence of past societies” by reconsidering appraisal and description practices. She concluded that “there is room for

4 Nesmith, “Archives from the bottom up”, pp. 5-26.
5 Rowat, “The record and repository as a cultural form of expression”, p. 203.
6 Rowat, “The record and repository as a cultural form of expression”, p. 203.
archives and archivists in the postmodern world, and archivists, with their unique perspective on reading / deconstructing the documentary traces of society, are ideally suited to make sense of it.”

Harris focused on the impact of the postmodern discussion on the archival repositories in South Africa in particular. In the context of the end of the apartheid era and the establishment of a democratic dispensation in 1994, he claimed that an earnest effort was made to transform the South African archival system to include the voices of the previously marginalised groups. However, Harris found that “pre-postmodern or, more precisely, … Positivist” practices were still prevalent and therefore new realities were resisted, raising “significant questions about the nature of transformation in South African archives.”

In 2001 the Canadian archivist Terry Cook looked at the postmodern way of thinking - that of “[p]rocess rather than product, becoming rather than being, dynamic rather than static, context rather than text, reflecting time and place rather than universal absolutes” - and the impact it had on “analyzing and understanding science, society, organizations, and business activity, among others”. In the light of significant changes in the purpose of archives as institutions and the nature of records he proposed that the postmodern philosophy should also be applied to archival science in the twenty-first century and serve as “the foundation for a new conceptual paradigm for the profession”. In another 2001 article Cook explored the impact of postmodern discussions on aspects such as “the archive” as record, institution and function, and the relevance of postmodern thinking for archival practice in greater depth. He examined the weaknesses and strengths of postmodern analysis, specifically in an archival context and suggested how “postmodern insights might change archivists’ daily practice as they work (and live) inescapably in conditions of postmodernity.” He concluded that such changes would entail “much greater transparency and accountability by archivists for the archival function itself and much greater awareness of the diversity, ambiguity, and multiple identities of records creators, information systems, and archives users”.

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7 Heald, “Is there room for archives in the postmodern world?”, pp. 89-100.
8 Harris, “Claiming less, delivering more”, pp. 132-141. See also Archives at the Crossroads 2007.
11 Cook, “Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth”, pp. 14-35.
Early in the twenty-first century more archivists began to re-appraise specific aspects of the archival profession. Ian Johnston concentrates on how the archive profession has addressed the notion of “representation”, focusing particularly on the area of “acquisition policies”. He highlights the fact that only limited professional theory and practice have been developed, and therefore advocates the need for more proactive and targeted policies and strategies. Using the acquisition of black and ethnic minority archives as an example, he has called on the archival profession to take a fresh approach to “collecting”.

Cook and Schwartz argue that archivists have become trapped in “the routine repetition of past practice” and have failed to realise that the public’s expectations of the archivist’s professional role and responsibility have changed. They therefore call on archivists to embrace postmodern ideas in order to “stimulate the building of archival knowledge, and enable present and future generations to hold the profession accountable for its choices in exercising power over the making of modern memory.”

The negation of the archival ideal of “objectivity” and the consequences thereof on the archival profession are discussed in articles by Nesmith, as well as Trace, published in 2002. In his article Nesmith suggests that the fact that “there is no way to avoid or neutralize the limits of the mediating influences that shape our understandings of our worlds” opens up “an important new intellectual place for archives in the formation of records, knowledge, culture, and societies”. The Trace article draws upon research from other disciplines, such as sociology, in order to place records and record-keeping within a framework that allows for an understanding of their social nature. In particular, the goal is to determine the underlying social factors that directly influence and shape the creation and keeping of records and to begin to understand how these factors manifest themselves in the construction of the record.

An important contribution from South Africa, a country which is very much in the throws of dealing with its past is the anthology *Refiguring the Archives*. The book grew out of a project hosted in 1998 by the University of the Witwatersrand’s Graduate School for the

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15 Trace, “What is recorded is never simply ‘what happened’”, pp. 137-159.
16 Hamilton, Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid and Saleh, *Refiguring the archives*, p. 7.
Humanities and Social Sciences in collaboration with four archival institutions, namely: the National Archives; the South African History Archive; the University’s Historical Papers; and the Gay and Lesbian Archives. These institutions were specifically invited in order to address the “concerns of archival practitioners, historical researchers who work with a particular concept of archive and who use archives, as well as public and community interests around archives”. As indicated in the title, the aim of this book was to challenge the “figuring by our apartheid and longer pasts”. The ways in which the archive constructs the past through control of selection, description and access to “sanctify” certain pasts and bury others is explored by both South African and foreign scholars. The editors conclude that the social role of the archives is and will become more pronounced in the future.

Theresa Rekut draws researchers’ attention to the physical attributes of records and specifically the fact that archives, as custodians of these records, “actively change this evidence through physical and intellectual mediations”. She points out that records should be considered as products of material culture and that the physical evidence encapsulated in these records should be considered as a “primary source of contextual evidence, thereby enriching the preservation of the meaning of the records”. In his later research Nesmith also focuses on archival records and specifically on the history of these records as well as the archives in which they are housed. Just as the opening of an archive is often an exciting occasion when access is gained to once inaccessible or previously unknown records, he sees this new direction in archival research as a “reopening” of archival collections which could offer the possibility to reconceptualise archival work.

Revisiting traditional archival practices, especially principles designed to preserve contextual value in records, Katie Shilton and Ramesh Srinivasan point out that “traditional practices of appraisal, arrangement, and description can be rearticulated as participatory, community-oriented processes”. This process “can enable context to be represented meaningfully in

17 Hamilton, Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid and Saleh, *Refiguring the archives*, p. 8.
18 Hamilton, Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid and Saleh, *Refiguring the archives*, p. 7.
19 Hamilton, Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid and Saleh, *Refiguring the archives*, pp. 16-17.
archives of traditionally marginalised communities” and can “help build culturally relevant records repositories while enabling marginalised communities to share their experiences with a wider public”. They call on archivists to broaden their “traditional tools” so as to actively engage marginalised communities in the preservation process, thereby preserving local knowledge and creating representative, empowered archives.24

Elizabeth Shepherd focuses on the context of the historical development of archives and archivists and specifically on the contributions made by “many fascinating individuals who established archives services and professional practice in England in the twentieth century”. In her 2009 article entitled “Culture and evidence: or what good are the archives?” she points out that to a great extent it was the “enthusiasms, interests and understandings”26 of these individuals, rather than government or legislation, that shaped English archives, underlining not only the subjective nature of archives, but the important cultural role they play in society at large.27 Such an investigation might be well worthy of pursuit in the south(ern) African context.

Community archives

The cultural theorist Stuart Hall points out that the effective exclusion of memories and pasts of communities and people from official archival collections, and therefore the national history, is not accidental. He claims that it is this complex inter-relationship between absences and marginalisations in national narratives and in archival records that community archives can address directly in their work.28 In recent decades the ability of community archives as a way of making the voices of the marginalised heard and for disadvantaged groups to challenge the paucity of records held in national archival repositories has been recognised. Although the examples used in their 2009 article on community archives relate specifically to community archives in Britain, Andrew Flinn, Mary Stevens and Shepherd raise a number of points that are relevant to the South African situation and specifically to

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23 Shilton and Srinivasan, “Participatory appraisal and arrangement for multicultural archival collections”, p. 87.
26 Shepherd, “Culture and evidence: or what good are the archives?”, p. 174.
27 Shepherd, “Culture and evidence: or what good are the archives?”, pp. 173-185.
28 S. Hall, “Constituting an archive”, Third Text, 54, 2001, pp.89-92. Cited by Flinn, and Stevens, “’It is noh mistri, we mekin histri.’”, p. 6
this study. Just as in Britain, South Africa is a culturally diverse country and the question of a national identity and a national memory is in the foreground. Furthermore, for a long time the material found in public or government-funded archives presented marginalised people who are not from the dominant sectors of society as “objects rather than citizens and individual actors in their own right”.  

Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd argue that despite there being no absolute agreed definitions on the term “community archives”, the defining characteristic is that it involves the “active participation of a community in documenting and making accessible the history of their particular group and / or locality on their own terms”. [Authors’ emphasis] Furthermore, the establishment of such an archive can be seen as a form of activism that seeks to redress or rebalance the absences in dominant heritage narratives as it gives the community power over what is to be preserved and what is to be destroyed and how these records are described and accessed. This is a point that is investigated in great detail in an earlier 2007 article by Flinn in which he looks at the challenges and opportunities that community archives present. In terms of the positives that community archives can add he suggests that community archives and the stories they tell can help us construct an inclusive local and national heritage in which all communities, all relations and interactions are included. This will help to connect people to places, communities and traditions, and thus contribute to a wider social justice agenda and support the construction of a democratised and truly culturally diverse heritage.

An important point raised by these authors is the fact that community archives “encompass all manner of collective self-identification including locality, ethnicity, faith, sexuality, occupation, shared interest, … , in short, is any group of people who come together and present themselves as such, and a ‘community archive’ is the product of their attempts to document the history of their commonality”. The question of the role archives play in

31 Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd, “Whose memories, whose archives? ”, p. 74; Flinn, and Stevens, “‘It is noh mistri, we mekin histri.’”, pp. 3-27.
constructing identities and the way in which archives and other institutions in the heritage sector connect with individual and collective memories are also raised by Flinn and Stevens as well as Sue McKemmish, Anne Gilliland-Swateland and Eric Ketelaar in two articles on how community archives challenge and subvert the mainstream. They agree that archives play a significant role in the processes of memory production as these institutions provide the tools or the building-blocks upon which memory is not only constructed, but “framed, verified and intimately accepted”.

An example of a community archive that has challenged the mainstream archival memory is Jeanette Bastian’s 2003 case study of the Virgin Islands. She focuses on the ways in which this post-colonial community, which had been denied access to the archives both in terms of usage and contribution, has forged its collective memory and has written its own history. In this chapter the tension between the written word and the oral tradition is investigated and how the absence of historical records impact on building a reliable and durable memory. Bastian concludes that “behind the theoretical discussions lies the practical reality that ownership of history (and therefore memory) is often obtained through hard-fought battles with uncertain outcomes for small disenfranchised societies or groups.”

The above mentioned chapter, as well as that by Flinn and Stevens, is included in a compilation on community archives and the shaping of memory. A section of the book *Community archives: The shaping of memory* which is of particular interest for this study includes three chapters that look at communities and non-traditional record-keeping. The focus of these is on how archives might form a basis for community identity, how they can promote reconciliation, how they can empower those on the margins of society and how they build and reinforce community memory.

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34 Flinn, and Stevens, “‘It is noh mistri, we mekin histri.’”, pp. 3-27; McKemmish, Gilliland-Swateland, Ketelaar, “‘Communities of memory’”, pp. 146-174.
35 Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd, “Whose memories, whose archives?”, p. 76.
Related to this is Beverley Butler’s research which addresses attempts of Palestinians to reconstitute a “remembered presence” in the face of growing Zionism. The way in which the contemporary Palestinian context provides a challenge to the “canonical and routinised archival discourse” and how “creative – and at times unorthodox – interventions have opened up and transformed preconceived ideas of what an archives is” \(^{38}\) is investigated. Butler points out that

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\text{[t]he definition of archival memory has been extended in the contemporary Palestinian context not only to include repositories for paper documentary evidence but to go beyond this and embrace a ‘heritage’ paradigm which gives recognition to tangible and intangible heritage resources, and to collective and individual strategies of representation. It also leads to a consideration of museum, heritage sites and cultural performances as an essentialised part of ‘just’ archival domain. This shift also reiterates the simultaneous need to reinvest in the aspirations and realities of an archival language and practice committed to a complex understanding of healing, recovery and rehousing memory-in-exile.}\^{39}\]

Despite the fact that community-orientated archives and community-focused memory initiatives are seen as critical to the democratisation of the South African national history and the shaping of a national identity, Anthea Josias points out that “their ability to persist is shaky”. \(^{40}\) In her article she looks at the problems surrounding the sustainability and autonomy of such initiatives in South Africa. She concludes that the consolidation of institution building, addressing the policy and legislative frameworks in the heritage sector and diversifying the sector and the range of collections available will go a long way in addressing the questions on the extent to which community memory projects and archives can challenge and transform archival theory and practice. \(^{41}\)

The aspect of sustainability and autonomy of specifically community craft initiatives in South Africa is also the focus of the doctoral study in technology of Ingrid Stevens. Due to the high levels of unemployment in South Africa, numerous craft projects have being initiated with the hope of creating sustainable employment. The failure of such projects is not only a waste

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\(^{38}\) B. Butler, “‘Othering’ the archives – from exile to inclusion and heritage dignity: the case of Palestinian archival memory”, *Archival Science*, 9, 2009, p. 63.

\(^{39}\) Butler, “‘Othering’ the archives – from exile to inclusion and heritage dignity”, p. 63.


of resources, but as Stevens points out, disappointing or even devastating to those involved.  

The aim of her study is therefore to provide guidelines and recommendations that could be used by people involved in one way or another in craft initiatives. She evaluates the approach of Morris & Co. in terms of design, business and labour, in order to develop a model of a successful craft enterprise and to apply these findings to selected South African community initiatives. Although Stevens’ study is from a perspective of the Fine Arts, her findings on the value and meaning of these craft projects, especially the two embroidery projects she investigated, namely Kaross™ and Mapula, can be used in the evaluation of the MCADF project as a possible counter-archive.

Orality

As indicated in Chapter I, traditionally historians have found the “intrinsically subjective and individual nature of remembered human experience” to be problematic, as it impacts on the authenticity and reliability of the records. In her 2003 study on the use of oral history in a land claim in Canada, Perry points out that oral testimony is seen to only have “limited utility where no documentary alternative” is available and that “oral archives” are valued only where they can be “corroborated by historical knowledge generated by usual repositories of Western Knowledge”. However, historians interested in the lives of ordinary people and especially the under-classes, have come to appreciate oral history as a valuable source to recover the experiences and histories of specific communities. Oral history has come to be seen not only as an alternative source to counter the paucity in official archival documents, but as a tool to empower and uplift marginalised communities.

The very aspect of orality that has been considered its “fatal flaw”, namely its “fluidity” has in the past decades been recognised as its “core strength” and according to Isabel Hofmeyr...

43 Stevens, “Morris and Co. as a theoretical model”.
oral history ‘live[s] by its fluidity’. In terms of the contribution that narratives make to the counter-archival debate Roque Ramirez, in his study of Latin American homosexual communities published in 2003, refers extensively to Renato Rosaldo who also finds the “messiness” of oral history narratives to be their strength. The fact that story-telling is not restricted to a linear chronology, but meanders, “bending for another perspective, then for an overview” opens up “variegated potentialities” and allows narratives to “do so many jobs at once”. Rosaldo points out that unlike more “single-minded hypothetico-deductive propositions, stories can simultaneously encompass a number of distinct plot lines and range yet more widely by describing the lay of land, taking overviews of the situation, and providing key background information”. Furthermore, the open-endedness of storytelling allows for “both a breadth and depth [that] can take us to places and meanings still undiscovered”.

In a similar vein Roque Ramirez points out that though “inanimate paper archival sources” are interesting and historical, these cannot “speak” to us. In contrast, a person can “indeed talk back to and with us, ensuring as much as possible that the fluidity and meandering qualities of her existence did not remain in silence”. As “oppositional histories” these testimonies can broaden historical authorship and thus the perspectives that the narrators bring can produce political texts able to critique oppressive institutions and make public records of stories or counter-memories that are not privileged in dominant narratives. For marginalised groups narrating was “the only visibility and archive of memory [they] could use. The seemingly simple and straightforward social act of talking - was the living archive [they] bequeathed to future generations”.

Roque Ramirez also emphasises the social dimension of orality as an important aspect in recovering previously silenced voices. He refers to oral narratives as “memory narratives”

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47 I. Hofmeyr, ‘We spend out years as a tale that is told’. Oral historical narrative in a South African chiefdom, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001), pp. 53-54.
49 Roque Ramirez, “A living archive of desire”, p. 117.
50 Roque Ramirez, “A living archive of desire”, p. 117.
51 Roque Ramirez, “A living archive of desire”, p. 117.
through which individuals construct and articulate their place in the world, both in the present and the past. He cites Michael Frisch\textsuperscript{56} who maintains that the importance of oral history is its ability to produce at once a “source” for public history and interpretive frames that can enhance people’s understanding of their own lives. This ability is especially important to marginalised communities who are constantly involved in a struggle for visibility, political identity and space, and where their “testimonies about existence are critical acts of documentation”.\textsuperscript{57} Orality is therefore literally a weapon of evidence against historical erasure and social analysis that fails to consider the experiences of individuals and communities on their own terms.\textsuperscript{58} Similarly Paul la Hausse points out that the “value of oral history has been most clearly demonstrated in historical research on the South African countryside, an area in which conventional archival records reveal little about the nature of social relationships”.\textsuperscript{59}

Roque Ramirez also sees a need for projects that will involve people in experiencing what it means to remember and how to keep these memories active and alive, as opposed to mere objects of collection. This, he argues, will enable communities and scholars alike to connect the past to the present and to make of history a “collective process of human signification where all of us become agents for its production”.\textsuperscript{60} Hamilton shares these sentiments and advocates the reconsideration of archives as spaces where communities will be encouraged to share their oral histories.\textsuperscript{61} According to Ketelaar, as long as the past is talked about it is in effect “commemorated”. He also emphasises the importance of oral history projects as essential vehicles and components of social memory as well as a way of affirming the identity of a community.\textsuperscript{62}

The 2006 article of Fiona Ross, Sue McKemmish and Shannon Faulkhead on the establishment of an oral memory archive for the indigenous Australian Koorie people serves

\textsuperscript{58} Roque Ramirez, “A living archive of desire”. pp. 113-123.
\textsuperscript{60} Roque Ramirez, “A living archive of desire”, pp. 125-126.
\textsuperscript{61} C. Hamilton, ““Living by fluidity”: Oral histories, material custodies and the politics of archiving” in Hamilton, Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid and Saleh, \textit{Refiguring the archives}, pp. 209-227.
\textsuperscript{62} Ketelaar, “Archives as Spaces of Memory”, pp. 12-16.
as a relevant example of an indigenous community that has been side-lined by colonial rule.\textsuperscript{63} The authors not only look at the positive elements of archiving the Koorie oral memory, but also highlight negative elements that have caused distrust and therefore difficulties for the development of a Koorie oral memory archive. They raise a number of questions that are helpful in studies on the role of counter-archives in the recognition and upliftment of marginalised communities. These include the question of archives becoming not only “sites of contested memories where alternative narratives and different perspectives can challenge dominant versions of history”, but “‘communities of records’ that reflect multicultural ownership of records and are governed by a matrix of negotiated and shared rights and obligations” and also of legal and professional frameworks that will recognise the co-creatorship and co-ownership.\textsuperscript{64}

An interesting aspect of this oral memory archive of the Koorie is that it consists of traditional stories, as well as contemporary narratives. The authors point out that this “opens up a broad conceptualisation of archiving Koorie oral memory, leading away from being concerned with storage and retrieval systems for Koorie oral records, narrowly defined, to become a process of archiving a shared and collective oral memory, and providing linkages between differing cultural narratives – within Koorie communities and beyond.”\textsuperscript{65} These oral narratives, therefore, have to be recognised for the important role they play in contemporary society. In a South African context La Hausse also points to the value of oral testimonies as being “particularly valuable in the writing of histories which recovered the subjective popular experiences of social change wrought within living memory.”\textsuperscript{66} The ability of oral narratives to allow for history to be interpreted as “past in the present”, a “necessary collapsing of temporalities to create historical meaning” is also emphasised by Rosaldo.\textsuperscript{67} This ability of orality to bridge the gap between the past and the present can help people to make sense of

\textsuperscript{63}“Vanishing Pasts, Ethnographic Presents and Digital Futures: The Case of the Maasai Audiovisual Archives” is another example of a program which aims to provide indigenous communities with the technical and methodological skills needed to record, maintain and preserve aspects of their traditional cultural heritage and public representations. It is jointly produced by the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress, the Maasai Cultural Heritage Foundation, the World Intellectual Property Organisation in Switzerland and the Duke University’s Center for Documentary Studies.

\textsuperscript{64} F. Ross, S. McKemnish and S. Faulkhead, “Pre-publication copy of the paper published as ‘Indigenous knowledge and the archives: Designing trusted archival systems for Koorie communities’”, \textit{Archives and Manuscripts}, 34(2), 2006, p. 24.

\textsuperscript{65} Ross, McKemnish and Faulkhead, “‘Indigenous knowledge and the archives’”, p. 6.


\textsuperscript{67} Roque Ramirez, “A living archive of desire”, p. 118.
their past and the role it plays in the present, an aspect which will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

In terms of methodology, when using oral sources, Helena Pohlandt-McCormick’s study of the Soweto uprising of 1976 is helpful. She used oral narratives not only to supplement, but to contradict and challenge the records held in the State [National] Archives of South Africa. Although it is not the explicit aim of the Mogalakwena story cloth project to enhance the political agency of the women, certain methodological aspects highlighted by Pohlandt-McCormick are significant when considering the oral testimonies of the craft artists. She points out that not only the stories themselves should be investigated, but the historical actors and the institutions to which they belong, as well. Furthermore, she makes scholars aware that the past is never static or unchanging, but is in fact a shifting historical terrain, for in the process of recalling and retelling thereof it is negotiated and influenced by a variety of factors in the present. Researchers therefore have to take into consideration not only the historical context in which the events of the past took place, but also the moment in which research was conducted.68

In another South African case Derek du Bruyn uses the combination of community history and oral history to write the history of one of Bloemfontein’s oldest existing townships, Batho. The focus of his research, completed as recently as 2008, is on recovering the stories, traditions, customs and experiences of not only those communities who have traditionally been neglected, but how they, as ordinary people go about their daily lives.69

The central role that memory plays in the construction of oral histories is the concern of an article by Sean Field. It is pertinent to this study as he not only focuses on the post-apartheid scenario in South Africa, but also explains oral history in archival terms. He points out that just as archives have to appraise, select and even destroy records, memory should not only be focused on remembering, conserving, listening and observing. Aspects such as the contextualisation of both the interviewer and the interviewee in order to determine possible biases and remembering - as well as forgetting which in archival terms would be the

conservation and destruction of records - should be taken into consideration. In a 2012 collection of eleven essays Field also addresses aspects such as nostalgia, identity, gender, spaces, displacement and the complex ways traumatic social changes inflect memories of the past. The focus of these essays is particularly on the displacements of the apartheid era and on the efforts to create a unified nation since the post-apartheid transition to democracy. Of particular interest for this study is the chapter entitled “Beyond Healing” where Field considers whether oral history can offer support and even aid in the healing of trauma survivors to “recompose their sense of self and to regenerate agency.”

In a 2003 article very pertinent to this study, Carol McEwan raises the question as to how we uncover and understand the experiences and perceptions of the vast population of black South African women who have been the most marginalised by colonialism and apartheid. She considers how they have been denied presence and agency in the construction of collective memory. This ties up with James O’Toole’s 2002 article in which he examines what he terms the “shadow side” of archival subjectivity, namely the relationship between records and various expressions of political and social power. Drawing on a selection of historical examples he shows how records are often “made and used for explicit, instrumental purposes, designed to put into effect the plans and desires of those with the upper hand in certain relationships”.

In terms of finding sources on women outside the archival repository, Susan Geiger and Kirk Hoppe’s articles on the use of life histories as primary sources for the content of women’s lives and for a “broader and deeper understanding of women’s consciousness, historically and in present” are also useful. Geiger points out that life histories can include narratives of more than one woman or several women from a particular society or ethnic group. These stories often provide invaluable access to experiences and perceptions of women whose lives are otherwise inaccessible to researchers. Furthermore, these stories can especially contribute

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72 McEwan, “Building a postcolonial archive?”.
to an understanding of women’s economic responsibilities and rights in non-industrialised rural agricultural societies. They can also give insight into women’s responses to social and economic disruptions caused by colonial intrusion and urbanisation such as displacement or removal; rural-urban migrations and the burden of postcolonial rural impoverishment which falls disproportionately on women.  

Closely related to both archives and orality is the concept of memory. As indicated memory and the act of remembering and forgetting are central in postmodern discussions of the archives and form the one “building block” on which orality rests. The interest in the study of human memory as a specifically social phenomenon dates from the early twentieth century with scholars such as Halbwachs and Henri-Louis Bergson highlighting that memory is not merely a construction of or property of the individual mind, but is essentially social, located in a “diverse and shifting collection of material artefacts and social practices”. The use of memory as a supplement or a replacement for history reflects the increasing discontent with the more traditional historical discourse. Kerwin Lee Klein points out that the sudden fascination with memory is no accident and goes with “postmodern reckonings of history as being oppressive”. According to him memory can come to the fore in an age of a “historiographic crisis” because it figures as a “therapeutic alternative to the historical discourse”.  

In their article on the relationship between an embodied practice such as embroidery and the formation of collective memory, Megan Warin and Simone Dennis point out that the materials in which memories are lodged, cannot be considered simply as receptacles and neither can memory be considered the constant material with which the process of remembering engages. The British cultural anthropologist Victor Turner stated that “works of art are not finished products, but continue to have an active life in process, as people engage with them in inconsistent and multiple meaningful ways”. Therefore these materials of memory are constantly changing and the “process of remembering actively engages with

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78 Warin and Dennis, “Threads of memory”, p. 163.
flexible, fluctuating and inconsistent material memories in process”. They conclude that a Western model of linear interpretation and a chronological ordering of “traces of past experiences” have been “embedded in the senses”.

From the 1950s onwards, with scholarly attention being given to marginalised groups, “memory” tended to become synonymous with “counter-memory”, “defined in opposition to hegemonic views of the past and associated with groups who had been ‘left out’, as it were, of mainstream history”. It was also in this decade that the question of identity became part of the memory discourse. In line with this, Allan Megill pointed out that when identity becomes problematic, memory becomes more important.

In the late 1980s David Thelen described the construction of memory as the process through which individuals, groups and cultures shape and reshape identities. Identity should therefore be considered as a project and a practice, underlining its fluid, dynamic and malleable nature. He argued that memory also helps in the establishment of core identities, how much and what kind of variation would be permitted, and what would be considered unacceptable. Jens Brockmeier points out that remembering the self “depends not on restoring an original identity, but on remembering, on putting past and present selves together, moment by moment, in a process of provisional reconstruction”. This is an important aspect in post-national and post-colonial societies. The continuous reworking of collective and personal identities, though it might not always be amicable, points to flexibility, tolerance of ambiguity, capacity for variation and inclusion and enables the development of counter-memories and new meanings. The concern of historians about the accuracy of memory has changed and the focus now is on the way in which families or groups select and interpret identifying common memories to serve changing needs and how such memory is recognised, agreed or disagreed on, negotiated, and finally how it is preserved and absorbed as meaningful to that specific group.

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79 Warin and Dennis, “Threads of memory”, p. 163.
80 Warin and Dennis, “Threads of memory”, pp. 163, 165.
82 Klein,”On the emergence of memory in historical discourse”, p. 143.
84 Brockmeier, “Remembering and forgetting”, p. 15.
An example of the central role that collective memory plays in identity formation is the 2004 study of Ruth Eyerman on the making of an African American identity. She focuses on slavery as a cultural marker, “a primal scene and site of memory in formation of African American identity”. She explores the notion that slavery produced a “unique opportunity for black Americans, providing culture, personality and a distinctive racial mission, a stepping-stone to racial progress”. In the South African context Fiona Ross proposed that being able to “narrate one’s experience in a public forum such as a Commission, even given the constraints of genre imposed by the Commission’s mandate and format, offers a means to identify the self in relation to a public, often envisaged as the state”. She points out that the aim of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (1995) was not simply to establish a relation between the individual and the state, but between individuals to promote “national unity” in order that “individuals’ ‘stories’ of pain and suffering ... become the grounds on which a shared memory could forge new forms of belonging.

As early as 1925 it was Halbwachs that highlighted an aspect of collective memory that would impact on the role of archives within society. According to him collective memory is not only concerned with knowledge and practical experience, but also with moral and aesthetic values. It therefore serves “both as a mirror and a lamp – as a model of and a model for society”. Within the archival domain there has been a growing awareness that archives do not merely mirror, but are sites of power where decisions are made about what is important enough to be remembered and what will be forgotten. For an extended period of time archives have therefore been regarded as playing an important role in the production of a social memory. These observations tie in with the notion that archives serve as a “memory bank” of a nation, and that it has a role to play in shaping the national identity. Whereas this “ideal” of an all-encompassing national identity or national culture is questioned, the need for a sense of belonging, some kind of kinship cannot be denied. Including the memories of

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those previously excluded from this “memory bank” brings about a shift towards a more inclusive notion of national identity that allows the multiple of different voices from different cultures to be heard.  

The term “cultural memory” was first introduced by the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann and his wife, literary theorist Aleida Assmann, in the late 1980s. In her study of the media that provided the material support underlying cultural memory, Aleida Assmann points out that when one shifts the focus from the “purely organic field of neurological structures and processes”, as studied by the medical or psychological sciences to the “social life as embedded in culture, one is forced to consider the technical media by which memory is formed and communicated”. She refers to the Russian Tartu-school semioticians and culturologists Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspenski who defined culture as the “non-hereditary memory of the collected”, thereby emphasising the dependence of cultural memory on cultural formation (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance), which they call “figures of memory”. The Assmanns conclude that “cultural memory” “does not come into existence or persist of its own accord”, but that individuals and cultures construct, create, establish, communicate, continue, reconstruct and appropriate it “interactively through communication by speech, images, and rituals”. It therefore has to be accepted by the “collective”. They point out that “[w]ithout such representations, it is impossible to build a memory that can transcend generations and historical epochs”, an aspect also highlighted by the Germanist and Goethe specialist Albrecht Schöne. He distinguishes between cultural memory “that transcends eras and is supported by normative texts” as opposed to communicative memory, which “generally links three generations through memories passed on by word of mouth”. The reliance on text also means that with the changing nature and development of the various media, the

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95 Assmann, Cultural memory and Western civilisation, p. 10.


97 Assmann, Cultural memory and Western civilisation, p. 10.

98 Assmann, Cultural memory and Western civilisation, p. 10.

99 Assmann, Cultural memory and Western civilisation, p. 10.

100 Assmann, Cultural memory and Western civilisation, p. 4.
constitution of the memory will also be continually changing. This observation ties in with the counter-archival insistence on recognising the subjective and changing nature of archives.

More recently Ann Rigney proposed that the term ‘cultural memory’ highlights the extent to which shared memories of the past are the product of mediation, textualization and acts of communication. These are not just regrettable deviations from some spontaneously produced memory on the part of participants, but rather a precondition for the operation of memories across generations, for the production of collective memories in the long term.

This emphasises the “social situatedness” of memory constructions. Rigney looks at the role played by artistic media “in crossing and helping to re-define the borders of imagined memory communities”. She points out that the aesthetic and fictional properties of works of art or craft make them “more ‘mobile’ and ‘exportable’ than other forms of representation”, making it possible to move even “beyond the boundaries of the immediate community and beyond national boundaries”. Art and craft can therefore be seen as “instruments par excellence in the ‘transfer’ of memories from one community to another, and hence as mediators between memory communities”.

A recent study on historical memory which is of great relevance to this study is the 2010 anthology on historical memory in Africa and how dealing with the past can influence the future. The editors recognise the vast amount of existing literature on this subject, but point out that the aim of their publication is to address a “structural lack in the memory discourse, namely the relationship between memory and the future.” The different contributions to this volume look at “the ambiguous nature of historical memory during times of social upheaval and transformation, focusing on a variety of cases from a number of African countries to illustrate the multifaceted and diverging roles of historical memory in dealing with the past, interpreting the present and anticipating the future.”

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101 Assmann, *Cultural memory and Western civilisation*, p. 10; Assman and Czaplicka, “Collective memory and cultural identity”, p. 130.
103 Rigney, “Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory”, p. 25.
107 Diawara, Lategan and Rusen (eds.), *Dealing with the past, reaching for the future*, pp. 1-2.
acknowledge that historical memory involves a “complex set of mental processes that function at different levels of human activity in the everyday and has personal, local, regional, national, supranational and universal dimensions and integrates nearly all realms of human existence” and therefore is ideally situated to fulfil a ‘sensemaking’ function.\textsuperscript{108}

Of particular interest to this study is the contribution of Annekie Joubert who highlights the important role of oral memory in African societies in making sense of present-day events. Her research is even more pertinent as she focuses amongst others on the Hananwa community which is also the focus of this thesis. In her chapter the “powerful ways in which memory is used to uncover the past for the purpose of political reconciliation in the present and for the future perspectives on human action” are highlighted. Joubert describes oral memory as providing an “arena within which the processes of re-reordering and reinterpretation can take place” which enables the “reconciliation of different experiences and memories, and facilitates a process of re-establishing identity amongst people torn apart by memories of violence and war”.\textsuperscript{109} Similarly Boyce Davies points out that “remembering is what heals; the oral tradition is what mends and gathers the tribes back together. Remembering or the function of memory means re-membering or bringing back all the parts together”.\textsuperscript{110}

The South African Apartheid Archives project can serve as another example of how memory can serve as a counter-archival activity that takes place outside traditional archives that is specifically relevant to this study. This was conceptualised and initiated in August 2008 by twenty-two researchers from universities in South Africa, Australia, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (USA) and was officially launched in July 2009 and is still ongoing.\textsuperscript{111} Although the majority of researchers are in the field of psychology, the aims of the project resonate with the purpose and role of the archives in society as envisaged by proponents of the counter-archive.\textsuperscript{112} This includes their intention to examine the “nature of the experiences of racism of particularly ‘ordinary’ South Africans under the old apartheid

\textsuperscript{108} Diawara, Lategan and Rusen (eds.), \textit{Dealing with the past, reaching for the future}, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{109} Diawara, Lategan and Rusen (eds.), \textit{Dealing with the past, reaching for the future}, pp. 5-6.
\textsuperscript{111} Apartheid Archives Project, “Race, space, location, dislocation: then and now”, University of Pretoria, 21-23 May 2014.
\textsuperscript{112} Ham, “The archival edge”, p. 5; Johnston, “Whose history is it anyway?”, pp. 213-215.
order and their continuing effects on individual and group functioning in contemporary South Africa”; 113 the need to create “spaces for an imaginary in which we can construct new individual and collective identities, subjectivities and positionalities that may offer up alternatives to the highly binaried and racialised social relations that continue to characterise contemporary South African society”; 114 to counter the tendency of “silencing people and their claims about, and versions of, their past”, 115 as well as attention paid to historical memory and the realisation of the “social, historical and cultural embeddedness of people and communities”. 116 According to McEwan memory is a means of “excavating silence”. 117

Josias’ recent study on archival activity in South Africa also illustrates the link between memory, counter-archives and the notion of healing. She points out that in the same manner that collective memory served as a tool of manipulation that helped to reinforce the apartheid ideology, it has subsequently been put to positive use as a “strategy of unification toward non-racial democracy, rainbow nation, as a framework for healing”. 118 In this changing memory landscape in the post apartheid era, the significant gaps that exist in written records are acknowledged and indigenous knowledge practices that were overlooked by official archival systems, have come to the foreground. According to Josias the legitimising of indigenous oral traditions and cultures necessitate a rethinking of “official” notions of evidence and authenticity. Furthermore, she adds “personal testimonies serve as baseline starting points for memory projects that range from nation-government driven processes, not only because of the inadequacy of written records, but as a way of mediating a ‘bottom up’ approach to documenting the past that takes cognisance of the need for acknowledgment and healing”. 119

The other aspect that makes up orality is narrative. In a 2002 article, Jens Brockmeier describes narrative as every text that tells a story with the aim to recall the act of intentional forgetting and thereby inhibiting the exclusion from the official cultural memory. However,

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115 Bowman, Duncan and Sonn , ” Editorial: Towards a psychology of South Africa’s”, p. 366.
116 Bowman, Duncan and Sonn , ” Editorial: Towards a psychology of South Africa’s”, p. 366.
he sees narrative as not merely consisting of telling stories, but of understanding the complex nets of human actions and events. Therefore, narrative endows the inherent historicity of human existence with cultural meaning. Furthermore, narrative is an important integrating force in the mnemonic system of cultural memory as it not only has the capacity to give shape to the temporal dimension of human experience, but the potential to construe complex temporal scenarios. This characteristic of narrative enables humans to think about their lives and themselves historically. He concludes that “narrativity allows humans to grasp a longer past and a more intricately conceived future in a more variegated social environment”.120

Brockmeier further distinguishes between three orders of narrative, namely linguistic, semiotic and discursive or performative narrative. Of particular interest for this study is the latter of the three where the focus is on the process of telling. In other words it is not the narrated event, but the narrative event that makes the plot. He highlights that to view a narrative as an “activity”, “performance” or “discourse” one must identify the way it is situated in the local cultural context.121

Also regarding the performative narrative Michael Jackson argues that storytelling, or the “capacity to narrate the self in life’s event for an audience wider than the self”,122 is a creation of a social relationship between the self and other. Therefore, as Jackson points out, “stories are nowhere articulated as personal revelations, but authored and authorised dialogically and collaboratively in the course of sharing one’s recollections with others”.[Author’s emphasise]123 They therefore create “sociality, generating intersubjective fields that span the divides between public and private and the forms of language considered appropriate to each.”124 He continues by emphasising that

[S]tories make it possible for us to overcome our separateness, to find common ground and common cause. To relate a story is to retrace one’s steps, going over the ground of one’s life again, reworking reality to render it more bearable. A story enables us to fuse the world within and the world without. In this way we gain some purchase over events that confounded

120 Brockmeier, “Remembering and forgetting”, p. 27.
121 Brockmeier, “Remembering and forgetting”, pp. 33-35.
us, humbled us and left us helpless. In telling a story we renew our faith that the world is within our grasp.  

This statement echoes Veena Das and Arthur Kleinman’s observation that “we understand the act of narrating life experiences to be an act through which individuals struggle to make shattered or dislocated social worlds meaningful”. Storytelling can therefore be seen as a way of connecting and building relationships with other people.

Ross also points out that narrative takes on an important role in restoring a sense of self in time and place and in re-establishing the grounds on which forms of personhood and sociality can be forged anew. In reference to the post-apartheid context in South Africa, and in light of the work done by the TRC, she refers to storytelling in the public domain as a “means in the ongoing work of fashioning the self in relation to changing social circumstances, a model through which people can engage in the work of considering experience, reshaping their understandings and seeking acknowledgement”.  

In his 2008 article on archives serving as spaces of memory, Ketelaar, too, highlights how the “telling” of stories has helped people to survive and make sense of the world. He points out that stories can serve both as a means of remembrance and vehicles for understanding. By allowing people to articulate their own stories and express these in the public domain by way of narrative helps them to incorporate their past into the present. He also refers to the fact that narrative does not merely consist of telling stories, but forms the basis for understanding how actions and events that take place over complex temporal dimensions are interconnected, and how these shape our past and help us to conceive our future. Expressing collective memories in narrative form is therefore important in developing an identity within a broader social network.  

128 Ketelaar, “Archives as spaces of memory”, p. 16.  
In terms of the impact of “narrated memory” on archives Ketelaar points out that unlike a court of law where the verdict is final, the reading of a historical event never is and by implication neither can the archive ever be finished. According to him “[t]he openness of the archive outweighs the closure of a trial. The file may have been closed, but it will be reactivated again and again. ... A record is never finished, never complete, the record ‘is always in a process of becoming’”.130

The study of the everyday

It is apparent that the study of the everyday life of ordinary people has been used by scholars who have “sought to challenge the idea of history as simply a series of event-driven, dramatic interruptions to normality.”131 Work in the Humanities and social discourse over the past decades has made that the “invisibility of the everyday in academic discourse”132 has become a thing of the past and a formidable body of research and theorising has been built up.

As already pointed out, the Annales historians Braudel and Lefebvre were some of the earliest scholars to use everyday life situations in historical writing. They used the “extremely wide range of mundane activities undertaken by ‘ordinary people’” as a way of making sense of “particular kinds of cultural change in Western societies”133 in the wake of industrialisation, modernisation and the two World Wars. Although Braudel made an important contribution with his focus on the quotidian material objects of ordinary workers, such as their houses, clothing, food and drink, Levebvre’s observations are particularly pertinent to this study. Lefebvre’s study of modern domestic arrangement in the post Second World War era highlighted the challenges ordinary people faced in the “transformation of largely rural traditions under pressure of a technological and economic revolution”134 and showed how being suddenly deprived of the repetitiveness of everyday routines could be a “source of profound disorientation and distress”.135 Lefebvre reversed the idea that “the modern... stands for what is novel, brilliant, paradoxical.... it is (apparently) daring, and transitory”, whereas “the quotidian is what is humble and solid, what is taken for granted...

130 Ketelaar, “Archives as spaces of memory”, p. 12.
132 Amad, Counter-Archive, p.7
133 Moran, “History, memory and the everyday”, p. 52
135 Bennett and Watson, Understanding everyday life, p. 352.
He argued that the “Ideal Home”, where living spaces become displays of modernity, could in fact “become a kind of benign tyranny, invading previously unpolicied aspects of daily routine with new expectations about stylishness, cleanliness, [and] efficiency.” This experience is not reserved for the marginalised, those in power have also been negatively affected through the industrialising and urbanising experience. However, faced with the universalising processes of modernity, Lefebvre noted that the “everyday” was in fact a sphere where the modern and the residual or traditional could co-exist and showed how the apparent process of conformity brought about by modernisation, is in fact “shot through with historical survivals and local differences.”

Lefebvre’s observations do not only apply to modern Western society, but also to more traditional communities facing the challenges of encroaching modern influences. In more recent studies of the 1990s, Brett Williams, Ondina Fachel Leal and Nadia Seremetakis address the role material culture plays in the everyday lives of these communities in dealing with the “tyranny” that modernity brings in its wake. Williams looks at the way in which African-Americans, who have moved from rural communities to the city, surround themselves with products of material culture - “knickknacks and decorations and through this density negotiate and cope with a density that is imposed on them”. Leal’s analysis into the way in which first generation urbanised Brazilian peasants decorate their homes shows “how these people live meaningfully within the contradictions between the city and the country, urban sophistication and rural peasantry, science and magic, the future and the past”. She claims that in the “suburbs they are placed on the spatial boundary between the city and the country, as first generation migrants they are on the equivalent historical boundary between the past and the future.”

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Seremetakis agrees with Lefebvre’s observation of the “tyranny” of modernity. She describes the “defacement of everyday life and ritual” by modern influences as “neo-colonial adaptations to an arbitrary modernity”.\(^{143}\) She contends that
everyday life is always a privileged site of political colonization because the everyday, prepared as a zone of devaluation, forgetfulness, and inattention, is also the site where new political identities can be fabricated by techniques of distraction; where power can make its own self-referential histories by absenting any things that relativises it. Everyday life is mythicised as a topic and the repository of passivity precisely because it harbours the most elusive depths, obscure corners, transient corridors that evade political grids and controls.\(^{144}\)

However, like Lefebvre, she observes that “everyday life is also the zone of lost glances, oblique views and angles where micro-practices leak through the crevices and cracks of official cultures and memories”.\(^{145}\) This she claims provides the opportunity to find meaning through the repetitiveness of everyday routines.

At almost the same time as the early Annales scholars, a particular type of social research was pioneered between 1937 and 1948 in Britain which some analysts saw as a vital new departure in scientific research. The aim of Tom Harrisson and Charles Madge was to develop a “science of ourselves” through the organisation they named “Mass-Observation”. Social research into the everyday experiences of workers in Britain was nothing new. However, unlike the research undertaken before and shortly after the First World War which concentrated on “carefully constructed statistical sampling of indices of social conditions such as housing, health, employment, and income”,\(^{146}\) Mass-Observation was concerned with how people thought and felt. Its mission was to “liberate ‘facts’ about what people did and said in order to ‘add to the social consciousness of the time’”.\(^{147}\) The research methods used were to document subjective accounts by asking volunteers to give a written account of their actions. This method was referred to as the “day survey” on the one hand and “observations”


\(^{144}\) Seremetakis (ed.), *The senses still*, p. 13.


on the other, recorded by observers who moved around, noting down what they saw and heard. The use of the everyday life experiences of “subjugated or invisible groups as the site at which abstract structures of domination and exploitation were directly encountered” were taken further by German Alltagsgeschichte (history of everyday life) and Italian microstoria (microhistory or an intensive historical investigation of a well-defined smaller unit of research). Both these historiographies or theories involve investigation on a micro-scale by dramatically shrinking the area of investigation. They focus on the small conditions to capture the lived experiences of individuals within - “the life and survival of those who have remained largely anonymous in history – the “nameless” multitudes in their workday trials and tribulations”. Characteristics of Alltagsgeschichte are that the focus is in the first place on the cost of “so-called progress, rationalization and emancipation in the modern period”. Furthermore, these historians propose an “integral” history that seeks to identify and integrate everything - “all relevant material, social, political and cultural data – that permits fullest possible reconstruction of ordinary life experiences in all varied complexity as formed and transformed” as opposed to “total history”. Their criticism of the long durée structure proposed by Braudel is that this macrocosmic view places agency in the hands of large-scale institutions. By giving “meticulous attention to human interaction on the micro-scale”, the broad processes are conceived as “products of dynamic practices to which ordinary people contributed, rather than impersonal structures of forces imposed by an abstract state” and the “human agency of past men and women at every level of society” is preserved.

The practice of everyday life has also been identified as a role player in the creation of national identity. In his 1994 study Jonas Frykman challenges the notion that national

149 Moran, “History, memory and the everyday”, pp. 51-68.
155 Moran, “History, memory and the everyday”, p. 52; Gregory,“Is small beautiful?”, p. 103.
identities have often been “considered as part of a ‘fabrication’ design by the elite or the ruling classes.”

He refers to studies on Swedish national identity conducted in the twentieth century that show “extensively how ethnic and national categories are used by people in everyday encounters, how identities are negotiated and reorganised.” He poses the question whether these people were indoctrinated before or whether some kind of definition of national identity also took place in everyday life – did it come “from below” as well as “from above?”

In 2002 Tim Edensor addresses more recent ideas on national identity that suggest that popular culture and the everyday need to be considered. These accounts point out that culture “is constantly in a process of becoming, of emerging out of the dynamism of popular culture and everyday life whereby people make and remake connections between the local and the national, between the national and the international, between the everyday and the extraordinary.” He also refers to the mark of status conferred to “national badges of high culture”, such as opera houses, national galleries and learned societies by certain governments and interest groups. However, these institutions are seen as part of “statist versions of national self-image” and Edensor points out that they have been “unable to retain hierarchical pre-eminence”. Instead, the “values expressed by the old cultural guardians have been challenged by ‘new cultural intermediaries’”, leading to an “increasing range of activities and cultural files with national significance”.

Christian Karner also looks at the influence of everyday life on debates about nationalism and national identities and specifically on ethnicity. In his 2007 monograph, in trying to find an answer to why “ethnicity is a growing source of political conflict in our globalizing world, producing and transforming multiplex patterns of inequality and domination”, he points out that the everyday experience of ethnicity, in terms of “emotional reach, biographical context and interpersonal dynamics”, should be understood. In addition, the effects of aspects such

157 Frykman, “On the move”, p. 64.
158 Frykman, “On the move”, p. 64.
160 Edensor, National identity, popular culture and everyday life, p. 15.
162 Edensor, National identity, popular culture and everyday life, p. 15.
as “migration, living in ‘diaspora communities’, economic crisis and/or political marginalisation on people’s sense of (cultural) self”\textsuperscript{163} need to be considered.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first century Feminism and women’s history have had a close association with the politics of “everyday” and women’s experiences in this realm. Dorothy Smith views experience as the foundation of a feminist sociology, “the ground of a new knowledge, a new culture” that is located in “one’s bodily and material existence”.\textsuperscript{164} Experience is seen as an alternative site at which dominant sociological paradigms and theory can be contested, as women’s standpoints are usually “situated outside textually mediated discourses in the actualities of our everyday lives” because they have been excluded from the “making of cultural and intellectual discourse”.\textsuperscript{165}

Similarly Kathleen Canning points out that the fact that everyday life is hailed as a “distinctively female sphere”, makes it, on the one hand, problematic as it shows how the “most mundane, taken-for-granted activities – conversation, housework, style of dress – serve to reinforce patriarchal norms.”\textsuperscript{166} However, in more recent studies, the fact that “women traditionally cook, clean, raise children and do much of the routine work of family reproduction” is perceived by some feminists as a source of strength and of value.\textsuperscript{167} Scholars such as Tony Bennett and Diane Watson argue that because of this “grounding in the mundane”, women have a “more realistic sense of how the world actually operated..., the embodied realities of life”.\textsuperscript{168} Therefore the connection of women with the everyday is not “a ruse of patriarchy, but rather sign of women’s grounding in the practical world”.\textsuperscript{169}

**Material Culture**

One of the earlier advocates of the use of material culture as a possible source is the American archaeologist James Deetz who in the 1970s focused on the material features of “seemingly little and insignificant things that accumulate to make a lifetime”, the

\textsuperscript{165} Canning, “Feminist history after the linguistic turn”, pp. 374.
\textsuperscript{166} Canning, “Feminist history after the linguistic turn”, p. 374.
\textsuperscript{167} Bennett and Watson (eds.), *Understanding everyday life*, p. 352.
\textsuperscript{168} Bennett and Watson (eds.), *Understanding everyday life*, p. 352.
\textsuperscript{169} Bennett and Watson (eds.), *Understanding everyday life*. © University of Pretoria
“commonplace objects”. He argued that although many of these objects may have a textual reference in inventories, diary accounts or bills, their material features could also illuminate the society in which they were made, used and discarded.

Some decades later the American ‘folk historian’ Henry Glassie also emphasised the need to move the focus away from solely written sources to include the study of objects. He maintained that studies which focus on words, whether written or spoken, “omit whole spheres of experience that are cumbersomely framed in language but gracefully shaped into artifacts”. He claimed that scholars “miss more than most people in recent times, and everyone in the most ancient days, when we restrict historical research to verbal documents. We miss the wordless experience of all people, rich or poor, near or far.” In her 2009 article Sara Pennell picks up on this statement and emphasises the potential that material cultural sources bring to the study of that state of being in the past, which is often, rather clumsily, termed ‘everyday life’. This if one of the ‘virtues’ of ‘old things’... Unlike documentary sources – so often written by ‘winners’ (and those other ‘dead white men’ who shaped the sources of academic history as it was studied in the nineteenth century) – material survivals could ‘speak’ of those in the past who had little or no textual ‘voice’.

To illustrate the point she refers to the industrialist Henry Ford who established a museum of American Life at Dearborn, Michigan in the first decades of the twentieth century. He saw material culture as an even better source than written information to shed light on the everyday and the undocumented.

Also in 2009 Karen Harvey points out that “material culture encapsulates not just the physical attributes of an object, but the myriad and shifting context through which it acquires meaning. Material culture is not simply objects that people make, use and throw away; it is an integral

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171 Deetz, *In small things forgotten*, p. 5; S. Pennell, “Material culture, micro-histories and the problem of scale” in Harvey (ed.), *History and material culture*, pp. 174-175.
part of – and indeed shapes – human experience”. She builds on work done by scholars such as Jules David Prown who earlier in 2001 also highlighted the importance of meaning in his definition of material culture. According to him material culture is just what it says it is – namely, the manifestations of culture through material productions. Like Bernard Herman before him who regarded “objects as evidence of other complex social relationships” and who aimed to construct “collective biographies of objects and sites” and “reconnect objects to their historical contexts”, Prown pointed out that the “study of material culture is the study of material to understand culture, to discover the beliefs – the values, ideas, attitudes, and assumptions – of a particular community or society at a given time. The underlying premise is that human-made objects reflect, consciously or unconsciously, directly or indirectly, the beliefs of the individuals who commissioned, fabricated, purchased, or used them and, by extension, the beliefs of the larger society to which these individuals belonged”.

Therefore, one of the ways to overcome the paucity of archival and published sources has been to move the focus of archival enquiry away from “formal political institutions that excluded women, toward the social and economic relations at a household level, where women’s activities take on great significance”. The material products that emanate from these activities serve as a testimony of women’s lives and achievements in the same way in which written documents produced in a formal political environment provide information on administrative and legal processes. Marsha MacDowell points to the paradox of privileged groups exerting control over language as well as the gendering of rhetorical spaces. Even though it meant the closing off of certain available means and spaces, it opened up other avenues for expression, such as material practices. This she refers to as “practices in the shadows”, due to the fact that these lack “archival trace[s] to secure them in the sightlines of history”.

177 Harvey, (ed.), *History and material culture*, p. 2; B. L. Herman, *The stolen house*, (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 1992), pp. 4, 11.
178 Harvey, (ed.), *History and material culture*, p. 6
180 M. MacDowell, “Native quiltmaking: history, traditions, and studies” in Daly Goggin and Fowkes Tobin (eds.), *Women and the material culture of needlework and textiles*, p. 41.
However, Matthew Cochran and Mary Beaudry, as well as John Moreland, point out in research in 2006 that material cultural objects are not records in any simple way. They do not act as purely “cultural receptacles that acquire meanings which can be unearthed and read by the student or researcher. Through their very materiality – their shape, function, decoration, and so on – they have a role to play in creating and shaping experiences, identities and relationships”. According to them material culture is “a potentially active agent in social life”. When considering the active role of objects in everyday life, the use of objects of material culture as archival sources is therefore a definite move away from the traditional notion of “primary archival material as ‘documents’ examined from a critical distance, and serving as ‘sources’ of information about people in the past.”

Consequently, the question arises about the methodology that should be used to incorporate material culture into a study, but more importantly how to treat objects of material culture as archival sources. With its roots in diverse fields of study such as cultural history, social history, anthropology as well as art history and the decorative arts, material culture can draw on a diverse range of methodologies to guide and inform the study thereof.

Ian Hodder discusses an important development in his 1989 article on the use of material culture as source material in archaeology. He refers to attempts in archaeology to see material culture as meaningful by using an analogy with language as a “structured system of signs separate from practical and expedient activity”. However, he points out that this separation of meaning from the context of action leads to a disjuncture split between theory and practice. Hodder suggests that material culture be considered as a particular material form of text which can be read in a similar way as one would read texts. In addition, a text is a specific and concrete product which can only be adequately interpreted in relation to the “historical meanings that it manipulates and in relation to the non-arbitrary social and

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182 Harvey, (ed.), History and material culture, p. 5
184 Harvey, (ed.), History and material culture, pp. 3, 6; Glassie, Material culture, p. 44.
186 Harvey, (ed.), History and material culture, p. 6; Prown, Art as evidence, pp. 7-10.
187 I. Hodder, “This is not an article about material culture as text”, This Journal of Anthropological Archaeology, 1989, Elsevier, p. 250.

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practical context in which it is ‘written’"). The notion of material culture as text is also discussed by Ann Smart Martin who views objects as a “text in which and through which meaning is constructed, and power is created and maintained”, and this text has “its own grammar and vocabulary”. Although Hodder’s area of focus is archaeology, the practical examples that he gives can provide guidelines when considering story cloths as archival sources. Just like archival records, text requires contextualisation to understand the various aspects contained therein. Furthermore, as archives have traditionally been text-based, the treatment of material culture as text could help to bridge the divide between the use of written and non-written sources as authentic archival sources.

Another contribution from the discipline of archaeology is the 2007 study on memory and material culture by Andrew Jones. He looks at the implication of the durability or ephemerality of material culture for the reproduction or recollection of societies in the past. He argues that the material world offers a vital framework for the formation of collective memory. He uses the topic of “memory” to critique the treatment of artefacts as symbols or as units of information (or memes) by interpretative archaeologists and behavioural archaeologists respectively. Instead he argues for a treatment of artefacts as forms of mnemonic trace that have an impact on the senses. He suggests that archaeologists should consider artefacts as networks of reference that bind memory traces in a meaningful collective memory.

The link between memory and material culture has also been a subject of discussion in anthropology and ethnography. The contributors to the 1994 anthology *The senses still: Perception and memory as material culture in modernity*, have a common interest in how historical representation and experience are embedded in material culture. The aim of these studies is to establish material culture as a historiographic space and to illustrate how it functions as an apparatus for the production of social and historical memory. In the prologue to this book, Seremetakis puts forward the notion that memory cannot be confined to purely a mentalist or subjective sphere, but that it is embedded in “culturally mediated material

188 Hodder, “This is not an article about material culture as text”, pp. 250-269.
practices". She furthermore uses the material cultural products of women in Greece as an example to illustrate that these products are inseparable from the women’s senses and emotions. She proposes that “a gendered historical consciousness is both emotionally and poetically stored in material culture”. This “memory of senses” embedded in material culture is of particular importance to cultures undergoing colonial and post-colonial experiences of transformation. It provides a buffer against the “blanketing and rationalising” socio-economic currents that treat indigenous artefacts and personal material experiences as meaningless, creating a moment of stillness when the “buried, discarded, forgotten escape to the social surface of awareness like life-supporting oxygen”.

The impact of colonialism on indigenous societies was already a subject of discussion at the British Association of Art Historians’ Conference held in 1995, entitled “Objects, Histories and Interpretation”. The focus of the conference was on the understanding and interpretation of material objects and on the role of museums in material culture in a post-colonial era. The questions raised were not only of concern to museums, but a number of academic fields, including history of material culture, cultural studies and anthropology. These questions touched on aspects such as the impact that the imposition of colonial powers had on the cultural production of indigenous societies; the impact of colonial power relations on the interpretation of objects; how in a post-colonial world the political as well as the theoretical institutions of colonialism can be re-evaluated; and specifically that the role of the museum be problematised both historically and in the present.

In the interpretation of material culture as archival sources, these aspects are equally relevant. Although archival institutions were late-comers in responding to the challenges posed by post-modern and post-structural scholars, the awareness of the social responsibility of both museums and archives, and to an extent the more inclusive scope of what is considered as archival records, such as objects of material culture, have led to an erosion of the boundaries between these two institutions. In terms of addressing aspects such as the influence of colonialism on aspects such as collection and appraisal, archivists can learn from other information institutions such as museums. Previously, material objects were not considered

as archival records, and the way in which museums deal with the interpretation and contextualisation could be of great value to archivists.

Needlework as an “alternative” historical text

Over several centuries needlework was regarded as a form of predominantly female labour, “limited to the domestic sphere”, 194 and dismissed as decorative and mindless. It was therefore overlooked in the recording and understanding of history as it was not deemed worthy of archival documentation and historical investigation. 195 However, more recently scholars have come to agree that the “centrality and significance of needlework and textile [in human history] warrants critical scholarly attention”. 196 Not only does needlework constitute a powerful rhetorical space, providing a “vehicle for unfettered and original self-expression”, 197 but it has also enabled women to construct their own discourses when they were denied access to any other form of expression. Maureen Daly Goggin explains needlework, and specifically embroidered samplers, as “grapholectic marks rendering the familiar text/ile” which fits the “parameters of canonical genres e.g. notebooks, confessions, autobiographies”, yet simultaneously “resists canonical generic placement precisely because it is cross-stitched, and lies outside the very narrow material boundaries typically set for canonical rhetorical texts”. 198 Goggin sees the stitching as transforming the “material surface into multiple levels of meaning, engag[ing] conflicting purposes and audiences, and [weaving] multiple discourses of particular historical moment and place.” 199

Furthermore, as Beverly Lemire points out in a 2009 publication, needlework as a cultural, social and economic product has enjoyed wide circulation and consumption. 200 Embroidery

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198 Daly Goggin, “Stitching a life in ‘Pen of Steel and Silken Inke’: Elizabeth Parker’s circa 1830 Sampler” in Daly Goggin and Fowkes Tobin (eds.), Women and the material culture of needlework and textiles, pp. 36-37.
199 Daly Goggin, “Stitching a life in ‘Pen of Steel and Silken Inke’”, p. 42.
200 B. Lemire, “The material culture of textiles and clothes in the Atlantic world, c.1500-1800” in Harvey (ed.), History and material culture, p. 85.

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in particular, has been a longstanding, but culturally invisible trade available for working-class women, making them very much a part of the historical process. Lemire’s study focuses on the material culture of three centuries of “textile and cloth” in the Atlantic world.\textsuperscript{201} It is therefore apparent that it is important to recoup “neglected rhetorical practices, artifacts and traditions”\textsuperscript{202} as they “can serve as an “alternative” text that has the potential to assist researchers to “recover and insert women into the fissures of the historical records” as “social beings producing and reproducing cultural products, transmitting and transforming cultural values”.\textsuperscript{203} In this process, over time, “fuller accounts and multiple ways of meaning are constructed, performed and circulated”,\textsuperscript{204} and Clare Wilkinson-Weber argues that a better understanding of political, class and gender constructions can be formed.\textsuperscript{205}

Over the past few decades an increasing number of studies have been done on the significance of needlework as an alternative to written sources. These have considered needlework in terms of functionality, art, craft or ritual and how it has affected our understanding of “gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, class, invention and technology, commerce and work over many centuries”.\textsuperscript{206} In the 1989 monograph \textit{The Subversive Stitch. Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine}\textsuperscript{207} Roszika Parker investigates the significance of embroidery from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. She highlights the development of ideals of feminine behaviour and states that “to know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women”.\textsuperscript{208} Although this study is limited to the history of women in the Western world, studies focusing on women outside the Western realm indicate that the notion of the inferiority of traditional female craft is prevalent in other parts of the world as well.\textsuperscript{209} Furthermore, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century native women in the colonies of the Western powers were taught needlework, often by the wives of missionaries, to “morally uplift” them, much in the same way as European working class

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{201} Lemire, “The material culture of textiles and clothes in the Atlantic world”, pp. 85-102.
\bibitem{202} Daly Goggin, “Stitching a life in ‘Pen of Steel and Silken Inke’”, pp. 36-37, 42.
\bibitem{203} Daly Goggin and Fowkes Tobin (eds.), \textit{Women and the material culture of needlework and textiles}, pp. 1-4, 26-27, 37
\bibitem{204} Daly Goggin, “Stitching a life in ‘Pen of Steel and Silken Inke’”, p. 42.
\bibitem{206} Livingstone and Ploof (eds.), \textit{The object of labor}, preface.
\bibitem{207} Parker, \textit{The subversive stitch}.
\bibitem{208} Parker, \textit{The subversive stitch}, foreword.
\bibitem{209} Livingstone and Ploof (eds.), \textit{The object of labor}, p. 176.
\end{thebibliography}
women. By contextualising embroidery, it can become a useful source for researchers to trace how notions of femininity and female labour, but also notions of female submissiveness, have developed over time.

In her 2002 article on Palestinian embroidery, Jeni Allenby traces the changes that have taken place in this once traditional art form. Traditionally embroidered costumes served as an “intricate communication system expressing the wearer’s status, wealth and geographic origin by means of their style and decorative elements”. With the destruction of traditional Palestinian society in the 1950s, the majority of Palestine’s cultural heritage ceased to exist when many Palestinians became refugees. Palestinian women no longer had the time nor the finances to embroider garments for themselves and very little remained to be seen of this aspect of their material culture. However, during the 1980s various women’s handicraft projects were set up within many Palestinian refugee camps to assist the women to earn an income and to promote Palestinian culture. Allenby points out that the “[i]increasing popular emphasis by contemporary Palestinians on the use of pre-1948 village life to articulate Palestinian national identity, together with the changing role of women during this period, produced an extraordinary creative time for these women as they began to move beyond their traditionally supportive role.” At the turn of the twentieth century, Palestinian embroidery has once again become a powerful expression of their material culture, although in a very different form than previously.

Warin and Dennis argue that embroidery and the construction of memory and identities are strongly interconnected. In their 2005 article “Threads of Memory: Reproducing the Cypress Tree through Sensual Consumption” they show how transferring memories onto cloth through embroidery helps a group of immigrant women in the process of transition brought about by having to leave their country of birth. They state that a

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211 Parker, The subversive stitch, pp. 2-4.
214 Allenby, “Re-inventing cultural heritage.”
thread of embodied memory stitches different places, ingredients, home and people together to yield a continuity characterised by the extension of embodied memory into the future. These threads are woven together by particular material memories and practices that are engaged with the processes of forgetting and remembering, including the recreation of patterns across cloths. 

In the 2007 collection *The Object of Labor: Art, Cloth, and Cultural Production* scholars from diverse fields of study look at the historical, political, socio-economic as well as the personal meaning of labour in the context of art and textile production. This can give researchers valuable insight into the different ways in which needlework can be used as a form of expression. The aim of the 2009 publication, *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework & Textiles 1750-1950* is to “forcefully make the case for just how deeply the needle has pierced social, political, economic, ethnic, and cultural facets of humanity, rendering it an extraordinarily valuable tool, and its associated material practices among the most important for human history.”

Although the two above-mentioned anthologies, as well as Parker’s work, focus on women as producers of cultural products and creators of social value, and therefore portray women as active subjects, the focus is on the “stubborn patriarchal” art-craft binary. In the Western world craft, such as embroidery which was produced predominantly by women, had been considered inferior to art which is considered a predominantly male activity. The call is to reject traditional notions of what constitutes art to include needlecraft such as embroidery. This thesis, however, will not engage in this categorisation of needlework, but will rather focus on needlework products as archival sources.

The 2011 article by Silke Stricktrodt on samplers made by African girls in mission schools in Sierra Leone between 1820 and 1840 sheds light on the use of needlework as sources of historical information. Embroidery was not a traditional skill for the people of Sierra Leone,

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215 Warin and Dennis, “Threads of memory”, pp. 159-170.  
216 Livingstone and Ploof (eds.), *The object of labor*.  
217 Livingstone and Ploof (eds.), *The object of labor*.  
218 Daly Goggin and Fowkes Tobin (eds.), *Women and the material culture of needlework and textiles*.  
219 Daly Goggin and Fowkes Tobin (eds.), *Women and the material culture of needlework and textiles*, preface.  
220 Livingstone and Ploof (eds.), *The object of labor*, preface.  
221 The thesis of Ingrid Stevens ("Morris and Co. as a theoretical model for contemporary South African craft enterprises", D. Technologiae, 2007, pp. 276-277) contains an informative discussion on the question whether craft articles should be considered art.
but was acquired through contact with an outside party. However, unlike the story cloths where the content is decided on by the women, the samplers were produced in the context of the mission schools. These samplers were used in mission propaganda as evidence sent to supporters of mission work in Europe and North America not only of the girls’ educational achievements, but of the success of the missionaries. Strickrodt points out that “to historians, these pieces of needlework are of interest because they were generated by a group of people for whom we do not usually have first-hand documentary material” as “they represent the direct material traces of the activity of the girls who made them”.222 However, she warns researchers that such “textile documents” could present serious problems of interpretation and that they must be regarded as “highly problematic sources of information for the lives, experiences or attitudes of the African girls who worked them”.223 She however recognises that these samplers are “material traces of the networks of support and exchange created by women”,224 and consequently “allow us a glimpse of this largely undocumented female part”225 of the highly gendered and patriarchal missionary enterprise.226

**Story cloths**

The term “story cloth” is used in craft art literature to refer to a form of narrative, pictorial textile craft art, presenting single scenes and narrative sequences in either embroidery or appliqué. This section will consider a selection of key story cloths and discuss their significance.

The study and writing of history was initially considered “especially unsuitable for women” as critics thought that it “required a mastery of historical material and logical reasoning” and that “women were considered incapable of such feats”.227 However, one of the best-known examples of a story cloth – a material history – that is considered an archival source is the Bayeux tapestry. Despite the use of the term “tapestry”, this story cloth is in fact an embroidered work. Since the early eighteenth century it has attracted attention from a large and diverse group of scholars as it is an early source of information on the Norman Conquest

of England (1067). It is an “illustrated” chronology of the event and contains a wealth of information ranging from the architecture to weaponry, as well as minute details of the Battle of Hastings. A comprehensive overview of the tapestry, *The Bayeux Tapestry: Embroidering the Facts of History: Proceedings of the Cerisy Colloquium*, published in 1999 and edited by Pierre Bouet, Brian Levy, and Francois Neveux, brings together twenty-one papers on various aspects of the tapestry, including art history, textile history and restoration, history of dress, literary history and military history. A more recent publication on the tapestry is that of Gale Owen-Crocker: in a collection of fifteen papers she looks not only at the images portrayed in the tapestry as a source of information on early medieval life, but in light of the embroidery’s sophisticated narrative structure, she emphasises the importance of considering the context in which they were created when “reading” the messages of the tapestry.

In contemporary society the tradition of story cloths is continued in a number of cultures, most of which are situated in the Third World where, in many parts still, women do not have access to formal education. Sally Peterson’s 1988 research of the story cloths produced by the Laotian refugees in Thailand is one of the earliest in-depth studies of the meaning of this “narrative pictorial textile art”, through which women of a third world country, and with limited Western based education, can use their material, and specifically needlework products to make their voices heard. The making of embroidered cloths is a traditional craft in Vietnam. However, the story cloths that have originated in the refugees camps differ from the symmetrical geometry of traditional Hmong design as “these pieces are overtly pictorial, presenting single scenes and narrative sequences in realistically rendered embroidery”. These cloths depict stories and daily activities of traditional Hmong cultural life, as well as the Vietnam War that lead to their exile. They have become a mode of communication that can connect the refugees with the outside world and “translate” their experiences for others to understand. A large percentage of these cloths find a market in the USA. In her article, “Translating Experience and the Reading of a Story Cloth”, Peterson investigates the role of memory and the telling and retelling of events (oral history) in the making of a “social history

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of the imagination”. This includes the “construction and deconstruction of symbolic systems as individuals and groups try to make some sense [translate] of the profusion of things that happen to them”. She shows how these embroidered story cloths can become key texts that enact concepts of historicity, cultural identification, intercultural communication, and collective action.

The 2007 anthology entitled The Object of Labor: Art, Cloth, and Cultural Production includes a discussion on how the traditional Indian crafts of embroidery and appliqué (sujuni/kantha) have been rekindled since the late 1980s through a story cloth project. The women who perform this type of embroidery often hail from the poorest and the lowest of the castes in India. Whereas embroidered cloths were previously predominantly decorative, in the revived format, they are used to provide social commentary. Furthermore, from being limited to local use, these story cloths are now sold to an international audience. The economic benefits gained from this project enable the women to overcome the stigma of “inferiority” and “backwardness associated” with traditional female craft.

In the same collection Lara Lepionka also focuses on the sujuni and kantha and explains that the “linguistic, poetic and aesthetic accomplishments of ordinary women with extraordinary visions of the world” are at the heart of story cloths. She sees the process as one of piecing together the imagery from the women’s own lives, religious events, social activities and rituals, thereby endowing each work with personality.

Although their articles do not deal with story cloths, both MacDowell’s and Daly Goggin’s research on quilt making amongst “Native” and “African American women” can be of great value when studying needlecraft that is not part of the traditional arts and crafts of a community, but yet over time has been assimilated as an integral part of their craft and art.

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235 Livingstone and Ploof (eds.), The object of labor.
238 Lepionka, “Visible links”.
239 MacDowell, “Native quiltmaking”, pp. 129-146.
activities. Quilt making, just as embroidery, was introduced to or imposed upon these communities by colonial powers in an effort to “civilize the native”.\footnote{MacDowell, “Native quiltmaking”, pp. 129-146.} Yet Daly Goggin emphasises the ability of quilts to empower women by giving them their own rhetorical space and enabling them to comment on society. As one participant aptly puts it: “I quilt because I don’t want my history, my story to die. Quilting gives me a voice when I can’t write or speak”\footnote{Daly Goggin, “Introduction: Threading women”, p. 41.}. MacDowell points out that the fact that quilts have long been made by Native American women which bring “to the fore notions of connoisseurship, gender constructs, academic disciplinary biases, politics, economics, and social and cultural factors”.\footnote{MacDowell, “Native quiltmaking”, pp. 129-130.} She also looks at how these quilts can enhance our understanding of these communities as well as interaction between two different cultural groups – that of the coloniser and the colonised.

Since the year 2000, Brenda Schmahmann has produced comprehensive studies of the majority of community embroidery projects in Southern Africa. These include studies on the Weya women in Zimbabwe, the Mapula embroidery project in Winterveld, as well as the Keiskamma Art Project situated in the Eastern Cape.\footnote{B. Schmahmann (ed.), \textit{Material Matters. Appliqués by the Weya women of Zimbabwe and needlework by South African collectives}, (Johannesburg: Routledge, 2000), pp. 119-136; M. Arnold and B. Schmahmann (eds.), \textit{Between union and liberation: Women artists in South Africa, 1910-1994}, (Burlington: Ashgate2005); Schmahmann, \textit{Mapula}; B. Schmahmann, “A framework for recuperation: HIV/AIDS and the Keiskamma Altarpiece”, \textit{African Arts}, 43(3), 2010, pp. 34-51.} As former professor of Art History and Visual Culture at Rhodes University, her focus is foremost an art historical viewpoint. However, as she contextualises these projects within the larger political and socio-economic environment, it makes it possible to view them not merely as works of art, but as lasting, though “invented”, records in which women can convey their personal experiences.

In their contributions to \textit{The Object of Labor: Art, Cloth, and Cultural Production} two South Africans, Carol Becker and Andries Botha look at the Amazwi Abesifazane project in South Africa which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter III. Central to this project is the fact that these cloths are created to serve as a cultural and historical archive. As indigenous women were not widely included in the TRC, their experiences have remained undocumented. The aim of this project is to enable these women to reconstruct a history of their lives under apartheid through embroidered cloths. The women are encouraged to share their stories which are written down and translated into English and then archived. These
stories are then illustrated through embroidery, enabling an uneducated and underrepresented group of women to occupy their rightful place in history. These pictorial embroidered cloths are called “memory cloths” as opposed to “story cloths”. Although in principal these cloths are similar in production to other pictorial narrative cloths, the choice of the word ‘memory’ might be intentional to emphasise the fact that the participants have to recall and then depict difficult memories.

McEwan sees the Amazwi Abesifazane project as an endeavour to establish a historical truth and a collective memory for black women who have been most marginalised by colonialism and apartheid – and one might add traditional society – and denied presence and agency in the construction of a collective memory. Therefore, she prefers using the term “memory cloths” as an alternative to story cloths, as the aim is to record the often undocumented experiences of indigenous women under apartheid recorded on cloth with embroidery and coloured beads. She considers the possibilities of creating a postcolonial archive where the voices and texts of historically marginalised people can be incorporated into national projects of “remembering” and of “belonging”. She focuses on the attempt to archive black women’s pictorial and written testimony with the aim to create a space for these women within nation building processes in order to fully realise their citizenship. This citizenship is more than a set of political rights or welfare provisions granted by state, but to ensure “active agency and the assertion of full autonomy within their community”. McEwan considers these story cloths as a community rehabilitation project that will enable the women to retrieve their memories and to improve their lives.

In the 2009 article “Memory Embroidered: Craft Art as Intermedial Space of Expression”, Joubert looks at the story cloths of the MCADF embroidery project as an alternative way to locate and to document the role of the women in the history of the Hananwa. Craft art is treated as an intermedial space of cultural expression - in this case a space where oral and visual art and writing meet to form a “new and innovate form of ‘oral craft art’”. Joubert specifically focuses on the oral performances that form an intrinsic part of the creation of

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these story cloths from a linguistic and literary perspective, treating them as sources of information and not merely craft art products.

A noticeable aspect of widening the scope of what is considered an archival record in the counter-archival domain is that these records represent a definite move away from the notion of a “stable” record as was deemed preferable by traditional archivists and historians.248 Scholars have recognised that records may be more complex and multiform than what was previously accepted and have accepted a more composite view of a record that consists of different parts that may be relevant: “the physical format, the information presented within it, or the information it conveys under some other aspect, or all of the above”.249 This means that the records have a certain mobility and that they “morph in various ways in accord with the shifting [cultural] context of their production”250 and that records cannot be defined “abstractly, as a kind of ideal”, but “contextually, in accord with the combined concerns of scholarly and societal needs”.251

Conclusion

From the discussion above it becomes clear how research and literature on the counter archival debate has moved away from the notion of archives as “reliable repositories of truth, seedbeds of unabridged and veracious history” and “an authentic, untampered-with past”.252 In comparison with this ideal, the domain of the counter archives is seemingly “unstable”. However, it is this very instability that allows the counter archives to adapt and respond to evolving cultural situations and possibilities from one context to another so effectively.253 This in turn could enable archives to respond to the former President of the Society of American Archivists, F. Gerald Ham’s anticipated role for archives as “hold[ing] up a mirror for mankind” for “[i]f we are not holding up that mirror, if we are not helping people

249 Nichols, “An artifact by any other name”, pp. 138-139.
250 Nichols, “An artifact by any other name”, p. 140.
251 Nichols, “An artifact by any other name”, pp. 138-139.
understand the world they live in, and this is not what archives are all about, then I do not know what it is we are doing that is all that important”.

CHAPTER III
CONTEXTUALISING OF THE MCADF PROJECT

The aim of this chapter is to contextualise the MCADF project within the broader South African historical landscape. Firstly, a brief overview of the importance of contextualising not only the archival documents, but the archival institution itself will be presented. The history of the area in which the MCADF project is situated will be provided in order to create an understanding of the motivation for and the circumstances under which this project was founded. Finally, the current situation will be discussed so as to gain insight into the milieu in which the Craft Art Centre operates as well as the daily struggles and challenges that the craft artists face.

Rationale for contextualisation

Bhekizizwe Peterson points out that “[b]ecause of South Africa’s racialised and divided history, the problem of its archive, particularly with regard to how it is constituted and its accessibility, has been a long-standing one”. He refers to the playwright and journalist H.I.E. Dhlomo who noted that because “colonial and apartheid authorities consistently denied the existence of any legacy among Africans worth preserving” and their insistence that Africans had no history, “time and again our position and future have been prejudiced and made insecure by reference to our past”. In the South African context the matter of “official or publicly sanctioned memories and histories [that] were shaped around silences and lies” extended well into the 1990s with the systematic destruction of records during the apartheid period. Even the archives established in the homelands could not give a true representation of the black population’s experiences under the apartheid regime as they could not afford to cut themselves loose from the “comprehensive support à la grande apartheid”. In the introduction to Refiguring the Archive, Hamilton, Harris and Graeme Reid highlight that for these reasons historians in South Africa have been “cautious about relying exclusively on

1 B. Peterson, “The archives and the political imaginary”, in Hamilton, Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid and Saleh, Refiguring the archive, p. 29.
2 Peterson, “The archives and the political imaginary”, p. 29.
public and, more specifically, government records because of their colonial and later apartheid biases”. 7

In her study on the research challenges posed by archives, Bastian refers to a number of scholars from various disciplines who have concluded that the problem consists not merely of missing evidence, but also of missing context in traditional archives. 8 The geographer James Duncan is one of several scholars from outside the realm of history to point out that “to work critically in the archives is .... not only to study in the archive, but to acknowledge that the archive itself was part and parcel of the machinery used to crush resistance to colonialism”. 9 Ballantyne emphasises the “need to appreciate how our colonial archives were constructed”. 10 He calls on archivists and post-colonial scholars to “catalogue what is absent as well as what is present, and to reconstruct the ideological work that they have done”. This requires that the “limitations of narrow interpretations be recognized, boundaries of provenance be tested” 11 and one needs to look beyond the “physical record creator to discover the context in place, ethnicity and collective memory in an effort to fully embrace and interpret the record within a multi-cultural and boundariless world.” 12 The fact that the focus of research should be on the “methods and strategies of the production of archives within context of institutions that produced them” and that scholars should consider “archiving as a process... as epistemological experiments rather than as sources...” 13 is also underlined by Stoler in her study of colonial archives. 14 These scholars see the need for a more expansive and comprehensive reading of records and to extend contextualisation to include not only collections housed in a repository, but in researching the way an archival institution has been brought together and the aspects that influenced this process. Thus the call from counter-archival scholars is for a focus on the context behind the content of archival collections. In the words of Burton it is the “power relationships that shape documentary

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7 Hamilton, Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid and Saleh, *Refiguring the Archives*, p. 9.
11 Bastian, “Reading colonial records through an archival lens”, p. 281.
12 Bastian, “Reading colonial records through an archival lens”, p.281.
13 Stoler, “Colonial archives and the arts of governance”, p. 87.
14 Bastian, “Reading colonial records through an archival lens”, pp. 280-281; Ballantyne, ““Archives, empires and the histories of colonialism””, p. 29; Stoler, “Colonial archives and the arts of governance”, p. 87; Ballantyne, “Mr Peal's archive”, pp. 98-102.
heritage, document structure, narrative, deeper contextual realities”\(^\text{15}\) – in other words the “stories” of the archives. Researchers are therefore called upon to read texts for non-textual information,\(^\text{16}\) to look beyond the content to the “records environment in which social meaning is composed and produced, and by learning to read records as sources of discourse (context) rather than sources of value (information)”.\(^\text{17}\)

Contextualisation is nothing new for archivists and the principle of “provenance” has guided them in the appraisal and arrangement of collections since their inception. However, anchoring archives in contextual social and cultural history, rather than scientific positivism overthrows traditional notions of archival practice and “traditional” archival research. Looking at archival records as a form of cultural expression and the awareness of the “importance and complexity of the history of human recording” bring to the fore the notion that there is not only one appropriate narrative which is relevant to a series of records. Rather, there could be various contextualities, serving multiple purposes to many audiences across time and space and changing according to the perspective from which the records are approached. Although both fixed in terms of content and structure, rather than being fully formed and closed as proposed by the positivist archival tradition\(^\text{18}\), records are constantly evolving and changing, “linked to ever-broadening layers of contextual metadata that manages their meanings, and enables their accessibility and useability as they move through ‘spacetime’”.\(^\text{19}\) This indicates a move away from the notion of records as carriers of the truth, as their meaning is relative to the context of creation. Therefore, in reading a specific text the researcher should keep in mind that many other texts and meanings are being concealed.\(^\text{20}\)

In the previous chapter the fact that archivists are active shapers of social memory influenced by larger forces, as opposed to being objective in the construction of history, was addressed. Archival scholars however agree that contextualisation goes beyond the recognition of archivists’ implicated-ness and of their own historicity. Cook and Harris also emphasise that

\(^\text{15}\) Cook, “Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth”, p. 25; A. Burton, “Thinking beyond the boundaries: empire, feminism and the domains of history”, Social History, 26 1, Jan 2001, pp. 66-69; Bastian, “Reading colonial records through an archival lens”, p. 276; Burton, Archives stories.

\(^\text{16}\) Cook, “Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth”; Nichols, “An artifact by any other name, pp. 138-141.


\(^\text{18}\) Chapter 1.


the primary archival challenge is not the preservation of records, but to provide a richer contextualisation of the records preserved. Heald adds to this argument by pointing out that archivists must realise that their task is to “understand the cultural products of society”,21 the cultural expressions that exist in concrete form. Archivists are therefore urged not to try and follow the latest trend in historical research,22 but to “reflect society’s values through functional analysis of interaction of citizen with state.”23 This requires a radical historicisation of archives as archival principles and practices have to be situated within the larger historical context of community, broader politics and social dynamics.24 Cook points out that in order to understand the archives, the political, economic, social and cultural milieus, that is the context of any given society has to be understood.25

The archivist as active participant in the record making process26 is in line with the notion of static archives being destabilised, as proposed by Foucault and Derrida. Cook echoes the sentiments of colleagues in the archival practice, such as Nesmith, Craig and Harris when he states that archival theoretical discourse should be about the “....process rather than product, becoming rather than being, dynamic rather than static, context rather than text, reflecting time and place rather than universal absolutes”. Cook advocates that these same ideas should not only be applied in analysing and understanding science, society, organizations, and business activity, among others”, but “become the watchwords for archival science in the new century, and thus the foundation for a new conceptual paradigm for the profession”.27

This notion impacts on the role of archives in the broader society. In the light of this, Blouin and Rosenberg point out that archives should not simply be seen as “historical repositories, but as a complex of structures, processes, and epistemologies situated at a critical point of intersection between scholarship, cultural practices, politics and technologies.”28 An awareness of their contextual situated-ness on a national and social level and in their capacity as sites of documentary preservation and “places of uncovering” enable archives to create and

21 Heald, “Is there room for archives in the postmodern world?”, p. 100.
22 Ham, “The archival edge”, pp. 5-6.
24 Thelen, “Memory and American history”, p. 1119; Rowat, “The record and repository as a cultural form of expression”, pp. 198, 203.
26 Ham, “The archival edge”, p. 9.
28 Blouin and Rosenberg (eds.), Archives, documentation and institutions of social memory, p. vii.
re-create social memory. They therefore conclude that archives “produce knowledge, legitimize political systems and construct identities. In the broadest sense, archives thus embody artifacts of culture that endure as signifiers of who we are and why.”29 According to Thelen in his study of the construction of memory, archives can therefore not operate in isolation, but “in conversation” with the community wherein they function.30 This links up with the emergence of community archives over the past decades, an aspect that has been addressed in chapter II.

In terms of contextualising story cloths as an archival source, Peterson in her earlier mentioned study of the story cloths created by the Hmong Vietnamese refugees, emphasises the need to ground these cloths in the context of the refugee camp life. She argues that this has to be done before the actual content of these cloths can be fully understood as radical adaptations of the traditional designs “raise questions of acculturation, authenticity, and cultural politics”.31 Given the importance of understanding the milieu or context in which an archives is brought together or constructed is therefore essential.

**Historical contextualisation**

The key to interpreting the story cloths produced by the MCADF embroidery project as a type of community archive is to understand the context in which this project emerged and is situated. The focus of historical research conducted on this broader topic to date has been on the Hananwa,32 a sub group of the Northern Sotho people, situated at the Blouberg Mountain, approximately 100km northwest of Polokwane, the current day capital city of Limpopo province. The postgraduate studies by N.C. Weidemann,33 T. J. Makhuru34 and L. Kriel35 focus specifically on the Blouberg group’s interaction with the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR) (South African Republic) and other Western settlers during the nineteenth century.

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29 Blouin and Rosenberg (eds.), *Archives, documentation and institutions of social memory*, p. vii.
30 Thelen, “Memory and American history”, p. 1119.
32 Two different ways of spelling is used namely Hananwa / Gananwa. In her thesis Kriel points out that Gananwa is apparently used by the Lebogo family who stand at the head of this group. However, according to Northern Sotho/ Pedi linguists the term Hananwa is preferred. (L. Kriel, “n Vergelyking tussen Colin Rae en Christoph Sonntag se weergawes van die Boer-Hananwa-oorlog van 1894”, DPhil, University of Pretoria, 2002, pp. ii-iii).
Weidemann’s study concentrates on the war of 1894. He endeavoured to expand on previous studies which focused on the causes and course of the war by including the circumstances and especially the life of the ZAR forces on commando. Makhurú’s study gives a historical overview of the political interaction between the Hananwa and the ZAR for the better part of the nineteenth century. Kriel’s study, in turn, focuses very specifically on the textual representation of the war that took place between the Hananwa of Blouberg and the ZAR in 1894 by comparing and contextualising the two most prominent diaries published on the events.

In all three these studies mention is made of a splinter group of the Hananwa, under the chief Kibi (Ramathu), who lived northwest of the Blouberg, on the banks of the Mogalakwena River. Not only was this group geographically separated from the main group at Blouberg, but politically a division took place in 1879 when the younger son, Kibi, murdered his father, causing a succession crisis within the greater Hananwa group. Kibi also collaborated with the forces of the ZAR during the Boer-Hananwa War of 1894, alienating himself and his followers from the community at Blouberg.36 The Craft Art Centre of the MCADF is situated in this area. However, the craft artists are not all Hananwa. Several introduced themselves as Babirwa, (another Northern Sotho sub group), hailing from the west of Polokwane up to the Botswana border. One woman identified herself as Venda.37

The anthropological doctoral study by J.A. van Schalkwyk on the Hananwa looks at the process of construction of identity of a pre-colonial society through colonial intervention and the policy of separate development. Although the focus of this study is also confined to the Blouberg area, it gives an overview of the situation in the 1990s in terms of physical and human resources. It also includes a comprehensive historical overview of the establishment of the group in the area, the first contact with white settlers and the process of economic and political marginalisation. This serves as valuable background information on aspects that have influenced the area in which the Craft Art Centre is situated.38

38 Van Schalkwyk, “Ideologie en konstruksie van ’n landelike samelewing”.

© University of Pretoria
Annekie Joubert’s research on the oral performances of two Northern Sotho communities can be helpful in becoming better acquainted with the Hananwa culture. She explores the survival, variability and functioning of a living oral tradition in the Hananwa community and aims to illustrate the performative dimensions that are still present in the social and cultural lives of this semi-literate community. 

Although the aim of Joubert’s study is to point out the essence of oral literature through the performance-directed perspective, she contextualises and gives detailed descriptions of each performance. The story cloths embroidered by the MCADF also originate in their oral tradition and the descriptions of their oral performances not only give a glimpse into the cultural life of the Hananwa, but also contribute to the understanding of the story cloths.

The focus of the 2006 masters’ study by Marike Fourie in Heritage Tourism is on the Blouberg area as well: aspects such as economic activities and infrastructure development that are addressed in detail, are of relevance to the Mogalakwena area as well. The already mentioned research by Boonzaaier and Philip focuses on the Blouberg area and presents an overview of the foodstuff cultivated by the Hananwa and the way in which it is prepared. A considerable number of the story cloths deal with food collection and preparation as it is a task assigned to the women in the community. Again, even though the focus is on the Hananwa of the Blouberg area, this research can be useful to better understand this chore that constitutes an important part of these women’s everyday lives.

Van Schalkwyk points out that up to the middle of nineteenth century the Hananwa relatively quickly and easily established their political dominance over a large geographical area. Their isolation ensured their independence and meant that they were relatively safe-guarded against encroachment from intruders, including white settlers. However, the period from the mid-nineteenth century can be regarded as one of total intervention. This was when the Hananwa’s encounter and eventual confrontation with “different cultures, traditions, societies, religions and political structures ... brought about devastating cultural changes,

39 Joubert, The power of performance, p.5.
necessitating ongoing restructuring and transformation, often resulting in agony.” 44 Joubert describes this confrontation as an “apocalypse” for almost all colonized societies, as they experienced “deepened demographic disaster, as well as crises of leaderships”. 45 By the beginning of the twentieth century not only had they lost their political independence to an external government, leading them to become politically and economically more and more sidelined, but their way of life changed drastically, causing the social fabric of their community to disintegrate. This situation is however not unique to the Hananwa and this area. The majority of indigenous communities in southern Africa had similar experiences in their encounter with colonial forces and missionaries, resulting in the same consequences. 46

In the early nineteenth century the Hananwa tolerated groups such as the Buys people, 47 early Boer settlers, Portuguese traders and missionaries entering their territory. In fact, they enjoyed a “relationship of mutual understanding and dependence” 48 with these “outsiders” as they could act as “news agencies, diplomatic intermediaries and facilitators to obtain commodities”, 49 whereas they in turn relied in varying degrees on the skills and knowledge that the Hananwa had of the area. 50 However, as more European settlers moved into the area, combined with a “more forceful British mercantile capital and imperialism from the 1870s”, 51 landownership and resources such as water, grazing, hunting grounds and minerals became contested and inevitably led to disputes and violent clashes. In the case of the Hananwa, full-scale war (1894) with the ZAR erupted to determine ownership over the area.

47 The Buys people were of French Huguenot descent who later moved to the Graaff-Reinet district, where they intermarried with Khoi and African women. Coenraad Buys was banned from the Cape colony because of his anti-British influence on the Xhosa people, and finally settled in the Soutpansberg, in the vicinity of Schoemansdal. The initial peaceful cohabitation with the local Black groups changed with the arrival of Boer settlers in the mid-1880s. (Joubert, The power of performance, pp. 198-199)
Furthermore, up until then, the Boer government had been unable to effectively collect taxes from the Hananwa which served as an added incentive to declare war.\textsuperscript{52}

Western missionary activity, not only in Southern Africa but worldwide, became seen by post-colonial scholars\textsuperscript{53} as the “key agent in the rupture ... from their traditional culture”.\textsuperscript{54} Willem Saayman points out that the reason for this lies in the fact that the “African social, religious, political and economic system was such an integrated whole that any attempt to change one dimension of the system inevitably influenced all the other dimensions”.\textsuperscript{55} According to Joubert, as “agents of change, the missionaries opened new horizons of knowledge and opportunity with the establishment of hospitals and schools”,\textsuperscript{56} but as Van Scalkwyk explains it also changed the local “people’s lives, their needs and world views” irrevocably.\textsuperscript{57} This view is emphasised by Johannes du Bruyn and Nicholas Southey in their study on the treatment of Christianity and Protestant missionaries in South African historiography. They quote T.O. Beidelman who stated that

\begin{quote}
Christian missions represent the most naive and ethnocentric, and therefore the most thorough-going, facet of colonial life... Missionaries invariably aimed at overall changes in the beliefs and actions of native peoples, at colonization of the heart and mind as well as body.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

Being exposed to “foreign” ways of building, agricultural activities and ways of dressing, the Hananwa’s material world changed. As consumers they became gradually “tied to the alien system of a money economy”,\textsuperscript{59} and contributed “either consciously or unconsciously to the process which undermined the indigenous industries and arrested the acquisition of

\textsuperscript{52} Joubert, \textit{The power of performance}, pp.201-202; Kriel, \textit{The ‘Malaboch’ books}, pp. 55-56; 72-82.
\textsuperscript{56} Joubert, \textit{The power of performance}, pp. 207-208.
manufacturing skills among the Hanawa since they encouraged the consumption of manufactured European commodities”.60

Initially, missionaries failed to understand the importance of indigenous practices for the Hananwa, such as rainmaking, initiation and thanksgiving. Joubert points out that they could not replace these indigenous institutions with “viable alternatives for the advancement of the Bagananwa society” which, according to her, undermined the “psychological capacity of the Hananwa to defend their independence against all odds.”61 The traditional Hananwa society blamed the missionaries and their converts for the severe droughts of 1872 and 1881 as they refused to adhere to the traditional ways and, in turn, the converts started to scorn the traditional way of life.62 Makhuru also regards the influence of the missionaries as instrumental in the subjugation of the Hananwa and attributes the succession battle of 1879, as well as the Hananwa splinter group’s collaboration with the ZAR forces in 1894 to the fact that their leader, Kibi, was converted to the Christian faith.63

The inability of Christianity to address all these aspects was recognised within the missionary community. In the 1930s Rev W. H. Trott and Rev G.A.O. Kuhn of the Berlin Missionary Society (BMS) expressed the need for the Lutheran church to be Africanised as the “liturgical customs of the Lutheran Church were incompatible with the customs of the indigenous people” which were based on a “sense of collectivism, as opposed to individuality of the Western societies.”64 The Lutheran church did however not implement any such changes.65

Today, African Independent Churches in South Africa, such as the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) which “exhibit distinctively African social structures, symbols, rituals, practices, beliefs and liturgy”,66 enjoy a large following and amongst the members of the MCADF by far the majority are members of the Zionist church. The reason for this can be attributed to

64 Joubert, The power of performance, pp. 204-205.
65 Joubert, The power of performance, pp. 204-205.
the fact that the church is able to give people a sense of security and continuity as, according to Dawid Venter, the ZCC is “poised in transition”, a spirituality that is ‘linking backwards and forwards at the same time’ allowing ‘modernity to be represented in older cultural forms, while cloaking older forms of tradition in newer guises’”.67 Furthermore, with its strict code of conduct and hierarchy defined by formalised dress, almost like uniforms, symbols and specific tasks in the church, almost along military lines, the church is able to fill the void in leadership in the black community in South Africa.68

However, the dismantling of the traditional autonomous Hananwa governing system had already started prior to the 1894 war with the discovery of diamonds in Kimberley and gold in the Witwatersrand in 1867 and 1886 respectively. In an attempt to provide a cheap, but steady workforce on the mines, the ZAR and British colonial governments imposed taxes on the local black population which forced the chiefs to send their young men to work in the mines. In the case of the Hananwa, as with some other groups, migrant labour had been part and parcel of the male Hananwa experience since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Up until the 1894 war the Hananwa also enriched themselves through work sojourns in the Cape Colony. On the other hand this led to the development of new social classes that did not support the chief and the traditional way of life, causing a split in the community. Wars between the colonial forces and the indigenous communities only further accelerated the process, such as the above-mentioned war of 1894 between the ZAR and the Hananwa.69

It would however be in the twentieth century that a policy of separate development (segregation and then apartheid) in favour of the white minority population would see the complete political and economic subjugation of the black population.70 One of the key aspects of this policy was the Natives Land Act (No. 27 of 1913). According to Timothy Keegan this Act was “designed to stamp out all forms of independent black tenancy”,71 as no black person was allowed to settle outside certain designated areas, namely existing reserves,

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67 Venter, Engaging modernity, pp. 53, 83-84; Joubert, “Religious imaginations in embroidered craft art”, p. 11.
traditional black areas and a small number of farms in private or tribal possession. The aim was not only to restrict the movement of black farmers, but, by hampering their self-sufficiency, to ensure a workforce for mines and industries, creating what Solomon Terreblanche and others describe as the “special relationship between power, land, and labour”.

Restricting the movement of black farmers would lead to serious problems of overstocking and the resultant degradation of the natural vegetation and soil erosion. By the 1920s the deterioration of the situation in the African areas was already remarked on in government publications. In 1932 the Native Economic Commission Report (1930-1932) commented at length on the “extremely low productivity of farming on the Reserves, on the increasing malnutrition and on the real danger of the irreversible destruction of the land through soil erosion”. In the drought prone Blouberg area, this proved to be devastating. In order to combat this problem and to improve agricultural production in the homeland areas, the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 was passed and subsequently “Betterment Planning”, or “Rehabilitation” as it is also known, was implemented. The intention was to create economically viable, agriculturally-based communities. This would have required the resettlement of over 40 per cent of rural families in new “rural villages” from where they would migrate to employment centres, and in new industrial towns where they would be employed as wage labourers. However, “Betterment” was not implemented as envisaged. In most cases the funding necessary for the new villages and industrial towns was not made available, leaving the government to deal with the “surplus” population. Although the plan was to remove people from land regarded as unsuitable for cultivation, in some areas people found themselves with less arable land than they had before, or they lost their arable land altogether. The rate of compensation was usually below replacement cost and a large

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number of cattle were culled, leading to resentment from the people affected. This made it very difficult for rural black people to survive economically and many who previously were reasonably to very successful commercial farmers, could now barely feed their own families.

Despite the failure of the “Betterment” schemes, separate development would continue to form an integral part of the subsequent National Party’s apartheid policy. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the reserves where black people were forced to live were restructured into “independent” homelands to give so-called economic and political credence to this policy. One of the results was that traditional authority systems that had any form of autonomy were taken away. The new structure still had some elements of the traditional system, but black leaders appointed to run the homelands were merely puppets of the apartheid government and could not fulfil the multiple roles that the traditional system had. This process further dramatically destabilised black communities where the chief played a central role in all aspects of their lives. In the case of the Hananwa, they were incorporated into the homeland of Lebowa in 1972 which consisted of several areas scattered across the current Limpopo province. The fragmentation of land, coupled with the relocation to areas as determined by the government, lead families to be broken up and the Hananwa to further lose their cohesion as a group. A.J. Christopher also points out that one of the most prominent aspects of the homelands was their “extreme poverty”. With their movement being severely restricted and without access to international or national capital on any scale, the majority of the homeland populations exhibited remarkably low incomes. Resettlement of unemployed people, high natural population growth rates which lead to overcrowding, agricultural stagnation and limited industrial growth all contributed to the “perpetuation of a cycle of poverty”.

82 Christopher, The atlas of changing South Africa, pp. 87-93. See also Callinicos, A people’s history of South Africa, vol.1, p. 30.
Whereas attempts were made to encourage the establishment of industries in some of the other homelands, this did not occur in the Blouberg area. This was partly due to it being so geographically isolated, but also due to the relationship between the Hananwa of Blouberg and the authorities. From the 1894 war onwards they were seen by the local Native commissioner as “dwarstrekkers” (obstructionists) as, despite warnings, they refused to register deaths or births, carry pass books, participate in the “betterment” programme and accept the new rules on the position of the traditional chiefs. Although the Kibi group accepted the new arrangements in terms of the traditional chiefs, the people designated as Hananwa by the government, were all lumped together and in 1954 any assistance in terms of infrastructure development was stopped.83

This problem was further exacerbated by the armed struggle against apartheid which the African National Congress (ANC) and Pan African Congress (PAC) embarked on in November 1961.84 After an anti-pass campaign in March 1960 where police clashed with protesters in the townships of Bopholong, Sharpeville and Langa, the government immediately responded by declaring a state of emergency and by banning the ANC and PAC.85 The banned organisations went underground and their newly formed military wings, Umkhonto we Sizwe and Poqo, started a campaign of sabotage, targeting the main arteries of the South African economic structure. However, after the capture of some of the leaders of the ANC and the subsequent Rivonia Trial that lead to their imprisonment, the ANC terminated their campaign of sabotage and went into exile.87 Whilst in exile they established links with a number of African countries, such as Tanzania, Angola and Zambia, where military and refugee camps were established and from where the ANC directed their activities and infiltrated South Africa. The instability in southern Africa in the 1970s due to ongoing African decolonialisation and the Soweto riots in 1976 in South Africa itself, gave new momentum to the ANC’s efforts to bring an end to apartheid.88 This culminated in 1984 in what was called a “people’s war” with the aim of making South Africa ungovernable.

84 Ross, A concise history of South Africa, pp. 128-129; Worden, Making of modern South Africa, pp. 117-118.
86 Lodge, Black politics in South Africa since 1945, pp. 231, 250-255; Ross, A concise history of South Africa, p. 131; Worden, Making of Modern South Africa, pp. 125-126.
87 Lodge, Black politics in South Africa since 1945, p. 297.
88 Lodge, Black politics in South Africa since 1945, pp. 328-330.
After riots had broken out in a number of townships, the National Party apartheid government responded by putting in place extreme measures to quell any opposition which ranged from a state of emergency declared in 1983 and intensifying their war against the “terrorist” forces fighting for the liberation of the black population. 89 It is also during this time that the National Archives started destroying documentation pertaining to any movement opposing the National Party government, effectively “erasing” them from the historical record. 90

It is during this volatile time that the story of the Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation (MCADF) started. In 1986, Dr. Elbé Coetsee, the founder of the MCADF, and her husband bought a farm on the banks of the Mogalakwena River, in the province of Limpopo, close to the Botswana border. (See Figure 1 on p. 101) As this was one of the main entry points into the country for members of Umkhonto we Sizwe, the South African Defence Force (SADF) maintained a heavy military presence. Coetsee recalls young SADF soldiers, covered in mud, physically exhausted and emotionally drained, arriving on the farm after weeks patrolling South Africa’s border with Zimbabwe and Botswana. The barbed wire fence that surrounds the Craft Art Centre also dates from that time and Coetsee deliberately decided not to take it down to serve as a reminder of the milieu in which the foundation was founded. 91 Responding to the question whether there was an “element of distrust”, especially from the local women’s side towards a white woman during this difficult political period, both parties indicated that their relationship was of a “social nature” and therefore not influenced by the politics of the day. 92

The military activity in the area discouraged any positive economic development and cross border raids, land mines on the roads, combined with long term drought that South Africa experienced in the early 1980s, forced many of the cattle farmers to sell up or change to game

91 Personal information: Dr. E. Coetsee, 2011-03-07.
**Figure 1:** Location of the Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre

**From:** Bing.com/images
farming, which is far less labour intensive. As a result, many of the local black families lost their source of income. This lead to the already high levels of migrant labour to increase as the local people, especially the men, had to look for work in the larger city centres and mines, leaving the women to fend for themselves, the effects of which will be discussed later on in this chapter. Struck by the extreme poverty resulting from the unemployment in the area, Coetsee decided to teach crafts, such as sewing, screen printing and weaving to the women who helped her in the house with the hope that by selling their products, these women could create a livelihood for themselves. This proved to be a success, and in 1994 the Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation was founded by Coetsee. Today twenty women are employed on a full-time basis, while another ten work part-time. The mission statement of the MCADF is: To create employment opportunities for previously disadvantaged women and young school leavers living in villages under the authority of traditional tribal chief, Kibi, in the Blouberg district of the Limpopo Province; promote and redevelop the traditional craft art skills inherent in rural communities, but which has become dormant due to poverty, and to enable more members of the community to become self-sufficient and less dependent on unemployment government grants and pensions; record and preserve indigenous knowledge of living oral cultures and nurture and develop creativity of children living in remote rural communities.

At the time Coetsee initiated this project, several humanitarian agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs) had started to promote the manufacture of rural handicrafts as a much needed source of income and productive employment, particularly in former “homeland” areas. Several sewing and embroidery projects were established at this time. It should be noted that embroidery and the making of embroidered story cloths had not been part of the customary arts and crafts of indigenous communities in Southern Africa. Missionaries who worked toward converting as well as educating these communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries taught them various “useful” skills, amongst which needlework and

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93 Personal information: Dr. E. Coetsee, 2011-03-07.
embroidery. Story cloths, however, are a more recent skill than the skill to work with needle and thread.

The embroidered story cloth projects that have been initiated over the past three decades in South Africa have several aspects in common. Just as was the case with the Mogalakwena project, the majority of projects were started by outside agencies, either an individual, a charity group or an art gallery. The Kaross™ embroidery initiative was founded in 1989 by Irma van Rooyen, a visual artist who moved to a farm in the Letsitele/Giyani area. The project started small with only five Shangaan embroiderers who sitting on a kaross (blanket) – hence the name of the project - created embroideries depicting their culture. The Mapula Embroidery Project was founded in 1991 by Soroptimists International Pretoria and the Sisters of Mercy with approximately twenty women. From the start, the training, development and coordination was done by a local woman, Emily Maluleke, who was a part time teacher at the D.W.T. Nthate School from where the project operates. By 1997 the project had grown to include eighty women. Some of the highlights of the project are the presentation of a Mapula cloth to Queen Elizabeth during her visit to South Africa in 1999 and the overall gold award at the prestigious FNB (First National Bank) Vita Crafts Now Award exhibition, organised by the Crafts Council of South Africa in 2000.

After the completion of her PhD on Venda folk tales in 1996, Ina le Roux, a then lecturer in Afrikaans literature at the University of Venda, founded another collective Tambani, a quilting and embroidering initiative. Her initial interest was sparked when one of her students invited her to meet his grandmother who knew many of the old Venda folk tales. Le Roux spent the next six years amongst these rural people, listening to and collecting their oral stories. In order to preserve the Venda oral tradition, but also to create some way of earning an income in the poverty stricken area, Le Roux encouraged the women to embroider the stories on cloth. These appliqué blocks, containing images of the Venda culture are used by quilters, knitters and crafters all over the world.

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97 Rogerson and Sithole, “Rural handicraft production in Mpumalanga, South Africa”, p. 150.
Isiphethu is another arts-based economic development project that includes tapestries or hangings made with hand-appliqué and fine embroidered details, some with beaded accents. This project was initiated in 1999 by the Carnegie Art Gallery in New Castle who approached a group of women to sew a wall hanging for a Woman’s Day project. The project inspired the women to continue creating and a workshop programme was launched in 2000. The National Arts Council provided the initial funding for materials and the reimbursement of taxi fares. In 2000 the project also made a successful application to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) to participate in an International Trade Fair which was also supported by the Newcastle Municipal Council and the Natal Arts Trust.  

Another initiative, the Keiskamma Art Project was started in 2000 by Carol Hofmeyr, a medical doctor and artist with the help of Jan Chalmers from the UK and Jackie Jezewski from France. Hofmeyr began teaching arts and crafts to a few women who collected the plastic bags that littered the village and crocheted them into hats and bags. Currently, in 2013 over 100 artists and crafters are involved in this project, specialising in commissioned tapestries and corporate gifts.

Another artist, Andries Botha, initiated the Amazwi Abesifazane – Voices of Women project in 2001. After attending the TRC hearings in South Africa, Botha felt that the women and their daily struggle against apartheid was to a great extent ignored during the TRC hearings. He developed a “creative methodology as a means for women’s memory to be recounted and held in trust as part of the memory archive of South Africa for future posterity.” The collection of close to 3000 embroidered cloths and recorded personal stories gathered from South African provinces was given a permanent home with the establishment of Africa’s first Women’s Museum in KwaZulu Natal. The aim of the museum is to enable the “memory

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retrieval of women and is made tangible through the production of embroidered and appliqué works of art and personal narrative”.

Celia de Villiers, a keen quilter, was asked in 2003 to start up another project, the Intuthuko Sewing group. Together with Susan Haycock, Clarence Nkosi and fellow artist Sonja Barac, de Villiers has been facilitating and mentoring the craft artists as well as developing markets for the group. The group has won various awards for their quilts and hangings including the FNB Vita Crafts Award for their “Journey to Freedom” embroideries celebrating ten years of democracy in South Africa. In June 2010 the Intuthuko group started to re-organise themselves into an independent co-operative.

The projects are either situated in former homelands, such as Kaross™ which is situated in the former Gazankulu, in the current day Limpopo Province; Mapula in Winterveld, formerly Bophuthatswana and today Northwest Province; Tambani in former Venda and the Keiskamma Art Project in Hamburg, in the former Transkei. Others are found in informal settlements close to industrial areas, such as Isiphethu in the mining town of New Castle and the Intuthuko Sewing Group in Etwatwa Township in Benoni. The Anazwi Abesifazane attracted women from different areas throughout the country, but most notably from the former Kwa-Zulu homeland which was particularly badly affected by violence and Aids. However, the fact that some of these projects are situated in former homelands does not imply that these women represent a specific “ethnic” group as determined by the apartheid government. Of importance is that they as black, marginalised women, subordinated at a number of levels are hereby given the opportunity to give voice to their experiences.

Most of the projects were a response to the abject poverty of marginalised communities in the former homelands and shanty towns which found themselves on the periphery of economic mainstream South Africa. The main aim is to generate an income for the women, thereby alleviating poverty and empowering them economically. Although projects such as Kaross™ and the Keiskamma Art Project also include men, the overwhelming majority of the participants are women. Often they are the sole breadwinners in their families and support up to ten family members.

In some cases, such as the Keiskamma Art Project and Amazwi Abesifazane, the need for healing is mentioned pertinently. In the case of Keiskamma it is specifically a way of dealing with the AIDS pandemic, whereas the Amazwi Abesifazane project focuses on providing a platform for women to articulate their traumatic experiences of apartheid. As already mentioned Botha felt that the final TRC report would contain only a partial truth. The hope was that the archives of story cloths that were created as a result of the project would provide an alternative to the mainstream history.

A secondary but equally important result of being able to sell their handiwork to support their families is that the women’s self-esteem has grown, an aspect which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter V. These projects are therefore recognised for their ability to become the “voices” of disempowered and underprivileged women as it allows them to comment on events in their lives and their community, thereby creating meaning and hope in their lives. This is also evident from the names given to the projects. Mapula means “Mother of Rain” in Setswana, the rain being considered a blessing in many African cultures; Isiphethu “fountain” or “source” in Zulu and Amazwi Abesifazane, “Voices of Women”. Several of the projects, including the Mogalakwena project, Intuthuko and the Keiskamma alterpiece, have received exposure abroad as well, bringing the plight of local black women to the

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114 Hinze, “Saint Anthony's Fire and AIDS”.
attention of an international audience and providing an important market and hence income for their craft art items.119

As the prime concern of this craft industry is to make a living out of the sale of the women’s work, the choice of products created are marketable goods such as cell phone bags, shopping bags, cushion covers and place mats. The form and imagery used is therefore often dictated by the consumer. However, several of these projects also produce artworks such as tapestries and wall-hangings which allow the women to create works familiar to themselves and their cultural background - exploring their “heritage and re-apply[ing] it”.120 The craft artists of Mapula, Isiphehtu and Intuthuko Sewing group are encouraged to include their personal experiences as well. These embroideries all tell stories of real events in the women’s daily lives, some reflect modern day living in general, while others depict historical incidents, legends and customs.121 The Tambani, Isipethu and Amazwi Abesifazane embroidered panels also include a written description or corresponding story.122

The Keiskamma project includes other arts and crafts. The embroidery section has a commercial range of cushion covers depicting Nguni cattle, an important aspect in Xhosa culture. This project is however particularly known for the large art installations it produces. One of two examples is a Bayeux-like tapestry which depicts the history of the South African nation and is housed in the Parliament buildings in Cape Town. The other is an altarpiece which bears witness to the AIDS crisis and performs in South Africa the same narrative function that the Isenheim Altarpiece, a 16th-century masterpiece, did for medieval Europe during the plague. This work was exhibited in churches and cathedrals in North America and England.123

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119 Hinze, “Saint Anthony's Fire and AIDS”.
123 Hinze, “Saint Anthony's Fire and AIDS”.
The Mogalakwena project can be seen as being situated between that of a commercial and an archival project. It has a specific Western market-orientated range that entails household goods which do not necessarily reflect on the culture or the views of the embroiderers. The majority of these products are made on commission for hotels and restaurants and include bed and table linen. The story cloths do not form part of this commercial range, but grew quite spontaneously out of the personal relationship between Coetsee and the local women. Born and bred in Cape Town, Coetsee admits that when she and her husband acquired the farm in the Limpopo province, she knew very little of the Northern Sotho people and she started to enquire about the women’s daily lives. To overcome the language and cultural barriers, the women found it easier to “tell” their stories by means of embroidered story cloths. Coetsee was astounded by the wealth of information on the indigenous culture and traditional knowledge systems contained in these stories. As a result, in the year 2000 the members of the MCADF started documenting their everyday life by means of embroidered story cloths. Although some of these story cloths and story books have been sold, the financial benefits, unlike the commercial range, are only a secondary motivation. The driving force behind the creation appears to be the sharing of their stories and their observations of their world around them in tangible form for future generations of their own, but also for other people worldwide.\textsuperscript{124} For this reason an archive of story cloths has been created, similar to the Amazwi Abesifazane archives, which includes photographs and descriptions of each cloth. This process will be discussed in Chapter IV. In her book \textit{Craft art in South Africa} Coetsee makes the point that many “crafts” are works of art in their own right which have become part of art collections\textsuperscript{125} and, in the case of the MCADF, have become objects of academic research.\textsuperscript{126}

\textsuperscript{125} Coetsee, \textit{Craft art in South Africa}; Personal information: Dr. E. Coetsee, 2011-03-07.
Current contextualisation

The democratic elections in 1994 and the new government’s promises of a “better life for all” brought a number of expectations from the new electorate. On a political level, the black population hoped that they could rid themselves from the unpopular local councils to make place for people of their own choice who would have their interests at heart. However, the breakdown of the traditional authorities coupled with the bribery and corruption that was used to entice blacks to support the apartheid system left a void in leadership that would prove very difficult to bridge. Since 1994 the media reported numerous stories concerning the inefficacy of the South African government, citing mediocrity, incompetence, fraud, corruption, nepotism, entitlement and failures of and delays in delivery.

Some argue that corruption has not increased but merely become more visible under the new political dispensation, owing to greater transparency. In order to prevent corruption, as early as 1994 the salaries of parliamentarians and municipal officials were set at relatively high levels. According to Allister Sparks

\[\text{the result has been the creation of a new political elite dependent on retaining their seats in parliament to maintain a lavish lifestyle. On the other hand, government employees in essential services such as education, policing and health services remain underpaid. Inadequately trained and underpaid personnel are poorly equipped to provide essential services and to maintain safety and security.}\]

In an open letter to the current Limpopo premier, Cassel Mathale, the political analyst Elvis Masoga accuses him that the promised “better life” in Limpopo is “exclusively enjoyed by your family, friends and close political associates”. He laments the premier’s lack of response to reports of “rampant corruption and maladministration”, leading most people to

127 Jeffery, People’s war, p. 69; Welsh, The rise and fall of apartheid, p. 566.
130 Ross, A concise history of South Africa, p. 198.
believe that the government is in fact tolerant of these practices. According to Masoga the fact that the province had to be placed under national administration in 2011, came not only as no surprise to most people, but it also served as “ultimate proof that [not only] the province was in crisis”, but that the “treble challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality” have actually become “bad if not worse” since he took over the reigns as premier in 2009.\(^{133}\)

Evidence of this dire situation was that according to the Blouberg Annual Report, twelve councillors had to be dismissed in the 2010/2011 period. The community’s lack of faith in the municipal leaders is also reflected in their reluctance to pay for rates and services.\(^{134}\) The MCADF members, without exception, voiced their grave disappointment with the municipal and provincial authorities. They feel that the councillors in Senwabarwana (previously Bochum) are either too far to be aware of the problems in their ward or that they simply do not care.\(^{135}\)

One of the more difficult issues that had to be dealt with during the negotiations that preceded the first democratic elections in 1994 was the role that traditional leaders would play in local government.\(^{136}\) Previously they were often maligned as “the faithful servants of the apartheid government and the bantustan despots”\(^{137}\) or as Barbara Oomen puts it the “administrative factotums of apartheid”.\(^{138}\) But as Oomen and Ineke van Kessel point out, traditional leaders have in the majority of cases aligned themselves, whether “wholeheartedly or for tactical reasons, with the powers that seem to offer the best chances of safeguarding their [own] positions”.\(^{139}\)


\(^{136}\) Bank and Southall, “Traditional leaders in South Africa’s new democracy”, pp. 415-418.


\(^{138}\) B. Oomen, “‘We must now go back to our history’”; Retraditionalisation in a Northern Province Chieftaincy”, *African Studies*, 59(1), 2000, p. 72. See also Hendricks and Ntsebeza, “Chiefs and rural local government in post-apartheid South Africa”, p. 99, who refer to the chiefs as colonial stooges and Bank and Southall, “Traditional leaders in South Africa’s new democracy”, p. 413.

\(^{139}\) Van Kessel and Oomen, “‘One chief, one vote’”, p. 572. See also B. Oomen, “‘We must now go back to our history’”; Retraditionalisation in a Northern Province Chieftaincy”, *African Studies*, 59(1), 2000, p. 71.
In the new democratic dispensation numerous chiefs managed to combine “the resource of tradition with appeals to western models and the discourse of liberation politics”, which in practical terms entailed that they projected themselves as “guardians of African custom, but simultaneously as pioneers of rural development”. With their leadership and indigenous law being recognised, which among other things entailed the right to a salary paid by the government, to adjudicate certain disputes according to customary law and to representation at various levels of government, traditional leaders have once again managed to adapt to changing times. Oomen and Van Kessel point out that if these leaders are perceived as non-partisan, they can play a valuable role in local communities. However, as they are dependent on government patronage, they can easily be manipulated by the government of the day, as has happened in the past.

However, according to the Blouberg municipality annual report, the five traditional authorities in the area do play a significant role in the development of the communities. Therefore the municipal council has established a forum where the mayor meets with the relevant magoshi (captains) to discuss issues relating to mutual cooperation with the hope of creating better cooperation and goodwill. In some circles it is felt that the maghoshi should play a more prominent leadership role as they, in most cases, know the people and care for them. However, the craft artists of the MCADF feel that after 1994, they not only have the right to independence from the previous oppressive political system, but also from the patriarchal system under the traditional captain or chief. Whereas they previously would have had to pay a percentage of their income to the captain as a tribute, this is not the case with the salary that they earn from the Craft Art Centre. They feel that this employment was obtained through their own skills and capabilities, and not through the captain. As will be discussed later in this chapter, the extent to which black women in South Africa have been truly liberated under the new dispensation can be debated. Furthermore, the current void in terms of leadership in the black community is a serious matter. These women have no connection to the new political elite whose lavish life styles they see as coming at their

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140 Van Kessel and Oomen, “‘One chief, one vote’”, p. 573.
141 Van Kessel and Oomen, “‘One chief, one vote’”, p. 573.
143 Van Kessel and Oomen, “‘One chief, one vote’”, pp. 561-585; Oomen, “‘We must now go back to our history’”, p. 71.
145 Personal information: Mr. J. Thlaouma, Tour guide, Makgabeng, 2013-01-17.
expense, but alternatively there is no historical figure whom they can fall back on. Moreover, one should not underestimate the importance for these women, after being without a voice and a say for so long, to vote and finally make choices that should change their lives for the better. To be let down by people in office goes beyond mere disappointment and leaves a great sense of insecurity and helplessness in the face of the extremely difficult circumstances in which they find themselves.147

In an address to parliament in 1998, the then Deputy President, Thabo Mbeki stated that:

a major component of the issue of reconciliation and nation-building is defined by, and derives from, the material conditions in our society which have divided our country into two nations, the one black and the other white. We therefore make so bold as to say that South Africa is a country of two nations. One of these nations is white, relatively prosperous, regardless of gender or geographic dispersal.... The second and larger nation of South Africa is black and poor, with the worst-affected being women in the rural areas, the black rural population in general and the disabled. This nation lives under conditions of grossly underdeveloped economic, physical, education, communication and other infrastructure.148

Christopher agrees with this statement and points out that “[a]lthough the legacy of the colonial and apartheid eras have been dismantled in law books, it remains in many other spheres of life. ... Formal segregation has been removed, but many aspects of the geography remain in place.”149 Therefore, poverty, poor education and unemployment, all due to under-development have become a vicious circle which up to the current day has not been broken.150 He also highlights the extreme poverty of the African rural areas and argues that as it is “hidden”, in comparison with “that of the slums of the cities which suffer the more publicized ‘urbanization of poverty’”, it is easily forgotten.151 This is an aspect pertinent to the situation of the participants of the MCADF.

A Household Survey held in 1995 found that 41 per cent of the economically active population in Limpopo Province were without work.152 By 2009 this figure had not shown much improvement with nearly a quarter of the working-age population unable to find

147 Terreblanche, A history of inequality in South Africa, pp. 52-54.
149 Christopher, The atlas of changing South Africa, pp. 232-238.
151 Christopher, The atlas of changing South Africa, pp. 232-238.
152 Christopher, The atlas of changing South Africa, pp. 232-238.
employment. The 2011 National Census report showed that 49.9 per cent of the workforce in Limpopo was unemployed, as compared to the national rate of 23.9 per cent. In the Blouberg municipal area most of the wards are rural and poverty stricken with high levels of unemployment and illiteracy. Agriculture and cattle farming are still seen as the main economic activities and figures indicate that up to 85 per cent of the community still use these as sources of survival. It is in this area where the former policy of dispossession is felt very severely. The lack of land which led to the exploitation of the little land available, erosion and the invasion of plants such as sicklebush (Dichrostachys nutans) have made the area unsuitable for grazing, with the exception of goats. Most of the rainfall occurs during the hot summer months when evaporation is very high. Furthermore, because the area is prone to frequent droughts it makes intensive crop farming impossible. The economy of the black people of the area is therefore based on rudimentary subsistence farming. It is not surprising then that the Blouberg municipality falls within the category of the lowest income levels in the country and is characterised by high levels of unemployment and persistent degrees of abject poverty.

One of the results of the extreme poverty in the former homelands is the high rate of temporary short-term labour migrancy to “white South Africa”. The homelands furthest from the industrial areas, which included Lebowa, recorded a higher ratio of absentees of residents, with the majority of males in the vital age of 15-64 age groups temporarily away from their homes. Many still have to leave to make a living. According to a survey held in 1998, of the 36 per cent of the local population which was economically active, 79 per cent were migrant workers. By 2011 this situation had not changed and official statistics show that between 2001 and 2011 Limpopo province continued to experience negative net migration figures. As a result single parent families, headed in the majority of cases by women or households headed by children, were and still are the norm rather than the exception and most members

of the community are children under the age of twelve and adults over the age of forty-five.158

The majority of the members of the MCADF are single parents, several with husbands working as migrant labourers as far afield as eMhalahleni and Giyani, respectively ± 400km and ±230km away.159 In the cases where the husbands have abandoned them and their children there are understandably feelings of resentment and anger. One of the women who had been left with three small children, voiced her negative opinion as follows using a Biblical metaphor: “For men to get to heaven is like for a camel to go through the eye of the needle”. She and other colleagues who are single mothers have concluded that they will still embroider a story cloth about the comings and goings of the men in their society. Judging by their tone of voice and facial expressions, this story will indeed not flatter the men.160

Although most of the women can make light of their plight as single parents and sole breadwinners, the consequences are extremely serious and the multitude of social problems in the area are attributed to the effects of migrant labour. Alcoholism and drug abuse are rife and the number of illegitimate children is increasing. Girls often do not complete their schooling due to unplanned pregnancies which place an additional burden on the household. A number of the MCADF members concur that having to look after grandchildren born out of wedlock is a burden. In a society where there has been a tradition of viewing fertility and children as contributing towards the well-being of the individual and providing assurance for a proper burial, it is indeed a irony that the disintegration of the family unit has caused their “security” for the future, their children, to have become an encumbrance.161

However, being a single parent due to either migrancy or abandonment, has also impacted on the traditional submissive role of the woman in black South African society as wives have had to become responsible for the economic well-being of the family.162 Some of the women have built a local career, often as teachers or nurses and have become independent and not

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willing to accept the rule of the migrant husband. Due to these changes, women have come to play a much bigger socio-cultural role, especially where social and economic activities are combined. Some of the more notable examples, which initially had a social basis but have become practised commercially, are the making of beer and the renting of mokang-kanyane (traditional dance groups) to perform at special occasions. Both were previously linked to social occasions, but are now subject to the payment of a fee.

Although, as indicated in other contexts, embroidery has never been a customary practice amongst the indigenous people of the southern African region, the production of story cloths can be seen as a combination of inherent social and economic activities. Storytelling is an integral part of the social and educational life of most indigenous African people. The fact that the creation of these cloths starts off with an oral discussion of the contents thereof makes them an apt means for the transfer of the craft artists’ stories. Just as folksongs or legends are passed through oral traditions, the story cloths are “passed on from hand to hand through observation and conversation”. The stitches become narrative elements, not only allowing the viewer to get a unique glimpse of their contemporary life, but providing a vehicle for social comment, which Lepionka likens to a comic strip poster. After the discussion, the design is transferred to the cloth through firstly drawing and then embroidery. These cloths are then sold with the aim of earning an income.

Sociologist Valerie Möller refers to the increased dependency on the South African state as unemployment’s “twin problem”. She points out that “[t]he social safety net has been widened to alleviate the hardships caused by jobless growth.” The number of beneficiaries of social grants rose from 3.6 million in 2001 to 13 million in 2009. Often an old-age pension, a disability pension or a government child support grant, paid to one or more members of the household is the only relatively reliable source of cash income in a household or extended family. This payment, however, is not only used by the intended recipient, but

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Although newly enfranchised citizens feel entitled to state support in the absence of other means of livelihoods, Möller sees this as a new form of paternalism and patronage between state and citizen [that] has succeeded the one that existed between white employers and black workers in the colonial and apartheid eras. As long as government transfers remain the most important source of household income and means of survival, it is foreseeable that the poor will continue to be dependent on state handouts. This dependence on government grants since 1994 was another incentive for Coetsee in establishing the Craft Art Centre. She reasons that if these women are able to create a livelihood for themselves, they can become less dependent on these grants and more importantly, they will be able to stay at home with their families. The latter is one of the main reasons why finding work locally is so important to the women. Two of the interviewees pointed out that though they used to work in Gauteng and Polokwane, they returned to Samson village or Grootpan, the two settlements close to the Craft Art Centre from which the majority of women hail.

Even though the members receive a fixed monthly income from the Craft Art Centre, the majority of them also receive some form of social grant. Though money is tight, they agree that the salary enables them to move beyond mere survival and barely making ends meet, to the possibility of improving their own and their children’s lives. Two of the main expenses the women incur are electricity and education for their children. Alletha Jooste, the administrative assistant at the Craft Art Centre observed that the household products that they choose to buy have to be of the best quality that they can afford, as they rightly argue that they will last so much longer. They are also constantly looking out for special offers on groceries and other goods and as a group buy in bulk at larger commercial centres, such as Polokwane, to get more value for their money.

Craft projects, as well as the combining of socio-cultural and economic activities, such as the brewing of beer and the molang-kanyane, show some kind of entrepreneurial initiative which is so needed in this community. External stimuli, to encourage traditional craft in the areas

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170 Moller, “Quality of life in South Africa”; p. 189.


set aside for the rural black population, can be dated back to as early as 1935 when a commission was appointed to look at handicraft as a means to economic upliftment. In addition, the Department of Native Affairs complained that educated blacks were being cut off from their background which made them negative towards their “traditional” way of life and therefore, not supportive of the implementation of native reserves and later homelands. Some of the advantages of such home industries were that they required relatively little capital, but were labour intensive, giving a large number of people the opportunity to gain employment. In many cases the handiwork skills were taught by Europeans and were not traditional to the local population. In the Blouberg area the missionaries from the BMS were active in this regard. A carpentry shop, for example, was established at the Leipzig missionary station and women were taught needlework by the wives of the missionaries. However, the colonial and apartheid authorities did not see these efforts as a way for blacks to become wholly economically independent as it would deprive the mining and industrial sectors in the white areas of a valuable source of cheap labour. According to Möller, independent black entrepreneurship was suppressed as ruthlessly as any political insurrection.

The first democratically elected government has also looked at encouraging entrepreneurship to address and ultimately eradicate poverty. According to Möller, as well as Terreblanche, “unsurprisingly” few of these efforts have borne few fruits. This is attributed firstly to the lack of infrastructure and training. Furthermore, affirmative action and equity measures such as Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) are seen to have benefited “an increasingly affluent but miniscule black minority. The new political and economic elite have, as already

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173 According to Saul Dubow the introduction and consolidation of segregation as a comprehensive national policy in the period between the two World Wars was accompanied by far-reaching changes in the field of ‘native administration’. In order to administer the large number of segregationist laws which was introduced during this period, the Native Affairs Department (NAD) was considerable enlarged, in terms of number of employees as well as its powers and sphere of jurisdiction. The administrative tone of the Department also changed from “benevolent paternalism” to a “more robust and purposive bureaucracy”. (S. Dubow, “Holding ‘a just balance between white and black’: The Native Affairs Department in South Africa c.1920-33”, Journal of Southern African Studies, 12(2), April 1986, pp. 217-239.)


175 Van Schalkwyk, “Ideologie en konstruksie van ‘n landelike samelewing”, pp. 211-215


177 Black Economic Empowerment is a programme launched by the South African government to redress the inequalities of Apartheid by reversing it and by giving certain previously disadvantaged groups of South African citizens economic privileges previously not available to them. It includes measures such as Employment Preference, skills development, ownership, management, socioeconomic development and preferential procurement. (SouthAfrica.info, ‘Black Economic Empowerment’, www.southafrica.info/business/trends/empowerment/bee.htm, s.a. Access: 2014-05-06.)
mentioned, variously been accused of being greedy and insensitive to the plight of the poor.\textsuperscript{178} and the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR)\textsuperscript{179} programme has become synonymous with broken promises.\textsuperscript{180} Scholars also make mention of the increased inequalities within the black community due to the new political and economic elite. Whereas the major social divide was formerly between the richer white minority and the poorer black majority, it has become a divide between “rich black urban dwellers and their poorer country cousins.”\textsuperscript{181} This recreates a situation of haves and have-nots and threatens the social cohesion.\textsuperscript{182} According to the Blouberg municipality annual report (2010/2011) the implementation of economic empowerment and planning programmes is aimed at ensuring “income generation for most of our poverty stricken communities.”\textsuperscript{183} The MCADF was also approached to become part of such a programme. When Coetsee approached the craft artists with a proposal from the relevant local government official, they rejected such a possibility outrightly. Their reasons were that they considered the official to be corrupt and suggested that as a government member she only had her own gain in mind.\textsuperscript{184}

As already mentioned, due to the remoteness of the area, little investment has been made in developing the infrastructure and as even the basic infrastructure is insufficient there is no incentive for further development.\textsuperscript{185} The Blouberg municipal annual report acknowledges that “the infrastructure backlog in the area is very huge (water, sanitation, roads, schools, clinics and housing)”.\textsuperscript{186} The poor condition of the roads in particular is highlighted as one of the main areas of concern and it is stated that this should be prioritised due to the economic importance thereof.\textsuperscript{187} Farmers in the area also agree that the state of the roads is of great concern. One farmer has indicated that he is reluctant to invest in the cultivation of labour

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\textsuperscript{178} Terreblanche, \textit{A history of inequality in South Africa}.
\textsuperscript{179} A strategy for rebuilding and restructuring the economy, in keeping with the goals set in the Reconstruction and Development Programme. It is described as an integrated economic strategy, in order to confront the related challenges of meeting basic needs, developing human resources, increasing participation in the democratic institutions of civil society and implementing the RDP in all its facets. (Treasury, ‘Growth, employment and redistribution’, <www.treasury.gov.za/publications/other/gear/all.pdf>, s.a. Access: 2014-05-06.)
\textsuperscript{180} Moller, “Quality of life in South Africa”, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{181} Moller, “Quality of life in South Africa”, p. 187.
\textsuperscript{183} Terreblanche, \textit{A History of Inequality in South Africa}.
\textsuperscript{185} Personal information, Ms. P. Terreblanche, anthropologist and freelance researcher, Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre, 2013-01-15; Written information: Dr. E. Coetsee, 2013-06-18.
\textsuperscript{186} Van Schalkwyk, “Iedologie en konstruksie van ‘n landelike samelewing”, pp. 40-41.
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intensive crops, such as vegetables, as safe transport to the relevant markets cannot be guaranteed. Great distances separate these remote settlements from services such as schools and hospitals and the bad state of repair of the roads only exacerbates the problem. Few people have cars and many still rely on donkey carts for short distance transport. For travelling further afield they have to make use of buses and taxis, but the women feel that they are at the mercy of ruthless operators who overcharge, knowing well that they offer the only option of transport to the bigger centres.

The two settlements of Grootpan and Samson in Limpopo province received electricity in 2006 which brought enormous changes, both positive and negative. All the women in the group enthusiastically agreed that having electrical appliances saves time. Previously they would have to go out into the veldt before or after work to collect wood and only then would they be able to start with the cooking. They also indicated that it was a great advantage to have electric light so that the children can do their homework in the evening. However, the price hikes in electricity that South Africans have experienced over the past number of years is of great concern for them as many cannot afford to buy enough pre-paid electricity to last them a month. Having access to electricity has also enabled these women to acquire cellular phones, the impact of which cannot be over-estimated. Previously they would have had to travel some distance to reach a public phone, but cellular phones allow them to bridge great distances and have instant access to distant family members.

Unfortunately, not all that electricity has brought is positive. Most of the women emphasised the negative impact that the soap operas screened on television have on the younger generation. Aspects that are taboo in their society, for example for a pregnant woman to be seen, are projected as acceptable and even the norm. The lavish lifestyles portrayed in these series have also brought about a very strong element of materialism amongst the younger

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188 Personal information, farmer, Blouberg district, 18 January 2013.
189 Personal information, MCADF craft artists, 2013-01-14; I was taken by surprise by the symphony of ring tones that I heard at the Craft Art Centre. Most of these are extracts from classical pieces and Bach, Mozart and Tchaikovsky sound through the workshop. I had to ask what prompted their choice of ringtone and the answer was simply because they found that particular melody pretty.
190 Personal information, MCADF craft artists, 2013-01-14.
Another negative consequence of the arrival of electricity is that the traditional music and dances that would be performed at social functions have been replaced by a “boom box” (large sound system) as the preferred “instrument”. The local “shebeen” (bar) owner acquired a “boom box”, which he plays very loudly all hours of the day and night, depriving school-going children and the women who have to work from necessary sleep. Responding to a question from Coetsee whether they could complain, the women indicated that they would not dare. This is an indication that the subordinate position of women is still very much in place. Moreover, the change in cultural practices is inevitable, but for a society that has been isolated for such a long time, the rate of change can be disconcerting and can deprive such a community of a sense of identity.

The provision of water is highlighted in the Blouberg Annual Report as another challenge. The Glen-Alpine Dam, the only source of pipeline water in the area, is fed by the Mogalakwena River which is the only perennial river in the area. During the hot summer months boreholes, dams and wells dry up and there are chronic water shortages in certain areas. In many cases the inhabitants have to travel quite a distance to get water and young girls often spend a few hours a day, either before or after school, collecting water. The situation is compounded by illegal connections, the theft of diesel engines to pump water and the ageing infrastructure. In 2010 the first summit was convened at Elephant Spring in Bela-Bela to address the enormous water crisis in the municipality. The provision of “smaller storage [sic] Tanks (JoJo Tanks)” have not been satisfactory due to provisional government budget constraints and lack of resources and personnel. The majority of people do not have access to clean water and have to rely on natural and unspecified water sources. Coupled with poor sanitation and sewer reticulation projects not being implemented “because the budget was not enough”, waterborne diseases are also a major concern.

194 Personal information: Dr. E. Coetsee, 2011-03-06.
Traditionally, land ownership among the Sotho was not on an individual basis, but communal with the chief acting as trustee and distributing land for agricultural usage to the members of the clan. Land dispossession and forced removals during the apartheid period had already robbed many black people of the economic and social security that came with being part of such a tribal community. After the elections in 1994 most of the former homelands were registered as “state land”. In some places though, particular groups and tribes have strong underlying rights either through the purchase of land or through historical occupation. These rights were, however, not registered in their names because of discriminatory laws. As these underlying rights are disregarded by some current officials; there are long-standing disputes between provincial and local governments and traditional leaders about ownership and therefore control of the land. Councillors complain that tribal leaders block development so as to ensure that their authority remains intact, whilst traditional leaders feel that local government initiatives undermine pre-existing land rights. Martin Adams, Ben Cousins and Siyabulela Manona point out that “[i]n the process, the views of the rural poor are ignored” and that “[o]ccupants are not treated as decision makers on land which they have occupied for decades”, exacerbating the sense of loss of security. Although the provision of housing under the Reconstruction and Development Project (RDP) is nowhere sufficient compensation for the loss of tribal land, the ability to own a house was not only seen as a necessity, but as a way of providing some sense of security. This is very true for the members of the MCADF with the women taking great pride in their houses. As a result, the promised implementation of a new housing and infrastructure development in Grootpan, which was delayed due to a lack of provincial funds, came as a great disappointment.

A highlight in terms of infrastructure in the area was the construction of the Eldorado Sport facility which was used as a FIFA 2010 World Cup Public Viewing Area. The portrayal of both soccer and netball in the story cloths indicates the important role that sport plays in the community. The women agree that for children it is a positive way of keeping busy. Over weekends large crowds are drawn to the matches and in some way a sense of community is

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198 Adams, Cousins and Manona, *Land tenure and economic development in rural South Africa*, p. 15.
created, which is important especially in the light of a lack of good leadership and rapid social changes.\footnote{Personal information: Dr. E. Coetsee, 2011-03-06; Personal information, MCADF craft artists, 2013-01-15.}

Apartheid has possibly left its most indelible mark in the field of education where the former Bantu Education policy prepared black school children only for menial labour as ‘hewers of wood’.\footnote{Moller, “Quality of life in South Africa”, p. 187.} The newly elected democratic government realised that one of the most effective ways to eliminate the past inequalities was through education. Although South Africa has made relatively large investments in education by most international standards, lack of resources, overcrowding, a lack of motivation on the part of some learners and many teachers being “under-qualified, demoralised and lacking the commitment and professionalism necessary for their professions”\footnote{The Dinokeng Scenarios, p. 19.} have been impossible to overcome on a short-term basis. This prompted the Minister of Education in 1999 to describe the system as being in “crisis”. South Africa currently ranks among the lowest countries in the world as regards basic literacy and numeracy skills.\footnote{The Dinokeng Scenarios, p. 19; Eastern Province Herald, 28 July 1999.} This “rotten public education”,\footnote{J. Kane-Berman, South African Institute of Race Relations Fast Facts, December 2009.} as described by some, is a serious cause for concern, as it has failed to produce the skills needed for South Africa to compete in the global economy.\footnote{Moller, “Quality of life in South Africa”, p. 185; B. Boyle, “Economy set for a shake up”, Sunday Times, Johannesburg, 27 November 2006, p. 1.} According to the Institute of Race Relations the “failures in public education are now the most significant factor retarding the social and economic progress of black South Africans ... denying them any opportunities to improve their social and economic standings”.\footnote{Kane-Berman, South African Institute of Race Relations; Leslie, “Perceptions of the future of South Africa”, pp. 18-19.}

Limpopo province, where 90% of the population previously lived in homelands, is particularly affected by the “acute academic poverty”.\footnote{Christopher, The atlas of changing South Africa, pp. 234-238.} According to surveys, as much as 45% of the population has never received any schooling and the number of learners who complete Grade Twelve is negligible.\footnote{Christopher, The atlas of changing South Africa, pp. 149-150.} The lack of a proper education infrastructure in the area results in learners having to travel long distances to their schools. Little maintenance is done on the existing facilities which are very basic and hardly any schools in the rural areas...
have libraries or media centres or present extra-mural activities.\textsuperscript{210} The problem was compounded in 2012 when the Department of Basic Education failed to deliver textbooks to schools in the province and loads of textbooks and study guides were reportedly found dumped on several dumping sites across the province.\textsuperscript{211}

Most of the adults in the Blouberg area have received no education nor training, making it very difficult for them to compete in the job market. As there are limited facilities available in the municipal area that cater for Adult Basic Education, opportunities to improve their education are few and far between.\textsuperscript{212} Most of the members of the MCADF are illiterate, with only a few having completed primary school. They do realise the importance of a good education and have indicated that they send their children to school “with great hope”.\textsuperscript{213} Most of them also take an active interest in their children’s education by, for example, serving on the school boards.\textsuperscript{214}

Another serious infliction experienced by this region is HIV/Aids. South Africa falls under the five countries worldwide with the highest rate of the infection and the disease is now the leading cause of death, especially under black South Africans. According to Tarryn Leslie the majority of black households will have had personal experience of the disease and a high proportion will have grieved the death of a member of the extended family.\textsuperscript{215} The development of the country has suffered badly because of this. This pandemic, described thus by activists and the medical profession alike, affect the economically active section of the population. These deaths leave the remaining families impoverished and “surviving grandparents are often left to care for their orphaned grandchildren on their inadequate pensions and social grants.”\textsuperscript{216}

\textsuperscript{210} Van Schalkwyk, “Ideologie en konstruksie van ‘n landelike samelewing”, p. 54; Christopher, \textit{The atlas of changing South Africa}, pp. 149-152.

\textsuperscript{211} P. Govender, “Minister challenged over textbooks”, \textit{Sunday Times}, 2012-05-06; A. Saba, “Here’s why Limpopo kids don’t have books”, \textit{City Press}, 2012-05-13; M. Moloto, “No Grade 10 textbooks for angry Limpopo pupils”, \textit{Star}, 2012-05-17.

\textsuperscript{212} Van Schalkwyk, “Ideologie en konstruksie van ‘n landelike samelewing”, p. 54; Christopher, \textit{The atlas of changing South Africa}, pp. 149-152.

\textsuperscript{213} Personal information, MCADF craft artists, 2013-01-14.

\textsuperscript{214} On learning that I am from the University of Pretoria, one of the women also asked about the admission requirements, as her daughter is interested in becoming a social worker.


\textsuperscript{216} Moller, “Quality of life in South Africa”, pp. 188-189.
The high incidence of the disease is, on the one hand, blamed on the neglect of politicians, and especially the Mbeki presidency for their initial denial of the extent of the problem and the impact on the country. This resulted in delayed provision of Anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) and of testing and counselling sites. The slow response on behalf of government might have added to the stigma attached to HIV/AIDS which has prevented many South Africans from being tested and knowing their status. Möller points out that access to anti-retroviral treatment and a temporary disability grant may have created new incentives to know one’s status. However, it is generally agreed that the strong stigma attached to the disease is unlikely to disappear overnight.

The disease and other illnesses exacerbated by the compromised immune systems of the sufferers have placed the already struggling medical facilities under severe and mounting pressure. In Limpopo province the situation is critical, especially in the light of the poor financial state in which the provincial government finds itself. The Blouberg municipality has only a small number of clinics and two available hospitals, but no permanent doctors. The MCADF members have indicated that they still make use of traditional healers as well. This might be for practical reasons as the traditional healer is located much closer than the nearest clinic. Due to the lack of permanent medical staff, it is difficult to build up a personal relationship with the hospital and clinic staff. Traditional healers, on the contrary, live within the community and know the women and their families intimately. This speaks to the communal aspect of their lives, as opposed to the emphasis on the individual in Western society. The presence of traditional healers also serves as an example of how black communities in South Africa have retained links with their past, whilst at the same time making use of modern commodities.

The members of the MCADF and their families have also not been left untouched by AIDS. Although health services, the clinic, the Helen Franz Hospital and the traditional healers are depicted in the story cloths, as well as cleansing rituals after a period of mourning, this illness

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218 Leslie, “Perceptions of the future of South Africa”, p. 16; Dinokeng Senarios; Welsch, The rise and fall of apartheid, p. 569.
220 Kane-Berman, South African Institute of Race Relations.
221 Van Schalkwyk, “Ideologie en konstruksie van ‘n landelike samelewing”, pp. 53-54.
223 Hinze, “Saint Anthony’s Fire and AIDS”.

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is left unseen and unspoken. When asked if they embroider aspects that are difficult, they explained that they prefer not to. Counter-archival scholars point out that the exclusion of certain information can be just as telling, if not more, than the inclusion thereof. In the case of the MCADF story cloths it could be due to the stigma surrounding the disease. Another reason could be that the women simply find it too difficult to express the devastation and the impact on their lives. They did however point out that whereas children would traditionally not go to funerals, and a death in the community would usually be an elderly person who had the opportunity to lead a full life, children now grow up in the presence of death. They concluded that “die lewe het gevaarlik geword” (life has become dangerous).

Conclusion

In 1994, addressing the new representative parliament for the first time, President Nelson Mandela stated that the new government’s social policy would focus on the restoration of the human dignity of the poor and destitute:

Our single most important challenge is to help establish a social order in which the freedom of the individual will truly mean the freedom of the individual. ..... this requires that we speak not only of political freedoms.... My government’s commitment to create a people-centred society of liberty binds us to the pursuit of the goals of freedom from want, freedom from hunger, freedom from deprivation, freedom from ignorance, freedom from suppression and freedom from fear. These freedoms are fundamental to the guarantee of human dignity.

However, after twenty years of democracy, many people are still without such a degree of freedom. Colonialism and the policies of separate development and apartheid broke down the traditional structures that kept these communities together on a social, political and economic level. The first democratic elections in 1994 held the promise of empowerment and improvement, but thus far these expectations have not been met. Currently the MCADF women find themselves in a period of transition which has turned out to be a proverbial no-man’s land, without a solid foundation in the past to fall back on and no decisive leadership to show the way ahead.

224 Personal information, MCADF craft artists, 2013-01-15.
Due to the lack of formal education, skills and the mobility to fend for themselves these women find it difficult to move forward and bridge the void which will bring them to a situation where they can lay claim to such a level of human dignity as outlined by President Mandela. It is within this context of hardship that the MCADF was founded.
CHAPTER IV
PLACE AND SPACE OF WOMEN’S VOICES

In acknowledging the MCADF story cloths as archival records requires that the record as well as the record creators be included in the archival discussion along with the spaces where this record creation can take place. This chapter will survey international and local examples of this need for an alternative space, a safe space, and will consider the MCADF project specifically in these terms. Furthermore, it will look at sources which could break through historical, political and economically imposed barriers placed on black women in South Africa and allow them, as record creators, to make their voices heard. The purpose is to show that the creation of story cloths, which combines narrative content with needlework skills, needs a space which can provide women with the necessary means to tell their stories to a wider audience.

Place and space of women’s voices

Craig points out that all “archives originate in a conscious act of memorialising something by the giving, receiving and keeping of documentary records”. An archive can therefore be considered the physical space for memory and the site in which new generations’ understanding is shaped by community traditions and recollections.¹

As already mentioned in terms of archival space, “traditional” or colonial archives discouraged certain groups the use of their holdings, either through the location and physical structure of the buildings or the insistence on written information.² In order for archives to take on a more humane and therapeutic role “committed to a complex understanding of healing, recovery and rehousing memory-in-exile”,³ Butler maintains that dominant archival grand narratives need to be relinquished. She sees the role of archives as twofold. In the first place these institutions should apprehend “in greater depth the moral-ethical ‘debts’ and ‘duties’ and the operational ‘responses’ and ‘responsibilities’ towards ‘inclusion’”.⁴ Secondly, they should work “towards full recognition of those constituencies who, historically and in the contemporary moment, have been disenfranchised or exiled outside the

² See Chapter I.
³ Butler, “‘Othering’ the archives – From exile to inclusion and heritage dignity”, p. 63.
⁴ Butler, “‘Othering’ the archives – From exile to inclusion and heritage dignity”, p. 63.
realms of dominant cultural–institutional discourse”. Harris refers to Derrida’s notion of “hospitality” to suggest that the “struggle for archival justice involves seeking to include and welcome the “other” into the archive”. This entails not merely tolerating the “other” as a guest in the archive, but welcoming the “other” in “with the power and status of the host”. In practical terms it requires reaching out and allowing active participation from the previously marginalised. Ketelaar points out that as social spaces, archives can help to form and to host these “excluded” communities by serving as spaces of memory where people’s experiences can be transformed into meaning. He sees the role of archives as places of shared custody and trust where records are preserved through time, “long enough perhaps to destroy the agony and heal the community”. In order to address this matter of exclusion from archives as mentioned earlier, independent or community heritage initiatives have been established in countries such as the UK and the USA. The specific aim is one of collecting and preserving “the historical materials which underpin a narrative which seeks to overcome exclusions and silences in other dominant accounts”. These community-based initiatives have an important role to play in the counter-archival debate in terms of giving previously or currently marginalised people a voice in democratising the archival record as well as decentralising the archives as public institution.

Existing literature on community archives focuses on the connection between these institutions and developments in social history. Scholars such as Raphael Samuel, who observed that history was a social form of knowledge, the work “not of one individual but of a thousand hands”, sought to promote “non-professional, community, and collaborative

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5 Butler, “‘Othering’ the archives – From exile to inclusion and heritage dignity”, p. 63.
10 Flinn, “Archival activism”, p. 11.
11 Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd, “Whose memories, whose archives?”, pp. 74-75; Flinn, and Stevens, “‘It is noh mistri, we mekin histri.’”, pp. 3-27.
history-making”. In the light of the observations of Samuel and the cultural historian Hall, Flinn points out that it seems clear that independent community-led archives may have significant roles to play in the production of these democratized and more inclusive histories. The very existence of these independent archives, operating outside the framework of mainstream, publicly funded, professionally staffed institutions is both a reproach and a challenge to that mainstream.

The focus is therefore on community archives as “an act of resistance against subordination and discrimination”. Flinn and Stevens place the initiative and the agency of community archives for the most part in the hands of that very community with the aim to preserve and insert their own history.

When a history is denied or made invisible, a group or a community may sustain or recover that history ... that through activities like community archives is strengthened and reinforced by being made visible and shared. It is in this context, of challenging and resisting historic and ongoing discrimination in society and subordination in national narratives, that independent histories and community archives are perhaps best understood.

Proponents of community archives argue that once such a collection is brought together, a space should be created to “allow people to explore and better understand the past in ways which might encourage a greater sense of belonging and identification”. However, in countries where a “disruption of the profoundest kind to the home - the private archive” has taken place, spaces of recognition, commemoration, mourning, transition and hospitality often have to be created first before the recollecting and recovering of a traumatic past can take place. This is particularly important in multi-cultural societies where certain groups have been privileged at the expense of others. In such situations these spaces should encourage respect for knowledge systems embedded within the community and aid understanding of local knowledge.

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14 Flinn, “Archival activism”, pp. 4-5.
15 Flinn, and Stevens, “It is noh mistri, we mekin histri”, p. 8.
16 Flinn, and Stevens, “It is noh mistri, we mekin histri”, p. 8.
17 Flinn, “Archival activism”, p. 11.
18 Butler, “‘Othering’ the archives – From exile to inclusion and heritage dignity”, p. 68.
19 Shilton and Srinivasan, “Participatory appraisal and arrangement for multicultural archival collections”, pp. 90-91.
In South Africa specifically, Hofmeyr shows that the “breakdown of physical and institutional contexts that determine the correct transmission and reception”\(^{20}\) of oral historical narratives amongst black South Africans has led to some of these narratives becoming incoherent, lifeless and empty. She refers in particular to the change in household shape, namely the grid-plan villages implemented under apartheid that replaced the cluster-style homesteads and the traditional space of the *kgoro* (courtyards).\(^{21}\) Whereas the *kgoro* previously served as the “primary site for telling of and listening to oral historical narrative”, its “removal not only shattered the major forum of historical education, it also robbed people of their accustomed, everyday social spaces”.\(^{22}\) This entailed “the loss of both the site of the practice of oral narration as well as of the powerful physical mnemonics for historical memory.”\(^{23}\)

However, as Hofmeyr points out, the *kgoro* also stood as “a symbol of the chiefdom and an entire traditional order”, where *men* discussed business of chiefdom or community.” [my emphasis]\(^{24}\) Women, who according to customary law, were given the status of minors which meant exclusion from political and legal forums, were often barred or permitted only as spectators to these discussions.\(^{25}\) This shows that gender was the “decisive division in the storytelling genre”.\(^{26}\) Hofmeyr refers to studies of Jean Comaroff\(^{27}\) and Margaret Kinsman\(^{28}\) which show that “[t]hrough this representation men, and the agnatic lineages into which they were grouped, became models of society, history and permanence (all ancestors, for example were male).”\(^{29}\) By contrast women were seen as temporary and they were associated with “unstable and repetitive transformation...”\(^{30}\) This relegated women to the space of fleeting or passing “fictional” stories as opposed to men taking part in the telling of more permanent

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\(^{20}\) Hamilton, “‘Living by fluidity’”, p. 219.
\(^{21}\) Hofmeyr, *We spend our years as a tale that is told*, p. 7; Hamilton, “‘Living by fluidity’”, p. 219.
\(^{22}\) Hofmeyr, *We spend our years as a tale that is told*, p. 172.
\(^{23}\) Hamilton, “‘Living by fluidity’”, p. 219.
\(^{24}\) Hofmeyr, *We spend our years as a tale that is told*, p. 219.
\(^{26}\) Hofmeyr, *We spend our years as a tale that is told*, pp. 6-7. See also Hofmeyr, *We spend our years as a tale that is told*, p. 177.
\(^{29}\) Hofmeyr, *We spend our years as a tale that is told*, p. 27.
\(^{30}\) Hofmeyr, *We spend our years as a tale that is told*, p. 27.
“true” historical narratives.31 As a result women were not only denied the space, but a means or record to add their voices to the community memory. This gendering of storytelling will be discussed in more detail below.

In terms of specifically making the voices of women heard, Carole Boyce Davies concurs with this notion of “safe spaces” and points out that “location ... allows one to speak or not speak, to be affirmed in one’s speech or rejected, to be heard or censored”.32 A division between public and private spaces in the early nineteenth century lead to women in the Western world being denied access to the public sphere, forcing them to confine their creative output to the private or domestic sphere where their lives had more meaning.33 Furthermore, Uma Narayan points out that by denying women inclusion into mainstream historical writing lead to the tendency to see the stereotypically “masculine” narrative as better or more progressive.34 This is in line with Margaret Strobel’s research on how women perceive their role in the making and writing of history. She concludes that the many years of marginalisation, as well as denied presence and agency in the construction of a collective memory,35 have led to many women believing that they cannot make a positive contribution to society.36 In the South African context Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjes have found a similar situation where, because they are constantly diminished by society, women see their role as negligible.37 This, combined with the social milieu in South Africa, has made the inclusion of women, and especially black women, even more difficult.

The idea of having to stay home, in a “separate space” and the menial household work that is associated with it, has been a focal point of Western feminists’ criticism. However, Susan Cahill has discovered in her research that this is not necessarily “women’s nemesis, the cause of suffering and failure”. She has found that women’s “autobiographies and memoirs exhibit few of the fatal splits between private and public identities, between life and literature that

31 Hofmeyr, “We spend our years as a tale that is told”, p.177.
33 This aspect is discussed in Chapter I.
wilt and wither many stories of emerging selfhood.” However, for women in third world countries their experiences of the domestic setting do not have the same meaning as for Western women and “home is not necessarily a comfortable or safe space”. In their own society they have had to bear the brunt of the physical hard labour associated with maintaining the family structure, such as fetching water and collecting fire wood and the carrying out of agricultural chores, without the necessary infrastructure. The “double colonisation” mentioned in Chapter I that indigenous women in South Africa suffered during the colonial period was exacerbated under apartheid. Goldblatt and Meintjies point out that black women suffered most because of forced removals, pass arrests and other acts of “systemic apartheid violence”. In addition, there was also the migrant labour system which meant male absenteeism and single parenting were compounded by the afore-mentioned cycle of poverty. One could describe black women’s position as a “triple denial”: the repression they suffered and still do to a certain extent, in their traditional societies and under colonialism compounded by the apartheid system, have made black South African women the most marginalised of the marginalised.

After the relatively peaceful transfer of power to the black majority after the first democratic elections in 1994, South Africa was often hailed as a “global, political site of possibility and hope” and an “example of functional reconciliation and opportunity”. Botha describes this process as a transformation “into a legislative framework of government where the debilitating nature of racism is expressed and transformed within a functional social order”. In the subsequent years a successful campaign was launched by the Women’s National Coalition (WNC) aimed at the inclusion and representation of women as a “distinct group of citizens in the new institutions of democracy” and their incorporation as “an interest group into the policymaking process”. Women received previously denied political and civil rights after the first democratic elections, especially with the passing of the South African


39 Boyce Davies, Black women, writing and identity, pp. 15-16.


41 Goldblatt and Meintjies, “Dealing with the aftermath”, p. 7.

42 See Chapter III. See also Christopher, The atlas of changing South Africa, pp. 87-93; Callinicos, A people’s history of South Africa, vol.1, p.30.


Constitution of 1996 which formally recognised women as equal citizens and granted them specific protection in section 9 of the act, entitled “Equality”. However, several scholars highlight that in the new democratic dispensation the imbalances on social and economic levels still exist. McEwan states that “pervasive sexism constantly undercuts equal rights and legislation far removed from lived experiences of many women”. Even in redressing the apartheid system, its legacy of exclusion and discrimination that was not only racialised but also gendered, is reproduced. This, coupled with the “profound cultural and other pressures” placed on women, has rendered them powerless. It has led to a situation of continuing and escalating violence against women that has become so commonplace that there is no longer a sense of urgency to resolve it, making the private space of black women even more fragile. Furthermore, the devastation caused by the earlier mentioned HIV/AIDS pandemic that particularly affects black women has led to South Africa sustaining “shocking statistics of mortalities, creating a framework for a special set of social and cultural circumstances”.

In the light of these facts writing a national inclusive history of the post-apartheid era is weighed down by the “harsh” legacy of the past. According to Robert Ross “[m]emories could not be cleared, and psyches had been scarred”. In his work on the TRC Kenneth Christie echoes similar sentiments by stating that “South Africa is a country where the notion of ‘fractured’ memory is given new meaning. Memory is not fractured here; rather it is splintered, rent apart, torn into a multitude of pieces.” McEwan adds to this argument and states that for South Africa to engender a “common sense of nationhood” it is imperative that these shards of memories be restored and pieced together.

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53 Ross, A concise history of South Africa, p. 201.
In this context it is therefore vital to “recognise safe spaces where black woman’s speech can be heard”. Alternatively what is needed is to “produce what can be identified as a ‘new space, an area of transformation and change where we ... can begin to unravel the ordering and structuring of dominant cultural codes” and create “spaces where critical positioning, or process of identification, articulation and representation can occur”. Boyce Davies likens this process to the “reacquisition of the ‘tongue’” which brings women closer to “reconnection and at times re-evaluation”. McEwan points out that “without spaces for articulation of memory, black women's citizenship, in terms of social standing and belonging stays compromised”. She emphasises the “need to create space for women within nation building processes in order that they are fully able to realize their citizenship”. This entails not only voting rights or welfare provisions from the state, but “active agency and the assertion of full autonomy within community”. In a country that has suffered under the oppression brought about by colonialism and apartheid, which disrupted people’s lives and destroyed communities, having a safe place where these women can recall traumatic events in their lives makes it possible for healing to take place.

A poignant example of the difference “feeling safe” can make to women’s willingness to give voice to their experiences is discussed by Goldblatt and Meintjes in their article on the way sexual violence was dealt with by the TRC. As mentioned in Chapter III, the TRC was constructed as a “legislative and cultural instrument that could facilitate the complex social need for political reconciliation and renewal”. However, many women’s stories were “negated and normalised” and its narrow definition of “severe ill treatment” meant that women who suffered abuse were often not considered victims of gross human rights violations. In fact, the wives and mothers of victims have regularly been portrayed by both the Commission and the media as “secondary victims”. Goldblatt and Meintjes point out that this could have had a detrimental effect “not only for our understanding of our history

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56 Boyce Davies, *Black women, writing and identity*, p. 154
57 Boyce Davies, *Black women, writing and identity*, p. 154
58 Boyce Davies, *Black women, writing and identity*, pp. 20-22
63 Botha, “Amazwi Abesifazane, Reclaiming the emotional and public self”, p. 132.
64 Goldblatt and Meintjes, “Dealing with the aftermath”, p. 7.
but also for current attempts to heal our society."  

However, soon after the TRC hearings started, the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) held a workshop to look into early indications of exclusion of negative representation of women in the TRC. A submission was presented to the TRC proposing that women’s participation should be increased. Some of these submissions included that “women-only hearings be held, that women be asked to speak about themselves when coming to speak about others and that a gender analysis be developed for use in the final report of the TRC”. Certain individuals, as well as women’s organisations, put pressure on the TRC to take the matter seriously. In response the TRC organised two workshops to discuss ways of bringing more women into the process. Subsequently, the TRC held a number of special hearings where women could give testimony behind closed doors and with a predominantly female audience. The fact that women who previously were not willing to testify, did come forward when provided with an opportunity to do so in a safe space indicates that they were possibly afraid, inhibited and/or ashamed to speak about their experiences.

Because community archives are for the most part situated within the community and created and housed in what would not necessarily be considered a conventional archival repository, this makes them much more accessible to all members of the community. This however does not guarantee that members of that community feel free to share their stories. Peterson notes how difficult it can be for marginalised communities to find a safe space and how it can impact on the ability to speak up freely. This difficulty is apparent in the case of the earlier mentioned Hmong fleeing from their native Vietnam and living in refugee camps in Thailand. These women have been careful in portraying aspects of their war experience by means of embroidered story cloths. Although American military equipment and material are depicted in intimate detail, US soldiers and other personnel are not portrayed except in non-controversial roles in the refugee camps. Although some refugees feel strongly that the world and their children should know how they lost their country, some feel it is better left unsaid, particularly in a host country and they “worry that even this mute testimony may endanger their current position, if not their lives”.

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65 Goldblatt and Meintjes, “Dealing with the aftermath”, p. 7.  
In another example in India, even though these embroidered cloths are created in their own homes, the pervasive discrimination against women along with the fact that embroidery is seen as a low craft diminishes these women. Laila Tyabji, designer and advocate for Muslim crafts women in Punjab, states it is “an industry and profession often practised in subprimitive conditions without the support of pensions, insurance, fixed salary or medicare”.70 This makes the possibility of a safe space even more elusive. However, she holds out for the possibility that crafts production, properly conducted with the emphasis on women’s empowerment, can bring a change to the “wretched conditions of handicraft productions”.71 The women in India have been performing embroidery as a profession over centuries and the gendered nature of their work has become ingrained. It must however be noted that the context within which the South African embroidery projects mentioned in this study were founded differ vastly from that in India as these projects are recent developments which have been established with the specific aim of economic upliftment and the improvement of the local women’s lives.

The MCADF story cloth archives started in the farm house of the Coetsees where the women initially helped out as domestic workers. As this space grew too small to accommodate the various activities, and as more women were employed, another farm was bought on the opposite bank of the Mogalakwena River. Here Coetsee established a Craft Art Village, a space which serves as the creative hub of Mogalakwena Craft Art. A shed was converted into a Craft Art Centre with waist-high cutting tables, work surfaces in front of the windows to ensure good lighting, a small kitchen where the women make tea and warm their lunch, as well as a work area on the stoep (veranda). These women come from settlements close to the farm, some even within walking distance, which as indicated enables them to stay with their families. This bigger space also affords Coetsee the opportunity to host workshops and invite artists and researchers to work alongside the craft artists.72

When establishing a craft centre the location can be a difficult aspect to solve. The drawback of being situated in close proximity to the community that a craft centre serves is that these communities are more often than not in far flung and isolated rural areas. These communities

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are therefore remote, hampering not only the economic viability of the project, but bringing into question the contribution their stories could make to the larger South African narrative. The women and organisations who established these embroidery projects actively promote their work and give them exposure to a larger market. Through creating more lucrative retail opportunities in bigger centres, such as opening the Kaross™ store in Johannesburg⁷³ or the Mogalakwena Art Gallery in Cape Town and establishing connections with similar projects abroad, especially in the U.S.A. and Canada, local initiatives have not only broadened their client base, but have received valuable financial support. Ina le Roux represented Tambani at the Paducah quilt and embroidery show in Kentucky⁷⁴ and the Intuthuko Sewing Group and Mogalakwena Craft Art were represented by some of their members at the International Folk Art Market in Santa Fé, New Mexico, in the USA in 2004.⁷⁵

In South Africa there has been a growing recognition for craft projects. The South African Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology has included some embroidery projects in exhibitions abroad and the FNB Vita Craft Now Awards, organised by the Craft Council of South Africa since 1997, has gone a long way to recognise the various projects as well as individual artists work.⁷⁶

Exhibitions locally and abroad and especially at events such as international conferences, for example the Make Art/Stop AIDS exhibition of the Keiskamma Art Project’s work, have enabled these projects to create a wider awareness of their work. The “Made in translation” exhibition, curated by artist Pippa Skotnes and Petra Keene, which was exhibited at the South African Museum in Cape Town is another example of greater exposure. The MCADF craft artists created embroidered panels depicting rock art sites at Makgabeng, in the Blouberg area, an area which is earmarked as a potential National and World Heritage Site as it contains the highest diversity of rock art in South Africa, namely that of Northern Sotho, Khoehoen and San. Another example is the exhibition consisting of story cloths depicting the local soccer teams of the Blouberg district to celebrate the Soccer World Cup 2010 as

well as to recognise soccer sports in rural settlements.\textsuperscript{77} The panels were displayed as part of a Village Soccer Exhibition hosted at the Mogalakwena Gallery in Cape Town with the accompanying information printed in Sepedi, English, German, French, Italian as well as Braille, giving access not only to the local community, but to international visitors who came to South Africa during the World Cup.\textsuperscript{78}

In order to prevent isolation and to encourage interaction between the craft artists and the wider public, an artist’s retreat was also built alongside the Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre with four units where visitors can stay, as well as a writer’s retreat cottage where researchers can stay for an extended period. A number of well-known scholars and artists of all disciplines have visited Mogalakwena Craft Art, amongst whom Nicholas Hlobo, Colbert Mashile, Karel Nel, Rosenclaire, Clementina van der Walt, Philemon Hlungwane and Willem Boshoff. Besides the research dimension, this space is also used for workshops in weaving, embroidery and beading.\textsuperscript{79}

Coetsee also realised the important role that natural resources play in the MCADFW women’s way of life, whether it is the collection of plants for medicinal purposes or for the weaving of baskets or the foodstuffs gathered in the veldt at certain times of the year. In order to study these resources and ensure their conservation, the Mogalakwena Research Centre was established in 2006 by Coetsee and Pete Laver. Here visiting local and foreign scientists and students can do research in the fields of ecology, anthropology and social entrepreneurship. The aim of this centre is “to make our work useful to the greater scientific community and relevant to local stakeholders”.\textsuperscript{80} One example includes an annual visit of students from the University of Queensland who do research at the Research Centre and also visit the Craft Art Centre.\textsuperscript{81}


\textsuperscript{79} Written information: Dr E. Coetsee, 2013-06-04; Richards, “The Fabric of a Community”, pp. 54-55.


\textsuperscript{81} “Research E-News 2010”, Mogalakwena Research Centre newsletter; Personal information: Dr E. Coetsee, 2011-03-06; Written information: Dr E. Coetsee, 2013-06-04.
The establishment of the Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre and the story cloth project can be considered a safe space for the craft artists in more ways than one. It fulfils an important role in providing a space where they feel comfortable to tell their stories. Whereas women were previously excluded from the kgoro, the traditionally male site of giving voice to one’s life, the Craft Art Centre has become their own “courtyard” or arena that they claim as a rhetorical space for themselves. Therefore, the Craft Art Centre and the Foundation have become central in the lives of these women of Mogalakwena. The women are only responsible for the cleaning of the centre and not the grounds nor the artist’s retreat which is situated next to the Centre. However, after a storm in January 2012 which uprooted and split open trees, these women took over from the male working team hired for cleaning up the grounds as the latter, according to women, were too slow and not thorough enough. This sense of ownership and belonging is also visible in their depictions in the story cloths of the Craft Art Centre as a physical space as well as the various activities that take place there. Visitors to the Centre are also thanked for their visit by the women performing traditional dances. Furthermore, the Craft Art Centre serves as a space where they can connect with other women and where meaningful friendships can be forged. Although the women belong to different churches and Sepedi is not the mother tongue of all the members, there is a sense of camaraderie amongst the craft artists and even former members are remembered. This is largely due to the fact that they share many common experiences as well as their joys and sorrows with their fellow members on a daily basis. During my second visit to the Craft Art Centre one of the members returned after having lost her daughter to AIDS whilst another woman’s grandchild died after having drunk paraffin. The other members showed visible concern and empathy for these two women and stepped in to help with practical aspects such as the catering for the funerals.

In a similar situation the embroiderers who were involved in the creation of the Keiskamma alter cloth, also indicated that it not only provided them with an outlet for their grief, but that

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82 Chapter IV.
84 MECAA. Category 1: Business, Trading and Transport. Photographs 1.25; 1.25; 1.36; Category 10: Traditional skills and customs. Photographs 10-.34; 10.36.
85 Personal visit to Craft Art Centre 2013-01-13-19.
they found comfort and reassurance in sharing their feelings with other women who had similar experiences. Hofmeyr, founder of the Keiskamma Art Project, describes it as the place where Art and Health interject to create meaning and hope to a population struggling from decades of abuse and poverty. Seremetakis’s observation that embroidery brings moments of stillness and reflection, allowing a woman to step back from her current surroundings, is echoed by one of the women of the Tambani project who stated that “when I quilt my thoughts become like a deep quiet pool of water”.

Further afield the phulkaris, the embroidered cloth produced by women in India is seen by some scholars as “a means of communication.” It is said that through “the stitches, colours and motifs” of phulkari embroidery, “a Punjabi woman... pours out her soul, her emotions, dreams and aspirations”. A sense of camaraderie amongst women in India is also evident. Michelle Maskiell describes the trinyan, the gatherings where they would come together to spin and embroider, as “the sociability of female work and exchange”. Over centuries women have used these opportunities in these spaces to “celebrate their own bonds to each other, bonds that had to be negotiated within and around the patriarchal girders of their family lives”. The phulkaris embodied friendship ties and women exchanging shawls to demonstrate their affection. Furthermore, phulkaris were treasured and passed from mother to daughter, one of the very few material possessions that could be inherited by Punjabi women, serving as a link from one female generation to the next.

The MCADF craft artists’ strong group identification also reflects the degree to which these women see their lives as communal. Several traditional practices that are labour intensive, such as tilling fields, are done within a group context. For example family and friends make up a work party, called a letaba or letsema to help the person who wants work done, who in

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89 B. Schmahmann, “Stitches as sutures. Trauma and recovery in works by the women in the Mapula Embroidery Project”, African Arts, 38, Autumn 2005, pp. 49, 62.
91 Seremetakis, The senses still, p. 15
95 Maskiell, “Embroidering the past”, p. 381.
96 Maskiell, “Embroidering the past”, p. 381.
97 Maskiell, “Embroidering the past”, p. 381.
turn prepares beer and food for those who have assisted. Therefore, working in a group context is not seen as detracting from the individual’s performance, but rather as a traditional practice where the production of the story cloths is entirely a group effort. An example of this group cohesion was the decision taken at a meeting that all the members would receive equal pay. When Coetsee questioned this decision, pointing out that some artists were more productive, they replied that the members’ overall contribution to the group’s welfare was considered. They explained that one of the artists, though not a very fast embroiderer could always be counted on to look after the other artists’ young children when they had an errand to run.

The initial relationship between Coetsee and the women, on the other hand, was that of employer and employees. In the South African context the apartheid system had forcibly separated white and black women, but despite this “radical split ... into distinct economically and politically opposed classes”, they met on a daily basis in the workplace. Cherry Clayton and David Schalkwyk point out that it “is therefore doubly unfortunate that white women, in their capacity as employers, or at least overseers, of black women, should themselves be one of the most exploitative and oppressive classes in society”, shattering “any complacent notions of sisterhood in South Africa”. In her novel Die Swerfiare van Poppie Nongena, the white Afrikaans author Elsa Joubert investigated “the possible forging of a common consciousness between these two races of women in South Africa”... “who at this level would normally be separated by the cultural and social dogmas of our society”. She concluded that although such a meeting is possible, it is not “without its ideological ... complexities”.

As already mentioned, the initiative of establishing the MCADF story cloth archive came from who Schmahmann aptly terms an “outsider”, in this case Coetsee, rather than people within the communities (“insiders”). According to Schmahmann, these “outsiders” do not always necessarily have a long term vested interest in the project. Furthermore, she asserts

99 Personal information, Dr E. Coetsee, 2011-03-06.
that the assistance that these “outsiders” offer, however well-meant, have the potential to hamper the process of creating managerial, creative and economic independence, aspects vital to ensure that these projects empower the communities not only economically, but socially as well.\textsuperscript{104} However, as indicated in Chapter III, the story cloths grew quite spontaneously out of the personal relationship between Coetsee and the local women. Unlike the commercial range of the Craft Art Centre where Coetsee determines the design according to consumer demand, the content of the story cloths is solely determined by the craft artists themselves within the safe space of the Centre.\textsuperscript{105}

The establishment of the Craft Art Centre and the Development Foundation show the possibility of women of both races in a mutually beneficial relationship. When the Coetsees bought the farm in the 1980s, South African history was characterised by racial tension, distrust and fear, not very different from the late 1970s when Joubert wrote her novel. The meeting between two vastly different cultures that took place between the local women of Mogalakwena and Coetsee attests to a kind of friendship forged across racial and language barriers. This is not a superficial and fleeting encounter of an “outsider” who does not necessarily have a long term vested interest in the project and is in great part owing to Coetsee’s interest in their lives and wellbeing.\textsuperscript{106}

\textbf{Story cloth voices}

In their discussion on the way in which community archives shape memory, Bastian and Alexander highlight the “acute desire and [the] pressing need for many citizens of our global, unbounded and networked twenty first century society”\textsuperscript{107} to be able to live “within the close kinship of community”.\textsuperscript{108} They point out how records are seen as a way in which to express these desires and needs.\textsuperscript{109} Craig agrees that archival documents are more than just “two dimensional containers of information from the past”. She sees records as connecting people to intentions and actions, creating a “large-scale map of society’s documentary relationships as these are woven over time”.\textsuperscript{110}

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\textsuperscript{104} Schmahmann, \textit{Mapula. Embroidery and empowerment in the Winterveld} , pp. 119, 120.
\textsuperscript{105} Personal information: Dr E. Coetsee, 2011-03-06; Written information: Dr E. Coetsee, 2013-06-04.
\textsuperscript{106} Krüger and Verster, “Development debate and practice”, p. 245.
\textsuperscript{107} Bastian and Alexander (eds.), \textit{Community archives}, p. xxi.
\textsuperscript{108} Bastian and Alexander (eds.), \textit{Community archives}, p. xxi.
\textsuperscript{109} Bastian and Alexander (eds.), \textit{Community archives}, p. xxi.
\textsuperscript{110} Craig, “Memories and the memorial”, pp. 287-289.
\end{flushright}
Marthe Gosteli, the founder of the Gosteli Archives for Women’s History in Switzerland, states that “equality of women today is impossible without the equality of women in the historical record”.\textsuperscript{111} In line with this Jean Goodwin emphasises the need to counteract the charge that women are not included in history because of a lack of evidence.\textsuperscript{112} In Can the Subaltern Speak Gayatri Spivak addressed the way in which subaltern women, as subjects, are already “positioned, represented, spoken for or constructed as absent or silent or not listened to in a variety of discourses” and that “her speech is already represented as non-speech”.\textsuperscript{113} In the case of former colonies “missionaries, administrators, politicians, popular representatives, and travellers have all played significant roles in scripting both the landscape and the people living in this region”.\textsuperscript{114} Geraldine Forbes found in her research on women in India that “writing the history of women ... was impossible until we began to search for, unearth, and preserve women’s documents”.\textsuperscript{115} Her concern, however, is with more than simply writing women’s history but “to put women into history on their own terms”.\textsuperscript{116}

In women’s studies specifically, Narayan applauds the attempts of authors and historians from former colonies to document the “wealth and complexity of local economic and social structures”\textsuperscript{117} that existed prior to colonialism and considers these as “useful for the ability to restore to colonized peoples a sense of the richness of their own history and culture”.\textsuperscript{118} She also points out that such studies could help to preserve the “knowledge of local arts, crafts, lore and techniques that were part of a former way of life before they are lost not only to practice but even to memory”.\textsuperscript{119}

The emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1970s under the leadership of Steve Biko brought home the importance of documenting the lives of black South Africans

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\textsuperscript{111} Wirz, Freitag and Offen “A historical memory for women”, p. 166.
\textsuperscript{112} Goodwin, “Revealing new narratives of women in Las Vegas”. Pp. 177, 180.
\textsuperscript{113} G. Spivak, Can the subaltern speak. Cited in Boyce Davies, Black women, writing and identity, pp. 20-22.
\textsuperscript{114} J. Robinson, “White women researching/ representing "others": From antiapartheid to postcolonialism?” in Blunt and Rose, Writing women and space, pp. 197-199; Boyce Davies, Black women, writing and identity, pp. 20-22.
\textsuperscript{115} Forbes, “Locating and preserving documents”, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{116} Forbes, “Locating and preserving documents”, p. 176.
\textsuperscript{117} Narayan, “The project of feminist epistemology”, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{118} Narayan, “The project of feminist epistemology”, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{119} Narayan, “The project of feminist epistemology”, p. 214.
\end{footnotesize}
and stated that one has to “write history to make history”.\textsuperscript{120} Yet, McEwan points out that both documentation and research amongst blacks was under-developed for a number of reasons. In the first place, the prevalence of orality and absence of literacy amongst blacks deterred the importance of the written word being recognised to some extent. The deliberate poor quality of instruction received under the apartheid Bantu Education system discouraged the emergence of written expression and recording even further. McEwan refers to Mamphela Ramphele who recalls the instability of life for black South Africans, “subject to forced removals and the vicissitudes of inadequate shelter”\textsuperscript{121} (space) that not only lead to the loss of important documents, but hampered the creation thereof.

McEwan picks up on Ramphele’s statement that “[n]othing positive about what [South African] blacks did was reported with any prominence. Blacks were depicted as the ultimate victims, completely lacking in agency”\textsuperscript{122} and concludes that the “scarcity of black researchers and social scientists made black South Africans vulnerable to becoming the objects of other people’s studies, with all the risks of limited insight inherent in that form of scholarship”.\textsuperscript{123} Albie Sachs adds to this argument and points out that in the past the majority of the South African population were not seen as agents of history, but as subjects of anthropology.\textsuperscript{124} This representation relegated them to “units of unchanging social structures”, and not as active participants within South African society. Any factual study of black people was done not to develop a greater understanding of their society and their views, but as a tool to facilitate “more effective administration through co-optation, control and subordination”.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{120} The Black Consciousness Movement emphasised the importance of freedom of speech. The early leaders of the movement published various journals, including the \textit{Black Review}, \textit{Black Voice}, \textit{Black Perspective}, and \textit{Creativity in Development} to give people marginalised by the apartheid system the opportunity to express themselves in print. Biko hoped to give black people a sense of pride about being black as the movement helped to expose and critique the inferiority complex felt by many blacks at the time. Disa, ‘Black Consciousness Movement’, <http://www.disa.ukzn.ac.za/index.php?option=com_displaydc&recordID=FtFeb84.1683.7118.001.001.Feb1984.7>, s.a. Access: 2014-02-28


\textsuperscript{122} McEwan, “Building a postcolonial archive?”, p. 743.

\textsuperscript{123} McEwan, “Building a postcolonial archive?”, p. 743.

\textsuperscript{124} Daniel Herwitz points out that the native people were represented in natural history museum exhibitions, alongside other plant and animal species, in their “natural setting”, by way of diorama (D.Herwitz, “Monument, ruin and redress in South African heritage”, Paper delivered at Politics of heritage Conference, University of Witwatersrand, 8-9 July 2011, p. 33)

\textsuperscript{125} Josias, “Toward an understanding of archives as a feature of collective memory”, pp. 1-14.
Due to the limited access to education and therefore the inability to leave written records, orality has been an important vehicle the world over for marginalised groups to keep their memories alive. As mentioned in Chapter II, historians interested in these histories on the periphery of society have seen memory forms outside conventional print-based media as democratic alternatives as these make it possible to give “history back to the people in their own words”, and allowing for an “alternative viewpoint from below”. It is this ability of oral history to recover the voices of the previously marginalised that has made it an effective tool for South African social historians. Through this they are able to “democratise the historical record, create an archive for the future” and legitimise indigenous oral traditions and cultures as an alternative form of historical documentation.

Through the ages the telling of family histories and folktales has provided a mode of expression for women. In both indigenous and Western societies, women have been seen as the “guardians and bearers of memory”, a notion that was rooted in attitudes toward their ... essential maternal role. Women, above all else, assured the continuity of human life by bearing and nurturing children and by extension, they have a special custodial role in institutions like the home, family, ... which were primarily responsible for the transmission of enduring cultural values.

Susan Ann Rogers points out that when the way in which information is gathered and decisions are made in indigenous societies is considered, it is clear that the “female members are in a much better position than men to control the dissemination of information relevant and important to the general well-being and .... functioning of that community. This is in part due to the work division which allows women to have frequent contact with each other and develop considerable group solidarity, as opposed to the men who work in isolation in outlying fields”. In indigenous societies important societal information that bound communities together were and still are passed on orally from generation to generation, often it seems, by female members of these communities.

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126 F. Cooper, “Memories of colonization. Commemoration, preservation, and erasure in an African archive” in Blouin and Rosenberg (eds.), Archives, documentation and institutions of social memory, p. 257.
127 Nesmith, “Archives from the bottom up”, pp. 18-21.
Hofmeyr, however, questions this notion and refers to the “woman-as-storyteller” image and specifically that of a “grandmother, preferably seated in the vicinity of a fire”\textsuperscript{130} as a stereotype. Though she does not deny the predominance of women storytellers in southern Africa, she feels the need to subject this notion to critical scrutiny, especially in view of the “institutionalised silencing that characterises women’s subordination in pre-colonial southern African societies.”\textsuperscript{131} Hofmeyr refers to an increasing number of studies which by the early 1990s were beginning to show that “the ordering force of gender in precolonial southern African societies was profound and far-reaching” and that “central to the operation of these societies was the subordination of women”.\textsuperscript{132} As women were prevented from “ever gaining complete economic independence, they were equally cut off from controlling the major intellectual resources and media in their society.”\textsuperscript{133} She points out that “[t]hese limitations that circumscribed women’s lives were nowhere more apparent than in the area of speech and performance”. As an example of such exclusion, she refers to the study by Kinsman\textsuperscript{134} who found that in the case of Tswana women, they were expected to “mind their own business and leave the \textit{mahuku [words]} to men”.\textsuperscript{135}

In his discussion on agency, Stanley Cavell states that agency – coming into one’s own powers – has to do with “the finding of a voice worthy of the self”. The restoration of dignity is therefore not simply a question of finding a voice, but of “a voice in control – that is, a voice with a signature”.\textsuperscript{136} Paul Gready adds to this argument and argues that it is less over the articulation of the subaltern voice that for greater control over voice, representation, interpretation and dissemination. Voice without such control may be worse than silence; voice with such control has the capacity to become a less perishable form of power because in essence it allows voice to enter into a more genuinely reciprocal dialogue.\textsuperscript{137}

\textsuperscript{130} Hofmeyr, “\textit{We spend our years as a tale that is told}”, p.25.  
\textsuperscript{131} Hofmeyr, “\textit{We spend our years as a tale that is told}”, p. 25.  
\textsuperscript{132} Hofmeyr, “\textit{We spend our years as a tale that is told}”, p. 25.  
\textsuperscript{133} Hofmeyr, “\textit{We spend our years as a tale that is told}”, p. 27.  
\textsuperscript{134} Kinsman, “\textit{Beasts of burden}”.  
\textsuperscript{135} Hofmeyr, “\textit{We spend our years as a tale that is told}”, pp. 26-28.  
For black women in South Africa it is therefore a matter of not only being given the opportunity to tell their stories, but to tell their stories in an environment and through a medium which will restore dignity and offer agency. When Foucault’s observation is considered, namely that “since memory is an important factor in struggle, if one controls people’s memory, one controls their dynamism”, it infers that the creation of these story cloths should give these women some control over their lives. The process of telling their own stories and creating a visible and lasting memory of their own lives gives these women a way of claiming “their unique identity and with it their orientation to the uncertainties of the future”.

Several oral history and memory projects have been established as a means to capture the “hidden histories” that challenge the version of the past held up by the apartheid government. Although the TRC has made a significant contribution towards recovering the experiences of black South Africans during apartheid, the focus was for the most part on the “more dramatic’ or salient narratives of apartheid atrocities and the fact that it thereby effectively (albeit, perhaps, unintentionally) foreclosed the possibility of an exploration of the more quotidian but pervasive, and no less significant, manifestations of apartheid abuse”. Projects such as the Apartheid Archives project, the Robben Island drawing project, the District Six Museum oral history project and the embroidered memory cloths produced by the Amazwi Abisifazane project, to mention but a few, were established with the aim of examining the impact of the apartheid system on the everyday lives of ordinary South Africans, and in the case of the embroidery projects on women specifically.

Hamilton shows that the role of objects in stimulating oral historical narratives is nothing new and that the “language of oral narrative is often linked to objects”. As examples she cites the exhibition *Memory: Luba Art and the Making of History* held by the Museum for African Art in New York. This explored the role of objects as mnemonics for historical narratives of the Luba people of southern Zaire; memory sticks or *Mregho* on Kilimanjaro; as well as

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140 Craig, “Memories and the memorial”, pp. 237-239.
143 Hamilton, “‘Living by fluidity’, p. 221.
Steven Robins’s study of the matjeshuise (mat houses) and veeposte (stock posts) of the Nama.\textsuperscript{145} She refers to the object as a “form of ‘hard text’ that could remain obscure and timeless, while the ‘soft text’, the narratives embedded in the object remained open to commentary and revision”.\textsuperscript{146} As the creation of story cloths is a combination of orality and material culture, it is not an unfamiliar concept for the women to adopt in order to convey their stories. Furthermore, these two elements are significant in the recovery of women’s voices in history and make story cloths a particularly effective way through which “uneducated and underrepresented”\textsuperscript{147} women can convey their stories to a larger audience.\textsuperscript{148}

As mentioned in Chapter III, the majority of the craft artists who form part of the MCADF are still illiterate according to Western categorisation and did not attend school, while only a small number completed their primary or secondary education.\textsuperscript{149} The stories depicted on the story cloths produced by the MCADF result from the oral discussions amongst the women, based on their memories and perceptions of events and practices. The cloths are therefore closely connected with their own personal reminiscences. They agree on a design, which is drawn by one of the women on a piece of cloth, while the other women give input. Their oral tradition and their skills as embroiderers are therefore a means of transmitting their stories in their own “words” and the cloth is used as a material vehicle of recollection.\textsuperscript{150}

Joubert describes story cloths as a mode of communication through which the craft artists “stage live events in silent visual forms”, using “the ‘multiple language’ of iconic and arbitrary signs.”\textsuperscript{151} McEwan sees the combination of creativity and memory - sewing and orality - as significant modes of communication in many cultures and historical contexts. She describes it as a “personal reclamation in written and pictorial form”\textsuperscript{152} when for various political and sociological reasons, written disclosure is not possible.\textsuperscript{153} In Palestine, at a

\textsuperscript{146}Hamilton, “‘Living by fluidity’”, p. 223.
\textsuperscript{147}Becker, “Amazwi Abesifazane: voices of women”, p. 120.
\textsuperscript{149}Personal information: Dr E. Coetsee, 2011-03-06; Written information: Dr E. Coetsee, 2013-06-04.
\textsuperscript{150}Joubert, “Memory embroidered”, p. 101; Personal information: Dr E. Coetsee, 2011-03-06.
\textsuperscript{151}Joubert, “Memory embroidered”, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{152}Becker, “Amazwi Abesifazane: voices of women”, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{153}McEwan, “Building a postcolonial archive?”, p. 748.
stage in their history where the portrayal of the Palestinian flag was banned, the women “adapted and reinvented cultural symbolic elements” and created embroidered “flag dresses” as a way of speaking out – a “symbolic defiance without violence”.  

In her study of the Mapula and Keiskamma embroidery projects, Schmahmann has come to a similar conclusion as McEwan and has found that these embroideries provide a forum for members of the project to articulate concerns they might otherwise feel unable to express. For example, the question of AIDS is still taboo to speak about in many black communities in South Africa. However, Schmahmann points out the creation of story cloths portraying aspects of the illness, including infidelity of spouses, seems to have remedied the silence that normally accompanies topics that are considered shameful. Furthermore, whereas they would be careful or unwilling to voice their political opinions publicly, the women of the Mapula project use story cloths to speak out. Not even the ANC leadership, including former presidents Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, are exempt from the women’s criticism, despite the North West Province being an ANC stronghold.

It can therefore be argued that the creation of story cloths draws on a rich historical tradition of crafted creativity which, as it is used as a means of intimate communication or voicing, brings the “craft” of archiving back to the community. The creation of these cloths requires active community participation and links the history of each individual with those of other women in similar circumstances. It enables the craft artists to develop a consciousness about indigenousness and political issues bringing each woman into a process that is as much about the future as it is about the past.

The fluid nature of memory and narration, the two components of oral history, have been discussed in Chapter II. In practical terms this means that the fixed nature of historical documents is challenged. Being an ongoing process means that the retelling of a story can change over time. In the case of the MCADF story cloth project, as well as other such projects, the craft artists revisit a subject resulting in multiple cloths of a specific subject

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156 Schmahmann, “Stitches as sutures”, p. 60.
158 Brockmeier, “Remembering and forgetting”, p. 64.
being produced. According to Joubert, the “similar and repetitive imagery used by different craft artists confirms the communal knowledge held by artists pertaining to this oral genre”. However, in each cloth new details emerge and a different aspect and perspective are highlighted. As Becker points out, each cloth contains a bit of archival information and with each act of “tilling” of the craft artists’ memories another story filled with important historical and cultural data is brought into the public arena, forming a cumulative archive. 

The dynamic nature of story cloths also indicates that new themes will continue to emerge, “documenting the ephemeral and the enduring, interpreting the real and the ideal from a variety of viewpoints”. Story cloths therefore can give a reflection of a past that is “nuanced, inclusive, negotiated and agreed upon by the very parties whose stories they reflect”. This is a move towards a more inclusive recollection of activities formerly side-lined or ignored in the “grand” narratives.

Both Peterson and McEwan point out that the “sheer diversity and magnitude of images and themes contained in story cloths” and the “rigorous attention [given] to complex and multiple experiences” enable story cloths to defy the critical under-representation of women. It illustrates the “resourcefulness of a culture to translate its principles into new creative endeavours - to pluralize aesthetic systems rather than relinquish control over them”. It thereby challenges the “androcentrism of African knowledge production by asserting African women can be producers of knowledge”.

The women subsequently “fill in” the details by way of colourful embroidery. Both Becker and Lepionka explain this process as the embroidered stitches becoming narrative elements, giving voice to the stories, which links up with Daly Goggin’s statement that the stitches are “grapholectic marks render[ed] text/ile”. It is interesting to note that the embroidery on the story cloths created at the Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre is not very intricate in terms of the variety of stitches. Although a skilled embroiderer was asked to teach the women different

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161 Peterson, “Translating experience and the reading of a story cloth”, p. 20.
163 Peterson, “Translating experience and the reading of a story cloth”, p. 11.
165 Peterson, “Translating experience and the reading of a story cloth”, p. 11.
167 Daly Goggin, “Stitching a life in ‘Pen of Steel and Silken Inke’”, pp. 36-37.
intricate stitches, they quickly returned to the more simple satin and chain stitches. In research on similar projects the spontaneity and simplicity - the almost naive representation - of the embroidered images are noted. This is seen as the strength of such projects, namely that the complexity of the narratives is captured under a guise of effortlessness.\textsuperscript{168}

Boyce Davies describes the process of black women who tell their stories orally and who want them told to a world community in written format, as a variety of boundary crossings that has to occur. “Boundaries of orality and writing, of geography and space, engender fundamental crossings and re-crossings.”\textsuperscript{169} Representing oral histories by means of material culture, and specifically needlework, has a number of advantages. Not only does it overcome the ephemerality of oral history, but as a product of craft and art, it has the ability to be widely disseminated and circulated. This is an important economic dimension of these story cloths, but also a viable means for the women to transfer their memories to a larger audience as the story cloths created in South Africa are sold to collectors worldwide.\textsuperscript{170}

Embroidered texts, or \textit{ekphrasis} (words or cryptic annotations), have been included with the MCADF story cloths since the year 2000 “to give, directly or indirectly, ‘voice’ to the embroidered pictures”\textsuperscript{171} by means of a brief explanation of each scene. After a discussion to determine the text to accompany the pictorial presentation, the text is written by the members who have basic literacy skills in Sepedi and in some cases are translated into English.\textsuperscript{172} This additional information helps to make the story cloths accessible to an audience which is not familiar with the culture and way of life of this group of women for as Coetsee rightly remarks: “If one can understand ‘the other’, it is possible to connect with them”.\textsuperscript{173} It can also be seen as an additional archival process where the women, once again in a group context, describe the cloth. This discussion is then recorded and transcribed for archival purposes. As these cloths and books are commercial commodities and therefore for sale, a photographic archive of the completed story cloths has also been built up which complements the transcribed recordings. This is a process of archiving very similar to the Amazwi

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\textsuperscript{169} Boyce Davies, \textit{Black women, writing and identity}, pp. 20-22.  \\
\textsuperscript{170} Rigney, “Plenitude, scarcity and the circulation of cultural memory”, p. 14.  \\
\textsuperscript{171} Joubert, “Memory embroidered”, pp. 97-126.  \\
\end{flushleft}
Abesifazane project where the stories depicted on the cloths are written down, translated into English and then both versions are archived.\textsuperscript{174}

With regards to the connection between the images and the accompanying text of the story cloths, Nichols’s study on illustrated manuscripts can provide useful insights. Just as the manuscript space of an illuminated folio consists of two main components that have been created by the “technology” of the manuscript, where the visual element iconically represents a viewer’s engagement with the juxtaposed verbal narrative, a story cloth consists of a visual and a textual component. In the case of story cloths, however, the order of creation is reversed.\textsuperscript{175} Adding a text panel or inserting text to the picture panel should not be seen as merely an addition to the pictorial representation. Using Nichols’ explanation, it in fact initiates a change in the picture, a form of commentary, an annotation that actively moves the picture, or at least the reader’s perception of it, in ways that would not happen in the absence of textual content. Nichols sees this addition as in “itself a perceiver, a gaze trained on that [picture] as a logical result of [intellectual] experiments empirically elaborated”.\textsuperscript{176}

When viewing the story cloths, the written commentary on the pictorial depiction should be contemplated simultaneously with the viewing of the story cloth. According to Nichols the innovative nature of illumination in the manuscript matrix is due to the “expectation of simultaneous (or nearly so) juxtaposed reading of one element by the other”,\textsuperscript{177} a characteristic that can be applied to story cloths as well. This textual record should however not be construed as the reading of the iconographic representation, but only as one of several possible written responses and just as the miniature in the case of manuscripts, the text added to story cloths offers a new venue for expression.\textsuperscript{178} Joubert also points out that since the craft artists have limited literacy skills, the written explanation “does not always offer a satisfactory description of the embroidered panels, but rather a living response to the works of art, which seems perceptual rather than neutrally descriptive”.\textsuperscript{179}
Although the text represents the efforts of craft artists “to come to grips intellectually” with the images they portray in the story cloths, and both the text and the image function in the same space and are derived largely from the same sources, the text is not usually a literal or a direct translation or explanation of a particular image. Rather than reproducing exactly the model that might have been provided, the added text offers a surrogate that alters the original. The text should therefore be considered as freestanding and independent of the pictorial representations it represents.

Archival process

An important premise of the counter-archival debate is that traditional archival practices should become “participatory, community-oriented processes”. It is therefore significant that the MCADF craft artists are actively involved in the archival process. Unlike previous attempts by anthropologists and social historians to obtain and preserve the stories of females in marginalised societies on their behalf, the stories contained in story cloths not only represent these women, but are collected, and appraised by them. With the exception of the Amazwi Abesifazane project, which was specifically established to archive black South African women’s experiences under apartheid, the MCADF story cloth project is the only community based project that is actively involved in transcribing and contextualising the content of the cloths as well. It is therefore a case of not only being part of history making as subjects, but of being actively involved as “archivists” themselves. The organization of collective memory and commemoration is a fundamental concern of every human society as this process can give insight into the way in which social and cultural arrangements influence the negotiations taking place within a society in order to construct a representation of its past. However, this is not a simple process and as highlighted in Chapter III, the environment in which these craft artists find themselves present several obstacles that could impede archival processes from taking place.

Field’s input on oral history, as discussed in Chapter II, namely that the process of favouring and even forgetting certain accounts above others is not much different from the archival

\[\text{Nichols, “An artifact by any other name", p. 141.} \]
\[\text{Nichols, “An artifact by any other name", p. 141.} \]
\[\text{Brockmeier, “Remembering and forgetting”, p. 23; Olick and Robbins, “Social memory studies”, p.109; Ketelaar, “Archives as spaces of memory”, p. 18.} \]
processes of selection, appraisal and destruction of records, can be applied to story cloths. As Peterson explains, for the Hmong refugees in Thailand the process of deciding the content of the story cloths is not very different to archival appraisal. It places the artists in a “reflexive position of looking at us looking at them; they must decide what is appropriate for us to see, in what form we should see it. Such decisions suggest an acute consciousness of their own cultural categories, and at least adequate comprehension of those of Euro-Americans”, thus negating the idea of cultures with an oral culture of being “savage” and “uncivilised”. This connects with Forbes’s argument that not only should women’s history be recorded, but their agency in the making of history and the production of records should be acknowledged. In terms of the story cloths produced by the MCADF, as with other South African projects such as Amazwi Abesifazane, Tambani and the Intuthuko Sewing Group, the craft artists are not only the subjects whose actions are captured in the record, but the creators and the archivists of these records. This aspect of story cloths ties in with Biko’s statement of writing one’s own history. As mentioned earlier, these women have the power to decide which aspects of their lives will be “remembered” and what will be “forgotten” which is important in shaping their identities and indicates a kind of agency, an aspect so long denied.

As indicated in Chapter II identity is seen as an anchor in times of turmoil and change and with modern influences moving in rapidly, a sense of cohesion and belonging can provide stability. The recognition of various memory practices are therefore essential as this will allow for a space for negotiation through which different stories and identities vie for a place in history, an aspect that is pertinent to South Africa. Several scholars point out that the fact that collective memory is shared through narration and dialogue underlines the fact that it is not a simple or unified process, but is in essence contested. This stands in stark contrast with the former State Archives which Josias likens to producing “pre-packaged communities

185 Peterson, “Translating experience and the reading of a story cloth”, p. 6.
186 Peterson, “Translating experience and the reading of a story cloth”, p. 6.
See also Chapter 2.
with labels and postal addresses”, 192 providing what she refers to as “storage-box models of history”, 193 models which might exclude the marginalised.

In terms of how the people of the Blouberg area were represented in archival material in the second half of the nineteenth century is closely related with their encounter with Western colonial powers. As shown in Chapter III this would eventually lead to the disintegration of the community. 194 Numerous letters and reports of some of the missionaries who worked in the area have been archived. These include the archives of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society in South Africa which is kept at the Cory Library, Rhodes University, Grahamstown and the records of the BMS which is housed at the Berliner Missionsgesellschaft Evangelisches Archivzentrum in Berlin, Germany. The South African National Archives in Pretoria, and in particular the Transvaalse Argiefbewaarphek (TAB) (Transvaal Archives Repository) houses records of the ZAR. It covers the period from 1880 when the ZAR started to expand its sphere of influence. Occupation of tribal land and taxation of the indigenous people were initially of prime concern. Extensive records on the war of 1894 can also be found in these collections. 195 After the Union of South Africa (1910) the Location Commission and the Department of Native Affairs dealt with aspects of the relocation of black people in terms of the 1913 Natives Land Act. During the apartheid era (1947-1980s) matters concerning the black population were dealt with by the Department of Bantu Administration and Development. All of these records are in the State Archives, but many are administrative by nature. 196

A number of government publications have also been published. These include laws passed by the ZAR and the Transvaal provincial governments. Of specific interest is the determination of the boundaries of the area allocated to the Hananwa and the establishment of

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192 Josias, “Toward an understanding of archives as a feature of collective memory”, p. 100.
193 Josias, “Toward an understanding of archives as a feature of collective memory”, p. 100.
195 Argief van die Superintendent van Naturelle van die: SN. 25 - 27 Minutes, 1881 -1900; SN. 175 Zoutpansberg: korrespondensie naturelle-kommissaris, 1881 1895.
Argief van die Kommandant-Generaal van die Z.A.R., 1880-1900
Argief van die Staatssecretaris van die ZAR, Buitelandse Sake SSA. 2.
196 The theses of Kriel, Makhuru, Van Schalkwyk and Weidemann provide a comprehensive overview of archival sources on the people of the Blouberg.
the Hananwa tribal authority in 1969. A number of military and ethnographical surveys of the indigenous population were also published intermittently.\textsuperscript{197}

Furthermore, under the apartheid government the black population was assigned to certain ethnic groups, each with its own “homeland”.\textsuperscript{198} The people in the Blouberg district were narrowly defined as Northern Sotho, forming part of the homeland of Lebowa with Sepedi as the native tongue, an approach which totally negated the diversity of the group. Furthermore, due to their gender, the craft artists have no say in traditional power structures and they feel that the appointed government officials do not carry their interests at heart, creating a sense of having no say in their own identity.

In light of this and as the construction of the MCADF story cloths is entirely a group effort, from the initial discussion before the designing of a specific story cloth to the translation of the text and the audio commentary on the completed cloths, the craft artists feel that these cloths truly provide a rhetorical space of their own. Therefore they identify strongly with the MCADF. This is evident from the fact that only in 2005, eleven years after the establishment of the Foundation, did the individual members start to put their names on the story cloths as they had felt that the Foundation served as their “voice”.\textsuperscript{199} This is not unique to this project and Lepionka has found that in India too, once the women became aware of the artistic merits of their work, they gradually started to sign the story cloths as a way of authenticating the pieces as their own work.\textsuperscript{200}


\textsuperscript{198} See Chapter III for further details.


\textsuperscript{200} Lepionka., “Visible links”, p.171.
Recognising that these story cloths serve as a resource of information on the contemporary culture in the Blouberg district, Coetsee has also put in place measures to catalogue and contextualise them. As the focus of this project is on documenting contemporary culture, the story cloths are referred to as “ethnographic” art panels and books. In 2010 Katrin Schmitter, a scholar from Switzerland, worked at the Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre, focusing on cataloguing and categorising photographs of embroidered panels in specific categories. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the craft artists revisit specific themes and events and in the cataloguing of the cloths, the following broad themes have emerged: Business, Trading and Transport; Education; Environment and nature; Farming and hunting; Governance; Health and healing; Religion and faith; Sport and leisure; Traditional dance, song and entertainment; Traditional skills and customs; Village life; Food and recipes. This process of documentation has been expanded and Petra Terreblanche, an anthropologist with extensive experience in the indigenous cultures of the Limpopo Province, is currently employed to research and document additional information pertaining to the various categories of story cloths. The aim of this project is to do an in depth analysis of the content of the cloths and to situate it within the broader framework of the community. She conducts her work at the Craft Art Centre and regularly interviews and questions the craft artists on specific aspects pertaining to the story cloths. This could be considered as another way of ensuring that the women are part of the archival process. A system of cross-referencing has also being put in place as some of the categories overlap. For example, cloths in category 10, which deals with rites of passage, rituals and ceremonies related to ancestors and supernatural forces and traditional celebrations such as marriage or initiation, could also contain information relevant to traditional dress and adornment which falls under category 9. These measures are important in ensuring the integrity and contextualisation of the story cloths as archival sources.

Conclusion

Flinn states that if “archives and other memory sites are to offer important spaces for engaging with potentially positive and empowering conversations about personal and

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collective identifications and promote notions of belonging, then these conversations need to be inclusive rather than exclusive”.203

The entrenched gendering of and exclusion from both spaces and mediums of articulation has necessitated the creation of “new” spaces and unconventional ways in order for black women to find a voice. In terms of providing an alternative archival space, a project such as the MCADF embroidered story cloths not only encompasses the counter-archival definitions of providing previously marginalised groups with the means to contribute to the national memory, but also embraces the notions of hospitality and the hosting of excluded groups which could enable them to claim their own memory space. Furthermore, the combination of oral tradition and material culture makes story cloths an ideal medium of communication for illiterate and marginalised women. However, these craft projects established in South Africa are not without criticism, an aspect which will be dealt with in Chapter V.

CHAPTER V
READING THE THREADS

This final chapter will consider what the story cloths created by the women of the MCADF project encapsulate, as well as the possible contribution these story cloths can make to research and the broader South African historical landscape. This discussion does not endeavour to present a critical analysis of the content, but rather will point to the fact that these story cloths deal with everyday occurrences as opposed to other memory projects that focus specifically on the apartheid past. The economic dimension of this project also begs the question as to whether a community development project can make a contribution to the lives of the participants and their wider community. Furthermore, being established initially as a development project, the possibility will be discussed of such a project serving as a community archive through which under-represented groups can become aware of and claim their memory and heritage. Finally, the contribution to the South African national memory and the process of healing and reconciliation that is taking place after over three centuries of colonialism and apartheid will be considered.\(^1\)

**Threads of embroidered memory**

Although the TRC has made a significant contribution towards recovering the experiences of black South Africans during the apartheid era, the focus was for the most part on the “more ‘dramatic’ or salient narratives of apartheid atrocities”.\(^2\) Thereby it “effectively (albeit, perhaps, unintentionally) foreclosed the possibility of an exploration of the more quotidian but pervasive, and no less significant, manifestations of apartheid abuse”.\(^3\) Projects such as the Apartheid Archives project and the embroidered memory cloths produced by the Amazwi Abisifazane project were established with the aim of examining the impact of the apartheid system on the everyday lives of ordinary South Africans, and in the case of the embroidery project, on women specifically.\(^4\) The content of the story cloths produced by the MCADF differs from a few other South African based memory projects in that it is an initiative that is not “inspired by an overtly articulated political agenda”.\(^5\) These cloths document everyday life situations, as well as rituals and rites of passage of the craft artists and the community to

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\(^1\) Butler, “‘Othering’ the archives – from exile to inclusion and heritage dignity”, p. 63.


which they belong. In a country that has suffered under the oppressive regimes of the colonial and apartheid governments which disrupted people’s lives and destroyed communities, the question could be asked as to how a project, that studies a “still point” in a country actively pursuing revolutionary change, can result in a more popular, democratised local history?

According to Flinn the importance of such a project is measured by the extent to which it is “motivated by the desire to celebrate and recover every voice or whether the project, in a critical sense, wishes to go further by exploring areas of difficulty and complexity in the group’s or community’s history, histories that might challenge the community as well as reinforce any preconceptions about identity”. He points out that celebratory histories of achievement ... are important, even valuable when such stories have been previously ignored or misrepresented, but ultimately they are rather limited, taking independent archives and radical history-making only so far.

He concludes that archives and history-making activities which go beyond acts of celebration and build upon the acts of recovery, “offer something more compelling, discursive, and ultimately more impactful”. In line with this, Burton points out that the “fragments of lives and dramas that we have only glimpses of, serve as testimony to fugitive work of gender and the fleeting presence of women as subjects in the past”. She is of the opinion that these stories can tell us more about a specific country’s history than monographs or textbooks.

In Chapter II Seremetakis’s observation is discussed, namely that everyday life is a privileged site for political colonisation. This was the case with the black population in South Africa during the colonial and apartheid eras and visible in the story cloths produced by the MCADF. In the portrayal of their “world”, it becomes evident that the community in which the MCADF is situated, as was the case with most of the former homelands, showed very little development of any kind. This underlines how apartheid, in the long term, impacted on the black population of South Africa, making them political and economic outsiders in their own country. Furthermore, having the opportunity to observe the “indigenous” life by way of

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9 Burton, Foreword: “Small stories” and the promise”, p. vi.
10 Burton, Foreword: “Small stories” and the promise”, p. vi.
story cloths provides an indictment against colonialism and apartheid which were built on the belief that the way of life of indigenous cultures was inferior. The ability to produce story cloths through which their own stories as black, marginalised women are told, challenges this notion of stagnancy and establishes them as producers of knowledge. These records show that the “apparent victory of proclaiming the [white] settlers as the true bearers of the territory and the history, and by rendering indigenous people and their claim absent, was actually a failure”, thereby contesting the very foundations of apartheid. As mentioned earlier, it is the abundance of information on the natural and cultural environment portrayed in the story cloths as well as the everyday experience that prompted Coetsee to establish the Mogakawena Research Centre. Moreover, with the exception of the Tambani project which endeavours to document Venda folk tales, the majority of the embroidery projects do not represent any specific ethnic group. Unlike the “grand narratives of the histories of apartheid”, memory cloths reveal the everyday survival struggles of black women. McEwan therefore considers it critical that the “memories of people who experience the minutiae of social and community life under apartheid should not be lost or erased in old or new forms of grandiose history writing”. Although some of the practices portrayed in the cloths, such as the performance of mokang-kanyane, can be ascribed to certain ethnic groups, the portrayal thereof in embroidered story cloths is not a celebration of unique ethnic practices, but a depiction of an aspect which is part and parcel of the women’s everyday lives.

The content of the MCADF story cloths offers a unique glimpse into the daily activities and the culture of the community. The scenes and stories are depicted either as single story cloths that serve almost like a “snapshot” of an event or as “story books” where the narrative stretches over time and therefore contains a series of story cloths sewn together. As the images are positioned within the social context, scholars of popular culture and textile experts have compared the cloths to newspaper headlines or comic strip posters as each cloth is a form of social and political pictorial commentary on contemporary popular culture. The craft artists’ keen sense of observation and attention to detail make these cloths valuable sources from which to glean such information.

In terms of the time frame, the story cloths contain for the most part depictions of contemporary life, spanning from the 1990s to the current day. However, some of the cloths also portray past practices such as the grounding of maize or sorghum, the weaving of baskets and grass mats and the making of clay pots. Both weaving and pottery are practised at the Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre. However, these are sold not as domestic commodities, but as decorative items. As everyday practices, weaving and pottery are disappearing as the black communities prefer to buy commercially available alternatives. Where possible, the cloths have been dated and the information included in the archives. However, the lack of specific dates, as well as the fact that the craft artists revisit certain themes is, as highlighted in Chapter II, a characteristic of the study of the everyday. It indicates a move away from the linear or chronological narratives that characterised the “grand” narratives found in traditional archives, towards an approach which is not necessarily quantifiable, but which allows for the mundane and repetitive quotidian practices to be recorded.

The depictions of village life contain information on economic consumption with numerous representations of the brand names of a variety of goods such as drinks, beer, washing powder and services such as fuel stations and a variety of stores. The names of these are visible on the minutely embroidered shopping bags carried by the characters portrayed in the cloths. The viewer can also get a sense of the hustle and bustle of pension day with images of women dressed up for their outing to the shops; friends pleased to meet one another; old men talking on the side of the road; boys fighting over sweets which as a result lay scattered in the dust. (See Figures 2 & 3 on p. 163)

The natural environment of the area is meticulously portrayed and the viewer can get a sense of the variety of bird and wildlife with the outline of Blouberg Mountain ever present on the horizon. (See Figure 4 on p. 164) Indigenous birds such as secretary birds, eagles, guinea fowl, swifts, storks, owls and barbets are clearly distinguishable. (See Figure 5 on p. 164) These are not merely static depictions, but have captured nature in action: the buffalo coming down to the river to drink; a hairy baboon catching a scorpion whilst another troop steals

Figure 2: MEAA Photograph 1.12: Makwaeba Bottle Store

Figure 3: MEAA Photograph 1.8: Dendron Shopping Complex
Figure 4: MEAA Photograph 3.77: Lešokeng

Figure 5: MEAA Photograph 3.67: Plants & birds story
fruit. Insects crawl up the trunk of a large boabab tree and aloes grow abundantly on the mountain slopes.\textsuperscript{21}

From the cloths various cultural practices can also be observed. \textit{Lobola}, the payment of the bridal price or dowry, is illustrated with the bride, centre stage, receiving gifts such as blankets; the cattle being presented; the killing of a goat for the celebration; the grandmothers sitting on the periphery discussing the happy event.\textsuperscript{22} (See Figures 6 & 7 on p. 166) Although \textit{lobola} is still practised extensively, aspects of a more Western style wedding have been incorporated in the celebration of some nuptials, as an indication that their way of life is not static, but constantly evolving through contact with different practices. All the preparations for a wedding feast are depicted in some of the story cloths. A gas stove attached to a gas bottle set up in the open to prepare food for the guests; a zinc basin to keep drinks cold and a marquee for the bridal couple - the bride in a long white dress and the groom in a suit and tie - can be observed.\textsuperscript{23} Another series of cloths, titled \textit{Setšhila}, describe the cleansing ceremony of a widow after the period of mourning, with the community gathering around her providing food and a new dress so that she can discard her mourning robes and carry on with her life.\textsuperscript{24} (See Figure 8 on p. 167) Explanations of certain cultural beliefs are also given, for example boys are warned not to steal birds’ eggs out of the nest because a snake might have taken residence there.\textsuperscript{25}

In terms of health care, visits to modern clinics and hospitals as well as to traditional healers are depicted and as indicated the craft artists make use of both.\textsuperscript{26} The Helen Franz Hospital, founded by a former missionary’s wife is the topic of one of the story cloths and the clinic at Bochum (Senwabarwana) is also depicted. The nurses are clearly distinguishable wearing blue skirts and white blouses with epaulettes and caps.\textsuperscript{27} Interestingly, with the exception of one of the cloths dealing with the interior of the clinic, the story cloths on modern health care are more concerned with the spectacle that unfolds outside the hospital: the ambulance is parked in front of the clinic with the driver ready for action; there is a man on a stretcher, a

\textsuperscript{21} MEAA. Category 3. Environment and Nature. Photographs 3.1-3.82.
\textsuperscript{22} MEAA. Category 10. Traditional Skills and Customs. Photographs 10.5-10.8; 10.10-10.14; 10.16; 10.18; Category 11: Village life. Photograph 11.4.
\textsuperscript{23} MEAA. Category 11: Village life. Photograph 11.2; 11.21.
\textsuperscript{24} MEAA. Category 10. Traditional Skills and Customs. Photographs 10.21-10.26.
\textsuperscript{26} Personal interview: Dr E. Coetsee, 2011-03-06; Personal interview: MCADF craft artists, 2013-01-15.
\textsuperscript{27} MEAA. Category 6. Health and Healing. Photographs 6.43.
Figure 6: MEAA Photograph 10.7: Lobola

Figure 7: MEAA Photograph 10.17: Lobola
Figure 8: MEAA Photograph 10.25: Setšhila

Figure 9: MEAA Photograph 6.48: Bochum Clinic
person in a wheelchair and another on crutches; a woman changing a baby’s nappy; while a man is relieving himself behind a tree – nothing escapes these story tellers’ attention.28 (See Figure 9 on p. 167) One of the story cloths also tells the story of a woman who is HIV positive and who has been hospitalised for a long time, but now, after visiting the traditional healer, is able to “get up and sit down”.29

Criticism is not only reserved for modern medicine. Another story cloth deals with a woman who pretended to be a traditional healer, demanding goats as payment, as a way to get food.30 All the various aspects of visiting the ngaka (traditional healer) are depicted, from the colourful outfit that the healer wears; the throwing of the bones and the pouch in which these are kept; the calabash (Lagenaria siceraria), bottle gourd or squash that when harvested, matured and dried can be used as a container) in which medicines are cooked over an open fire; the kaross (blanket) under which the patient sits during the healing; and the cleansing of the patient afterwards, as well as the different plants that are collected and cultivated for preparing medicine.31 (See Figure 10 on p. 169)

Significant milestones are also depicted. Receiving the right to vote in 1994 was an aspect of great value to the craft artists and several story cloths have been completed depicting meetings of the Blouberg municipal council as well as the Kibi tribal authority.32 The fact that a woman has been elected mayor is important to these women who are accustomed not to have a say in the traditional power structures and mayoress Refilfoe is by far the largest physical figure portrayed on the story cloth.33 (See Figure 11 on p. 169)

The significance of belonging to a church is also made evident from the many story cloths on the various denominations that the craft artists belong to. The different vestments are portrayed in great detail, such the uniforms of the ZCC34 and the robes and mitres characteristic of the Apostolic and Full Gospel churches.35 (See Figures 12 & 13 on p.170) The environment in which the Bible stories are set is that which they know and the clothing

30 MEAA. Category 6. Health and Healing. Photograph 6-34.
32 MEAA. Category 5: Governance. Photographs 5.4-5.9; 5.14; Category 11: Village life. Photograph 11.34.
33 MEAA. Category 5: Governance. Photograph 5.3.
34 MEAA. Category 7: Religion and Faith – churches, baptism and Bible stories. Photographs 7.3-7.9.
35 MEAA. Category 7: Religion and Faith – churches, baptism and Bible stories. Photographs 7.2; 7.5-7.7.
Figure 10: MEAA Photograph 6.13: Ngaka

Figure 11: MEAA Photograph 5.3: Blouberg municipality
Figure 12: MEAA Photograph 7.8: ZCC

Figure 13: MEAA Photograph 7.5: Republic [sic] Church Choir
of the characters in the stories is similar to the vestments worn in their denominations. For example, a depiction of the crucifixion (the term crosfight [sic] is used in the story cloth). The people at the foot of the cross are clothed very similarly to the church leaders depicted in the story cloths about the Apostolic church.36 In the story cloth of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, the Egyptians look like cowboys mounted on horses with trousers and hats.37 The whale in the story cloth about Jonah could very well be swimming in the Mogalakwena River38 and the miracle at the Bethesda “borehole” (term used on the story cloth) reminds one of a dam found on any farm in the district.39

Another aspect of great importance to the women is ensuring that their children receive a good education. A number of local schools feature in their stories with accompanying text such as “Education is light”.40 Although all the figures on the cloths are neatly dressed in school uniforms and are smiling, some throwing up their arms in the air, the lack of facilities is clearly visible. These schools merely consist of two or three classrooms with outside toilets and with no essential facilities such as a school hall or sport grounds.41 (See Figure 14 on p. 173) Amongst the story cloths on education is one telling of the feeding scheme at a local nursery school which was necessitated by the large number of orphans left in the wake of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.42 Yet another story cloth celebrates with Pietnet Sepaela, the former gardener at the Mogalakwena Lodge. She has started her own nursery school with the assistance of the Coetsees’ daughter, Isabella, who helped with the design and building of the school and the fundraising for materials.43 A church in England has become involved in this initiative and it is always with great anticipation and excitement that a consignment of knitted jerseys, blankets and toys is received at the school.44 (See Figure 15 on p. 173)

Due to the lack of development in the former homelands, many of these areas only received basic services after 1994. As indicated earlier, the craft artists have emphasised the impact receiving electricity and running water has had on their lives, especially not having to perform the arduous tasks of collecting firewood and water. This is also visible in the story

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37 MEAA. Category 7: Religion and Faith – churches, baptism and Bible stories. Photograph 7.11.
38 MEAA. Category 7: Religion and Faith – churches, baptism and Bible stories. Photograph 7.12.
39 MEAA. Category 7: Religion and Faith – churches, baptism and Bible stories. Photograph 7.4.
40 MEAA. Category 2: Education. Photograph 2.4.
41 MEAA. Category 2: Education. Photographs 2.2-2.6; 2.9.
42 MEAA. Category 2: Education. Photograph 2.1.
43 MEAA. Category 2: Education. Photograph 2.8.
44 Written information: Dr E. Coetsee, 2013-06-04.
cloths. Electricity poles, electric lights and taps, even if it is only an outside tap that allows them to water their vegetable garden, are clearly depicted. Having services such as banking being established in some of the rural settlements has also made it possible for them to manage their money. In several story cloths either a bank or the post office where money can be drawn and deposited with the cashiers safely behind a barred counter are depicted. (See Figure 16 on p. 174)

In addition to the lack of development, the isolation and rural setting have contributed to a far more traditional lifestyle being maintained. However, urban influences are encroaching and the meeting of the rural, almost old-fashioned way of life with a more modern life can be seen. In the township a mother with a baby carried the traditional way on the back is crossing the road while another, pushing her baby in a pram is entering a shop. The streets are teaming with taxis and donkey carts. (See Figure 17 on p. 174) The many examples of taxi ranks and taxis show their dependence on this more informal means of public transport as the majority cannot afford a motor vehicle. A potential passenger waiting on a rock instead of a bench, a snake in a tree next to the shop, chickens pecking in the dirt and a goat tethered to a tree all emphasise the rural setting. (See Figure 18 on p. 175) From the accompanying text an interesting variation on the phrase “to catch a taxi” can be learned, namely “to climb the taxi”, indicating perhaps the height of the mini bus taxi that necessitates the passengers to hoist themselves up into the vehicle. Migrant labour is very much part of their lives and mention is made in the accompanying text of workers stopping at the local fuel station before continuing with their journey home to either Botswana or Zimbabwe. Some story cloths tell about those who have managed to start their own small businesses, such as opening a restaurant or a tavern; a hairdresser with towels hanging on a rail; the

Figure 14: MEAA Photograph 2.3: Modikwa School

Figure 15: MEAA Photograph 2.8: Matome Prischool
Figure 16: MEAA Photograph 11.27: Senwabarwana

Figure 17: MEAA Photograph 11.29: Simson village
Figure 18: MEAA Photograph 1.1: Alldays Taxi Rank

Figure 19: MEAA Photograph 9 Cross reference with Village rural life
wedding planner, complete with marquee tent and plastic chairs with white slip-covers;\textsuperscript{54} (See Figure 19 on p. 175) the hearse parked in front of the funeral parlour where people come to buy a funeral plan on pension day.\textsuperscript{55} But there are also women trying to make a living by selling vegetables or mopani worms in make-shift stalls which contrast sharply with the shops in front of which they trade.\textsuperscript{56} Inside the shop a suave salesman, wearing sunglasses indoors, greets the customers. On the shelves behind him are zinc basins, tea sets and handbags.\textsuperscript{57} Being far from any large town with dedicated shops, the local shops have to cater for all needs.\textsuperscript{58} The majority of inhabitants of the townships near the Craft Art Centre grow their own vegetables\textsuperscript{59} and keep livestock\textsuperscript{60} as it is difficult and expensive to buy fresh produce. From the story cloths the role the seasons play in their lives in terms of food cultivation\textsuperscript{61} and collection can also be seen. A story cloth book on mopani worms portrays the development from when they hatch in spring when the trees get leaves, to the collecting, drying and storing,\textsuperscript{62} (See Figure 20 on p. 177) a warthog hunt is portrayed in graphic detail\textsuperscript{63} and other story cloths show how frogs and termites that come after the rains are collected for eating.\textsuperscript{64} The importance of the Mogalakwena River as a source of water is also clear from the numerous central depictions and accompanying text.\textsuperscript{65} (See Figure 21 on p. 177)

Many people construct their own houses to save costs, but a number have also received Reconstruction and Development Project (RDP) houses.\textsuperscript{66} These rectangular structures with corrugated iron roofs are easily identifiable on the story cloths, often next to a more

\textsuperscript{54} MEAA. Category 1: Business, Trading and Transport. Photograph 1.28.
\textsuperscript{55} MEAA. Category 1: Business, Trading and Transport. Photograph 1.36.
\textsuperscript{56} MEAA. Category 1: Business, Trading and Transport. Photograph 1.6.
\textsuperscript{57} MEAA. Category 1: Business, Trading and Transport. Photograph 1.18.
\textsuperscript{58} MEAA. Category 1: Business, Trading and Transport. Photographs 1.10; 1.12; 1.13; 1.15; 1.19; 1.21; 1.24; 1.31; 1.39; Category 11: Village life. Photographs 11.25-11.27; 11.31.
\textsuperscript{59} MEAA. Category 4: Farming and hunting. Photographs 4.1-4.3; 4.10-4.11; 4.13-4.18; 4.21-4.28; 4.3-4.31.
\textsuperscript{60} MEAA. Category 4: Farming and hunting. Photographs 4.4-4.9; Category 10: Traditional skills and customs. Photograph 10.31; Category 11: Village life. Photographs 11.12; 11.22; 11.24.
\textsuperscript{61} MEAA. Category 4: Farming and hunting. Photographs 4.12; 4.20.
\textsuperscript{62} MEAA. Category 3: Environment and Nature. Photographs 3.6; 3.8; 3.11.
\textsuperscript{63} MEAA. Category 3: Environment and Nature. Photograph 3.78.
\textsuperscript{64} MEAA. Category 3: Environment and Nature. Photographs 3.16; 3.81.
\textsuperscript{65} MEAA. Category 3: Environment and Nature. Photographs 3.3; 3.4; 3.12; 3.82.
\textsuperscript{66} The RDP was implemented after the first democratic elections in 1994. According to the government’s policy document on development it is an integrated, coherent socio-economic policy framework, which “seeks to mobilise all our people and our country’s resources toward the final eradication of apartheid and the building of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future.” (The Nelson Mandela Organisation, ‘The Reconstruction and Development Programme’, <www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/.../06lv02126.htm, s.a. Access: 2014-05-15.)
Figure 20: MEAA Photograph 3.11: Mopani worms

Figure 21: MEAA Photograph 3.41: Mogalakwena River
traditional thatch roof hut.\textsuperscript{67} Here, recently acquired plastic ware (some Tupperware) share the kitchen shelf with some traditionally baked pots. Despite having received electricity and running water, the majority cannot afford electric household appliances and many homes are still without a bathroom. The story cloths dealing with village life give an idea of what it entails to run a household for these women: although they no longer have to make their own soap and can buy brand named washing powder, clothes are still washed in the river and babies and young children are washed in a zinc basin outside the house. The house and the yard are cleaned with a broom made of long grass that is tied together and in many households cooking is done on an open fire outside.\textsuperscript{68} (See Figure 22 on p. 179) A source of great pride, however, in once case is Sinah’s four room house complete with a separate kitchen and an electrical stove and an upholstered lounge set in the “dinning [sic] room”.\textsuperscript{69} (See Figure 23 on p. 179)

In the performance of certain traditional song and dance rituals called mokang-kanyane\textsuperscript{70} or mantlhakalane,\textsuperscript{71} as well as the traditional Venda dances,\textsuperscript{72} the different traditional costumes worn by the various groups are portrayed in great detail. Even here the encroaching Western influence can be seen with T-shirts and contemporary white sport shoes (“tekkies”) worn with the more traditional dress.\textsuperscript{73} The large number of story cloths that depict the dances could be seen as an indicator of the importance of these for the women. Van Schalkwyk emphasises that many participate in these dances to escape from daily grind.\textsuperscript{74} In the past, men were the principals in most rituals and the making of music and the performance of different dances were performed by men. It is only recently that women have formed their own dance groups which could partly be ascribed to the absence of men in the community due to migrancy. (Figure 24 on p. 181)

Van Schalkwyk as well as Joubert note that the song genre of the mokang-kanyane provide these women with “culturally defined spaces” in which they can give commentary on

\textsuperscript{67} MEAA. Category 11: Village life. Photographs 11.1; 11.17; 11.19; 11.22; 11.29; 11.31.
\textsuperscript{68} MEAA. Category 11: Village life. Photographs 11.11; 11.16; 11.20.
\textsuperscript{69} MEAA. Category 11: Village life. Photographs 11.16; 11.30.
\textsuperscript{70} MEAA. Category 9: Dancing and Entertainment. Photographs 9.1; 9.2; 9.4; 9.17; 9.19-9.25.
\textsuperscript{71} MEAA. Category 9: Dancing and Entertainment. Photographs 9.4; 9.5; 9.12; 9.13.
\textsuperscript{72} MEAA. Category 9: Dancing and Entertainment. Photograph 9.6.
Figure 22: MEAA Photograph 11.1: Anna Mphe’s House

Figure 23: MEAA Photograph 11.30: Ramaswikana village
community matters and social experiences and this genre allows them the freedom of expression to even mock the chief or their husbands.\textsuperscript{75} Whereas the main purpose of the performance was purely for entertainment, usually performed in rural areas at social occasions, these performances have acquired a commercial dimension. Presently these groups are paid to perform which supplements the performers’ income. Furthermore, performing in a specific group which is distinguished from the others by the colours of the dress code creates unity amongst the members of a dance group and provides them with a sense of cohesion, self-representation and identity.\textsuperscript{76} These are also evident in the story cloths.

The majority of the cloths are concerned with the repetition of everyday life practices, but certain events stand out. In 2012 a game ranger working at the lodge was attacked by a crocodile. When his colleague jumped into the river to help him, the crocodile turned on him, seriously injuring him, an event portrayed vividly in a number of story cloths.\textsuperscript{77} (See Figure 25 on p. 180) Also all the drama of a court hearing is brought to life on cloth - the uniformed police officers escort a prisoner to the dock, another is sitting behind bars and the judges arrive splendid in their robes.\textsuperscript{78} In another story cloth a robbery in Alldays is portrayed, the thief losing some of his loot as he tries to dodge the bullets from a police officer’s gun.\textsuperscript{79} Some of these events are tragic, such as the cloth that tells of a mother visiting the \textit{ngaka} (traditional healer) because she “was so confused in her mind, because of her child that went missing when she was ten years old”.\textsuperscript{80}

Although most of the scenes depict aspects that form part of the craft artists’ daily lives, the quotidian, they do not necessarily feature personally in the stories. However, on 27 February 2013, as part of the celebration of International Women’s Day on 8 March of the same year, an exhibition entitled “A glimpse – Women and Fashion in Africa” opened at the Mogalakwena Gallery in Cape Town. This was curated by Coetsee and the cultural anthropologist, Susanne Tassé-Tagne. This exhibition included more autobiographical story
Figure 24: MEAA Photograph 9.22: Mokankanyane

Figure 25: MEAA Photograph 3.12: Noka new
cloths, namely hand-embroidered self-portraits of the craft artists in their favourite *diapora* (outfits), giving them the opportunity to express themselves more personally by depicting themselves and the way they dress.  

**Story cloth value**

As mentioned in Chapter IV, one of the main criticisms against needlework projects such as the embroidered story cloths produced by various initiatives in South Africa is that it is an outside party that establishes the project and manages the running thereof, without necessarily empowering the participants. Therefore, once they withdraw their support and are no longer involved, the project tends to die as there is no experienced person to step in and take over the management. Coetsee is very much aware of this and actively works towards avoiding this pitfall as she realises that it is important for the future of the Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre. However, she still does the marketing and, together with a bookkeeper and an auditor, handles the finances. In this regard Stevens emphasises that strong leadership is not a uniquely South African phenomenon, but seems to be vital for the survival of such craft enterprises situated in marginalised areas and with a focus on community upliftment. 

Another concern is the fact that the majority of leaders of South African craft enterprises are white and this has come under criticism. Stevens quotes Okwui Enwezor who argues that such a situation of white women in leadership positions over black women equates to a continuation of colonialismpaternalism “[s]ince [the black subject] can’t speak for himself, he is spoken for”. Stevens agrees with Enwezor’s criticism to an extent. She sees the phenomenon of whites serving as intermediaries and service providers for black producers as indicating some racial polarisation in the crafts that “surely reflects the previous history of South Africa and the privileged position of these female leaders in particular”. However, when considering Josias’s comment of the uncertain future of community archives in South Africa, as well as Steven’s findings on the devastating effects on the craft artists if such a

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82 Stevens, “Morris & Co. as a theoretical model”, p. 274.  
84 Stevens, “Morris & Co. as a theoretical model”, p. 272.
project fails, one could concur with Steven’s argument in countering Enwezor’s censure. She highlights that the very fact that these white women are well educated and middle class has equipped them with the necessary market experience to identify “the needs, aspiration, fashions and desire of their clients”, for the market for these “relatively or very expensive decorative products is certainly the middle to upper classes, the wealthy, urban dwellers and tourists.” Without the experience, knowledge of and connections with this client base, the growth and sustainability of these projects will be seriously hampered. This is also very much the case with the MCADF where many of these women are illiterate and have received limited education and therefore do not have the necessary experience. Furthermore, due to the isolation of the village and limited access to the outside world resulting from poor infrastructure, the craft artists do not feel confident enough to take on the project on their own.

Stevens points out that “it is possible and indeed likely” that with the “continuing development of a black middle class and its increasing purchase of local crafts”, that black women “who understand these markets, might be better positioned for leadership roles in craft enterprises than white women”. To ensure the long term continuation of the MCADF project the craft artists are gradually exposed to various aspects of the business. The decision-making process is handled by a committee of three of the women together with Coetsee. Any decision, however, has to be discussed by all the women who meet on a weekly basis and disputes have to be resolved within the group. Coetsee is only consulted if consensus cannot be reached. As she does not live permanently on the farm, but divides her time between Mogalakwena and Cape Town, the steps taken to ensure greater independence are necessary to ensure the continuation of production and the project. In fact, one of the women, Selina Phukela, represented MCADF at the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market, New Mexico in 2008 and in 2010 Sannah Mokgaha, together with Coetsee, represented the Mogalakwena embroiderers and beaders at SAHC/Decorex in Cape Town. Empowering the next generation to continue with building up the business is also high on the agenda. Mapula Mphago, the daughter of one of the embroiders, received training and became the assistant

85 Chapter II.
86 Stevens, “Morris & Co. as a theoretical model”, p. 272.
89 Stevens, “Morris & Co. as a theoretical model”, p. 273.
90 Written information Dr. E. Coetsee, 2013-06-18.
manager of the Mogalakwena River Lodge which is a luxury safari style lodge that attracts visitors from all over the world and demands the highest quality of service.  

Similar steps have been taken to ensure the long-term continuation of other embroidery projects in South Africa. As mentioned in Chapter III, from the outset the training, developing and coordination of the Mapula project was done by a local woman, Emily Maluleke, with the support of the Soroptimists International Pretoria and members of staff of the University of South Africa (UNISA). The running of the Keiskamma Art Project has also been handed over to twelve local managers and group leaders and in June 2010 the Intuthuko group started to re-organise themselves into a co-operative.

In terms of the significance of the story cloth project for the craft artists themselves, Coetsee points out that initially the women thought her interest in their culture and the idea of documenting and preserving it for future generations to be strange. For these women the contribution that telling their stories makes to their lives is concerned with a much more basic need – the need for economic survival. In a survey done by the Global Poverty Research Group in South Africa, unemployment is highest amongst black women in rural areas and for those without formal education. Furthermore, studies in community development projects show that the demographics of the handcrafters (the majority being well past school going age and who have extended families to look after) make it difficult for these women “to undergo tertiary training owing to their culture, age or social commitments” impeding the possibility to improve their employment potential. In some cases handcraft is the only skill they can use to earn money. In the case of the MCADF project, as well as the majority of other story cloth projects, the aim is to address the social and economic needs of a community situated in an area where few other possible means of employment can be established by “focusing on one of the most vulnerable and ‘neglected’ sectors of the

91 Personal information: Dr. E. Coetsee, 2011-03-06; Written information: Dr. E. Coetsee, 2013-06-18.
95 Personal information, Dr. E. Coetsee, 2011-03-06.
97 Krüger and Verster, “Development debate and practice, pp. 244-245.
community, namely the women”. When putting food on the table is a daily challenge - in the words of an Indian *sujuni* worker “the lives of my family hang by thread I embroider” - the possibility to create a community archive and to preserve their history are often put on the back burner.

The focus on the economic dimension aligns this project to that of community development project and begs the question whether projects such as the MCADF can be considered community archives. However, from within the archival domain there is a realisation that certain communities do not have the capacity to initiate such archival projects as there are more pressing societal conditions that need to be addressed.

Already in the nineteenth century the “the ability to earn even modest wages may well have been crucial for the household economies of the needy [Muslim / Punjabi] women who stitched *phulkaris* for pay” and in 1947 the “immediate physical survival of refugee women” uprooted by the violence which characterised the partition of Punjab lead to the establishment of a “Refugee Handicrafts Sale Room”. In Lucknow the “politic and physical devastation of the 1857 Uprising, and the later loss of its cultural elite to Pakistan in 1947” has led to the city’s decline and *chikan*, a visually distinct form of whitework embroidery in India, is no longer seen as “…only a craft …it is also an occupation, which keeps the kitchen fire burning in old city homes.”

According to the United Nations (UN) the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 created almost 750 000 Palestinian refugees which by the year 2000 rose to 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza alone living in UN refugee camps. As early as the 1950s embroidery projects were set up to assist Palestinian refugee women with income and promote traditional Palestinian culture. Most, however, were only established in the mid-1980s, when the international aid community finally recognised the need for such projects.

100 Krüger and Verster, “Development debate and practice, pp. 244-245.
102 Sousa, “Spinning and weaving the threads of native women’s lives”, p. 86; Fidelis, “Recovering women’s voices in Poland”, p. 120.
103 Maskiell, “Embroidering the past”, p. 375.
104 Maskiell, “Embroidering the past”, p. 376.
For the Hmong refugees in Thailand, too, the sale of their story cloths, especially to expatriots in the USA, provided a life-line.\textsuperscript{109} The women of the the Calakmul Model Forest in Mexico also state that

[w]hat motivates us are our needs. I have seen that when I have a little bit of work and make a few cents, I can buy things for my children - crackers, bread in the evening; and the next day they don’t have to eat just beans and rice, they can have egg or something else with it. This is why we need work, to be able to defend ourselves a little bit. This is why we need to be supported with training in handicrafts.\textsuperscript{110}

As shown above, similar sentiments have been echoed by the craft artists of the Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre who see their income as a way to improve the lives of their children.\textsuperscript{111} In South Africa the alleviation of the extreme poverty amongst blacks brought on by the apartheid system was the main reason for the establishment of most of the story cloth projects discussed in this study.

McEwan emphasises the importance of memory projects such as these embroidered story cloths, rooted in the material empowerment of previously oppressed peoples and agrees with other scholars that changing the inequalities black women suffer will require not only political representation, but the redistribution of economic power.\textsuperscript{112} In a number of articles that focus on the development of community archives in third world countries the fact is highlighted that community archives can indeed empower those on the margins of society.\textsuperscript{113}

In addition, the fact that the MCADF story cloth project makes it possible for the women to find employment locally, enabling them to stay with and look after their families, cannot be stressed enough. The Craft Art Centre is a symbol of the women’s ability to be economically self-sufficient and less dependent on government grants and provides the women with an “identity”, even a status, within the community. These are significant social benefits and

\textsuperscript{109} Peterson, “Translating experience and the reading of a story cloth”, pp. 7-8.
\textsuperscript{110} Murphy, “Embroidery as participation? ”, p. 165.
\textsuperscript{111} Personal information, MCADF craft artists, 2013-01-14.
\textsuperscript{112} McEwan, “Building a postcolonial archive?”, pp. 507, 753.
\textsuperscript{113} G. Kelly, “The Single Noongar Claim: native title, archival records and aboriginal community in Western Australia”; P. Galloway, “Oral tradition in living cultures: the role of archives in the preservation of memory”; Setareki Tale and Opeta Alefaio, “We are our memories: community and records in Fiji” in Bastian and Alexander (eds.).
dispel any notion that these story cloths are mere economic commodities. Bogumil Jewsiewicki points out that

[w]ere it not for daily life marked by AIDS, unemployment and economic disparities, this penitent memory [born out of the TRC hearings], having already overcome the barrier of race, could have enjoyed a prolonged expansion, transforming apartheid into a trauma that founded the new nation.

This notion of empowerment thus gives another perspective on the importance of material culture products which due to their economic value form part of a cultural visible trade. An expanded definition of the role and importance of community archives is called for - one that recognises that economic and social upliftment might be one of the foremost steps towards enabling previously marginalised women to become part of the recorded narrative and historical process.

Furthermore, the aim of the MCADF, as well as other projects, is to make an impact on the members of the community’s lives not only in economic terms. Part of their remuneration includes two visits annually, either for the women or their children, to a local doctor which very few of them could afford previously. Anne Harris of London South Bank University and Coetsee present workshops in first aid and basic health care, as well as AIDS awareness, which empower the women in the local communities to make informed decisions about their own and their children’s health. Training for adults in craft skills, cooking as well as the basic principles of cultural tourism is also presented.

Through the Craft Art Centre, the Foundation can also support and be involved in local schools as well as a “dropping centre” or orphanage. Guests and students are encouraged to visit the schools and get involved in projects and training. Regular donations and outreach initiatives help to furnish the schools with the necessary equipment. Workshops for the local children are presented at the Craft Art Centre and, since 1994, over 180 children have benefitted from these programmes.

116 Chapter 2; Lemire, “The material culture of textiles and clothes in the Atlantic world”, p. 85.
In addition, the Coetsees have made a further long term investment in the community with the opening of a *Bulbinella* (a genus of plant in the family *Xanthorrhoeaceae*, subfamily *Asphodeloideae*, most of the species being endemic to South Africa) extraction plant for a German pharmaceutical company. Here the local people are trained to work in a first world clinical processing plant, not only benefitting from current service, but enabling them to gain skills that could open up opportunities for future employment. Just as in the case of the MCADF, the Kaross™ workforce lives in a rural area where opportunities for advancement are scarce. Therefore, the Kaross™ Foundation was established with the intention and focus of creating formal education opportunities for the children of the employees through preschool development, sponsorships and bursaries.

Both Murphy and Wilkinson-Weber point to the fact that “handicraft development has been attractive because it is a low-cost intervention that makes modest demands on resources”. It is seen as a “socially conservative option” as it is founded upon “existing relations of production”. Hence it does not, as a rule, propose “challeng[ing] the cultural restrictions on women’s movements”, in which they are relegated to domestic roles, but might in fact even support them. What the effects of these efforts will be on the local South African communities in the long-term is difficult to predict. If international embroidery projects, such as those in Palestine are considered, the outcomes can benefit the female participants. In that country the social and charitable organisations with humanitarian objectives which established and maintained the embroidery projects since the early 1950s, have contributed greatly in promoting the role of Palestinian women in the educational, social, economic and political spheres. By the 1980s many of the women had become more involved with political and national issues through these various Women's Committees.

The combined effect of albeit modest economic empowerment coupled with more opportunities for self-expression, can be seen as a development towards “selfhood” which

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118 Personal visit, Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre, 2013-01-13-19; Written information Dr. E. Coetsee, 2013-06-18.
122 Murphy, “Embroidery as participation?”, p. 165.
could lead to greater independence on other levels. Even Murphy found that though some of the women complained about their lack of freedom within a patriarchal society, they agreed that their perceptions of themselves had changed, “they had different ideas about what kinds of work they could and could not do”. They also had more self-confidence due to the fact that they could earn their own living and take care of their families.

Coetsee and some of the other staff members, as well as returning researchers, have observed a change in the craft artists in terms of self-confidence. The craft artists’ initial sense of unimportance, brought on by years of being disregarded and discriminated against both in terms of internal and external forces, is evident in the fact that the initial story cloths’ imagery was very small. Coetsee points out that she has never specified the size of the imagery, but gradually, over time, as the women’s self-confidence has grown, large colourful images that fill the cloth have replaced the earlier small designs. The same argument can possibly be put forward for the women’s decision to add explanatory text to the story cloths – as they became more self-assured, they felt the need to share and explain their stories.

De Villiers, the co-ordinator of the Intuthuko Sewing Group, also mentions that the combined effects of a guaranteed income and the fact that the women know that their work will be appreciated internationally, has had an effect on their self-esteem. Furthermore, she remarks that it “definitely makes them innovative and motivates them to uphold their reputation concerning their skill and artistry”. This aspect is also mentioned by Lepionka in her research on the story cloth projects in India. She points out that when the story cloths were introduced as income-generating projects, the craftswomen “poured their innermost feelings through talented fingers” which not only empowered them economically but also psychologically. If, as discussed in Chapter I, the role of arts and craft as “instruments” to make sense of one’s world is considered, as well as the observation by Blouin and Rosenberg that archives represent “artifacts of culture” that indicate “who we are and why”, story

126 Murphy, “Embroidery as participation?”, p. 164.
127 Murphy, “Embroidery as participation?”, p. 164.
132 Chapter III.
cloths could be seen as the means through which marginalised women can make sense of their lives. There is therefore a poignant irony in the fact that this craft, through which women’s submissive position and seclusion from the “outside word” was reinforced in the nineteenth century and that was supposed to expose native women in the colonies to Western civilisation and encourage them to adapt to a Western life-style, has become a modern vehicle of artistic expression and economic empowerment that has given women the opportunity to create meaningful work that takes them out of the “cycle of poverty and invisibility”. What was envisaged as a tool of subjection has become a voice to speak out and expose the Western world to their way of life.

In addition, the existence of the Mogalakwena Research Centre and the work done there conveys an important message to the local community, caught between centuries of relative isolation and the modern world encroaching at a rapid rate. It brings home that their way of life is not inferior to the Western way of life, but in fact has proven to be sustainable and in many aspects in harmony with nature. As a result, over the years, seeing the positive reception of the story cloths, in terms of their artists’ merit and especially their research value on a national and international level, the craft artists have started to realise the importance of this project. When considering Lefebvre’s comment on the uncertainty and anguish caused by the “tyranny” and the universalising processes of modernity, this awareness is of particular importance for black South Africans and women in particular. Having their lives already disrupted due to forced removals, migration and rural impoverishment, the recognition of their voices could provide some sense of stability and continuity.

Achille Mbembe points to an alarming tendency of “re-enchanting” tradition in order to restore African identity after having been fractured by slavery, colonisation and apartheid. For black women a return to practices pre-dating these developments is not necessarily a viable option because, due to the paternalistic nature of traditional society they had been denied an identity separate from their husbands. In addition they were assigned an identity of “non-being” under the colonial and apartheid dispensations. Mbembe proposes that the focus should rather be on the different ways of imagining identity that are at work today and what

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133 Lepionka, “Visible links”, pp. 159-163.
135 Personal information, Dr. E. Coetsee, 2011-03-06.
136 Chapter II; Bennett and Watson, Understanding everyday life, p. 352.
social practices they produce. Lepionka refers to projects in India that have become
their means of conquering the confines of their landscape and their limited lifecycle – a sujuni worker’s way of transcending the dependence and drudgery of her arduous, anonymous being. Through discovering a creative skill and strength that is uniquely hers, she has rediscovered her femininity, identity and self.

These projects have helped to develop an identity based on a sense of worth and pride in the positive contribution their stories can make in their respective countries. This delight in their work and strengthened cultural awareness are evident in a number of embroidery projects in South Africa and countries such as Palestine and India. It is echoed in statements such as “Embroidery is our heritage. We love embroidery... and we are proud of it” and “[t]he patience and labour expended on them would not tire us out because we would feel happy and proud with the sense of achievement”.142

The importance of the role shared memory can play in forging new forms of belonging and making sense of the world is explained on the KarossTM Foundation’s website:

This awareness of who you are within a more global environment is an important concept in terms of sustainable development and the upliftment of people. There exists a need for women in the rural areas of South Africa, [...] to acknowledge and explore their own capacity to take part in making a difference in their communities and South Africa as a whole.143

The celebration of the Craft Art Centre, the Blouberg area, as well as the Limpopo province that is portrayed through their embroideries, is testament of the craft artists of Mogalakwena’s sense of pride and belonging. Just like the women of other embroidery projects, their position has changed from what Schmahmann describes in her article on the

139 Olick and Robbins, “Social memory studies”, p. 110.
140 Written information Dr. E. Coetsee, 2013-06-18.
142 Maskiell, “Embroidering the past”, p. 381.
Mapula Embroidery project as follows: “from inadvertent residents of [a] homeland … to South African citizens capable of enjoying full civil rights.”

Related to the earlier mentioned criticism against the initiation of these projects by white “outsiders” by Schmahmann, is the efforts of Western historians, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, to collect by means of recording, translating (into “universally accessible” languages such as English or French) and finally cataloguing and archiving transcribed oral histories. These historians emphasised the importance of their work as these oral histories were seen as being “in danger of extinction as the older, knowledgeable generations died out”. The oral sources were recognised as “filling in the details of the precolonial and colonial pasts where written sources were either absent or biased in favour of literate, often alien, conquering elites”. In a similar way one of the guiding ideas of the Wits History Workshop from the 1970s was the “the recording of oral histories in written form” in order to “protect sources that were otherwise in danger of being lost”. Hamilton points out that the implications of such actions promote the idea that the need to “recover unwritten histories” implies that what is not written is lost. Furthermore, the “notion of ‘lost’ here comes perilously close to proposing that the dynamic existence of such accounts in oral form from which they are to be recovered is no existence at all.” In addition, it is now suggested that such recording activities occurred in the “context of the exertion of colonial power”. Coupled with the recognition of the essential “fluidity” as core characteristic of oral traditions, it raises questions about the appropriateness of the recording of oral traditions even in post-colonial times. According to Hamilton, rather than preserving these histories, the “fixing of oral account may undermine their resilience and disempower precisely those people who are deemed to have the greatest need of the history that oral accounts contain.”

Increasingly, archives are challenged to move away from the “strong documentary bias” that has characterised these institutions until recently. Instead of merely recording and

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transcribing oral “black” sources in order to augment the existing written “white” sources, Hamilton calls for a situation where

we seek to facilitate their [oral traditions] reinvigoration by creating conditions where communities committed to the recognition of oral traditions contribute directly their shared understandings and accepted intra-community practices as sources.\(^{151}\)

Furthermore, the inextricable link between oral and performative aspects of living history to material objects as well as places has to be appreciated. This would entail recognising the need to preserve mnemonics and create “structured opportunities and spaces for the telling and reception of oral historical narratives.”\(^{152}\)

Hamilton advocates that historians and archivists alike should “seek to facilitate their reinvigoration by creating conditions where communities committed to the recognition of oral traditions contribute directly to their shared understandings and accepted intra-community practices as sources.”\(^{153}\) Could story cloth projects such as the MCADF project possibly serve as such a kind of “new archive” where the oral histories are not merely “captured” in a fixed format for long term preservation? As pointed out, story cloths are not traditional mnemonic devices for black women in South Africa and neither does the workshop context in which these cloths are created form part of the traditional spaces in which oral histories were performed. Having been previously excluded from both the space and the medium to transmit their memories, could these workshops, which provide spaces where black women can recover their memories, be considered as sites where a “reconstruction of circumstances of production of historical knowledge”\(^{154}\) can take place? Furthermore, could the process of creation of story cloths – a meeting point of orality and material culture – be considered a “new mode of archiving oral traditions and living heritage that is cognisant both of fixed and flexible elements: connections between oral texts and associated physical materials or sites, and contextual fluidities”?\(^{155}\) I venture to argue that they do.

\(^{152}\) Hamilton, “Living by fluidity”, p. 224.
National memory

It is apparent that the impact of story cloth creation is visible and measurable in terms of newly gained confidence and economic benefits. However, in the final assessment the question also needs to be answered whether an archive that results from a community project such as the MCADF embroidered story cloths can make a contribution on a national level by opening up possibilities for creating a postcolonial archive in the new democratic dispensation and add an alternative perspective to South African history? Both Flinn and McEwan argue that local-level community-based archives, community memory schemes and oral history projects all have the potential, if supported and preserved, to open up new spaces for the articulation of memory and the archiving of the present.\(^{156}\) They indicate that they can “challenge and subvert the authority of mainstream histories and archives”\(^{157}\) and “counteract archival violence of the past”.\(^{158}\)

McEwan also points out that community memory initiatives advocate going beyond the “mere recovery” of marginalised voices, as they view the concepts “archive” and “heritage” as always contested, “critical territories which have a significant role to play in contributing to transformed histories for multi-ethnic and multi-cultured societies”.\(^{159}\) She argues that modern post-national, post-identity societies will be more at ease when they have developed new democratised and inclusive historical narratives which seek to include all rather than exclude or ignore sections of those societies.\(^{160}\) In memorialising the past, it is important to “keep multiple versions of history alive and ‘not to privilege, as has so often been done, a few master narratives that offer sense of unity at the cost of ignoring the fracture and dissonance’”.\(^{161}\) McEwan maintains that “resisting various kinds of amnesia is essential to the creation of a shared past and a shared sense of national and communal belonging.”\(^{162}\)

In the South African context specifically, Jewsiewicki is of the opinion that “[t]here is nothing but memory to help stage – to tell, as the need arises – such operations [of reparation and rehabilitation of the representations of the past within the presence of the ‘new’ nation]

\(^{157}\) Flinn, “Community histories, community archives”, p. 165.
\(^{158}\) McEwan, “Building a Postcolonial Archive?”, p. 742.
\(^{159}\) Flinn, “Archival activism”, p. 4.
\(^{160}\) Flinn, “Archival activism”, p. 4.
and to re-establish continuity against the current of history”.\textsuperscript{163} As mentioned in Chapter II, in a time of transition, memory can be seen as the “therapeutic alternative” to historical discourse.\textsuperscript{164} In dealing with the past, the first two democratically elected presidents of South Africa, Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki, adopted approaches that aimed at reinstating “citizens – at least symbolically – in historic continuity and legitimacy”.\textsuperscript{165} Colin Bundy points out that the notion of a society of diverse but shared culture with acceptance and tolerance of “the Other” put forward by the TRC, gave impetus to the image of the rainbow nation. “Rainbowism” claimed the possibility of a “harmonious, common identity even while its imagery signalled that such identity was constituted by different colours (or races or cultures or communities)”.\textsuperscript{166}

However, in the public sphere of post-apartheid South Africa which fashions such a memory, discursive projects in nation-building have been struggling to come to terms with issues relating to social identity, ethnicity, race, citizenship, nationality, nationhood.\textsuperscript{167} Bundy refers to the “National Question” in capital letters and asks what the post-apartheid nation is and who belongs or is excluded from this nation, and on what basis.

How does “national identity gain its salience and power to transcend the particularities of ethnicity and race”? What political or economic or moral bridge can span the contradiction between a juridical assertion of common citizenship and the experiential reality of difference, separateness and inequality? How in short is nation to be imagined, let alone realised? There is an overwhelming awareness of the deep structures of South African society – power, class, place, distribution of goods – are drawn along racial axes.\textsuperscript{168}

Bundy also mentions some approaches that have been put forward in order to create a national identity with which all South Africans will identify. Amongst these are the creation of political and constitutional systems specifically engineered to accommodate ethnic or group differences; the creation of a “civic nationalism” or a constitutional pluralist democracy based on a sense of common citizenship with mutual respect for different cultural

\textsuperscript{163} Jewsiewicki, “Historical memory and representation of new nations in Africa”, p. 61.
\textsuperscript{164} Chapter II.
\textsuperscript{165} Jewsiewicki, “Historical memory and representation of new nations in Africa”, p. 62.
\textsuperscript{167} Bundy, “New nation, new history”, p. 79
\textsuperscript{168} Bundy, “New nation, new history”, p. 79.
levels or the possibility of a united effort towards social justice where the focus of the debate will be on social, rather than political measures to address gender inequalities, class inequalities.  

Brockmeier points out that the aspect that binds individuals of diverse economic, political and social backgrounds together into a homogenous community is a “collective memory” that acknowledges the variety of knowledge systems, beliefs and concepts of self. According to him such an acknowledgement allows for a “continuous flow of actions, narratives, images and other texts” that enables individuals to create a shared horizon of experience, understanding and orientation without reducing it to a sense of belonging based on race, material property or kinship.

In South Africa, the notion of a “shared horizon” has been difficult to attain. Jewsiewicki points out that Mandela and Desmond Tutu’s ambition was to make sure that there would be only “one nation, which henceforth would never experience rupture of either legitimacy or continuity, and that citizens would share not only the present and the future but also the past.” The initial national narrative after 1994 stressed “redress, acknowledgment, social flexibility and building a culture of human rights,” and great strides were being made in recovering marginalised histories. Paradoxically, the “‘memorial theatre’ of the TRC contributed to the idea that two distinct experiences and two distinct memories were inherited from apartheid”, was reinforcing the racial categorisation that still persists to divide South African society.

However, efforts to address this split lead to the “uncomfortable de-sanitising of apartheid era sorties”. Less than a decade after the first democratic elections, scholars started to notice a tendency of a “sanitised representation of contemporary South Africa” which not only allowed both government and the business community in order to “sell” the country abroad as

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170 Brockmeier, “Remembering and forgetting”, p. 17.
171 Brockmeier, “Remembering and forgetting”, pp. 18, 38.
174 Josias, Toward an understanding of archives”, p. 103; Botha, “Amazwi Abesifazane, Reclaiming the emotional and public self”, p. 132.
175 Jewsiewicki, “Historical memory and representation of new nations in Africa”, p. 64.
176 Chapter II; Bowman, Duncan and Sonn , “ Editorial: Towards a psychology of South Africa’s”, p. 366.
“fully rehabilitated”, but “threaten[ed] to erase past economic exploitation”. A national narrative emerged based on an artificially constructed pre-colonial past, under the banner of an “African Renaissance” - an Africa filled with wild animals and exotic landscapes, harking back to “the distant past where colonialism and apartheid do not yet figure, where black and indigenous Africa are the sources of virtue and value”. This representation of the African heritage has been seen as a “new form of grandiose history writing”, transforming “unacceptable racial exclusivity into acceptable class exclusivity”.

In her work *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women? Stories of the South African Transition*, Samuelson alerts us to the danger of a national history fashioned during the transition that has its “edges sewn in too neatly”, thereby rendering both the women and the everyday invisible. She proposes using images of sewing, quilting, patchwork and tapestry to make us aware of the world of the “ordinary” often omitted in the TRC, as these allow us to “trace forms of ‘living on’” ... “denied in the closure sought by the nationalist teleological script.” These needlework practices act as “metaphors of becoming, rather than of being; they favour process and creative reworking over completion and complacency”, “deferring the desire for a seamless closure in the name of reconciliation”, reminding us of the “provisionality and fragility of social construction: stitches and patches can mend and thereby make fabric re-usable and life liveable, without promising the attainment of originary wholeness that the national Mother is called upon to represent”.

The question arises how the divide between these two memories can be bridged and how a public memory can be constructed that will encompass beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present and by implication its future? The necessity of an understanding that emerges from active and creative engagement with unfamiliar cultures is also emphasised in *Reconciliation Through Truth: A Reckoning of Apartheid Criminal Governance* where Asmal et al highlight the need to build a new, shared and ceaselessly debated memory of that past. They argue that:

Without sustained remembrance and debate, it will be difficult to develop a new South African culture with its various strands intertwined in constructive friction, rather than in mere conflict and mutual strangulation. Talk of shared memory must not be misunderstood, mystified. It is not the creation of a post apartheid “volk” (people) or a stifling homogenous nationhood, or of a new fatherland.... Rather, shared memory, in the intended sense, is a process of historical accountability.185

More than a decade later this matter is still debated. Gary Baines agrees that “collective memory” might be the key to reinforcing a sense of national identity, thereby re-defining what “being South African” means. This is an aspect that he considers as playing a crucial role in multicultural societies. He points out that the failure to construct a new national “master” narrative can partly be attributed to the emergence of identity politics.186 In this regard Jewsiewicki reiterates the fact that

[p]utting collective experience and memory at the centre of the definition of belonging to the nation would restore the unity of blacks, which had been fractured by the heavily politicized renaissance of cultural and ethnic identities.187

In the South African context it is recognised that without “sustained remembrance” and “ceaselessly debated memory” it will be difficult to construct a shared memory in post-apartheid South Africa and continue the process of historical accountability and viable democracy. Furthermore, the need to “counteract the archival violence of the past” and to “democratise the archive-building process” is only possible if African women are recognised as “producers of knowledge”.188

As Narayan points out, integrating women’s contribution into the national memory is not merely adding details or widening the canvas. Women’s location in the world – excluded from “prestigious areas of human activity” such as politics and science – has made it possible for them to “perceive and understand different aspects of both the world and human activities

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188 McEwan, “Building a postcolonial archive?”, pp. 742, 747, 752.
in ways that challenge male bias of existing perspectives”. She sees the role of a more feminist epistemology as balancing the “assertion of value of a different culture or experience against the dangers of romanticising it to the extent that the limitations and oppressions it confers on subjects are ignored” and suggests that different cultural contexts and political agendas may cast a very different light on so-called “idols” and “enemies” of knowledge.

In countries with a tradition of textile production and embroidery, the more recent interpretations have shown how aspects of their national economy cannot be clearly understood without acknowledging the role women played. In her published PhD thesis *The Malay handloom weavers: A study of the rise and decline of traditional manufacture*, Maznah Mohamad aims to bring to light the defining role women played in the Malaysian economic and industrial development, as well as British textile history in the nineteenth century that historians and economists have overlooked. The studies of Maskiell and Clare Wilkinson-Weber also help to demystify and conceptualise the role of women in India and Pakistan’s economy. Maskiell points out that the

*phulkari* embroidery thread can metaphorically stitch together the theoretical and methodological divide between cultural studies and economic and material analyses. Studying the various aspects of *phulkari* practice can enable historians to gain a more integrated view of the commercialization of the Punjabi colonial economy and how capitalist production relations that were anchored in the gendering of work have remained so powerful after 1947. Through *phulkari* production, exchange, and consumption practices within nineteenth- and early- twentieth-century Punjabi rural society, we can trace how gendered colonial English-language narratives of tradition and heritage were redeployed in a “nativist romanticization” of Punjabi cultural history after 1947. To write a “post-orientalist” history for Pakistan and India requires questioning the masculinist’s focus of Punjabi economic history as well as historicizing the household work and material culture of the many groups of Punjabi women who created such beautiful embroidered textiles.

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189 Narayan, “The project of feminist epistemology”, p. 213.
193 Maskiell, “Embroidering the past”.
194 Wilkinson-Weber, “Women, work and the imagination of craft in South Asia”.
Several scholars have also highlighted the consequences of the “endemic gender-blindness”\textsuperscript{196} that had characterised South African historiography until recently. In this country too there has been a growing recognition that “there is precious little men’s history that can be divorced either from women’s contributions or, perhaps more importantly, from men’s pervasive consciousness of and attempts to enforce women’s subordination”.\textsuperscript{197} Claire Robertson points out that “[w]ithout the inclusion of women, without the consideration of people as gendered beings, our historical vision is so impaired as to be unacceptably inaccurate”.\textsuperscript{198} In her study on the portrayal of women, or the lack thereof, in British Cape colonial history in the nineteenth century, Helen Bradford comes to the conclusion that

if women are omitted, or trivialized, or not examined with the same rigour automatically accorded men, then the price is frequently interpretations with limited purchase on the past. Numerous analyses of key events or processes - class formation, the emergence of ‘democracy’, black resistance, mass starvation - are flawed by the inapplicability of interpretations to the female majority, or by the impossibility of accounting for these phenomena without according serious attention to women.\textsuperscript{199}

The necessity to include the voices of specifically black women in the South African national narrative extends beyond being merely an attempt to establish a more comprehensive history of South Africa. Scholars\textsuperscript{200} agree that in order for South Africa to develop into a stable and equitable democracy, the voices of black women need to help shape the nation and citizenship and the “central role that women play in consolidating the building of nation, homes and communities”\textsuperscript{201} have to be acknowledged. Geiger’s observation, as discussed in Chapter II, that women’s life histories need to be acknowledged to understand the impact of colonialism and urbanisation is therefore of particular importance in the South African context.\textsuperscript{202}

\textsuperscript{196} Manicom, “Ruling relations”, p. 463.
\textsuperscript{198} C.C. Robertson, “Never underestimate the power of women: the transforming vision of African women's history”, 	extit{Women's Studies International Forum}, xi, 1988, pp. 440, 450.
\textsuperscript{200} McEwan, “Building a postcolonial archive?”, p. 752; Josias, “Toward an understanding of”, p. 107; Lee, “On the emergence of memory in historical discourse”, pp. 130, 144; Butler, “‘Othering’ the archives – from exile to inclusion and heritage dignity”, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{201} McEwan, “Building a postcolonial archive?”, p. 752.
According to Cahill the vitality of the everyday life histories of women comes from the fact that they are concerned with “primary lived experience – events like birth, childhood, poverty, desire, work and love, sickness and death – and that of narrative made about such experience.”  She points out that this “connectedness of self and story, of contemplation and action” refutes the notion of women’s experience as “essentially private, divorced from the making of history and happiness”.  Cahill quotes William Dean Howells, who called the ability to tell your own life story, “the most democratic province in the republic of letters”. She concludes that these autobiographical accounts of women who have faced “one crushing sort of another: sexual, racial, economic, classists” enable us in part, to taste and to learn from its discoveries of freedom and meaning against the background of this long century of daunting polarities. We find much to learn in its kind humour and in the urgency of its written memories. We are moved to consider what they discovered: that we do not exist separately from one another; that every life story, including our own, counts; that this news is good and generative. They widen our consciousness of common grounds and wonderful differences.

Elaine Unterhalter underlines the necessity of autobiographical writings in post-apartheid South Africa. According to her such writings have created a new language through which forms of recognitional justice, particularly concerning race, can be acknowledged. They suggest a form of ethics through remembering. … In recognising a common humanity, a new society, a new orientation beyond the fragments, conditions may begin to be established that allow gender, race and class inequalities to be addressed. … [A] theory of justice that does not attend to the ways we narrate our different and common truths through memory and history would be a thin theory. Truth without justice cannot sustain new ways of living in a more equal society. But bringing social justice into being through policy and practice requires meticulous and skilful attention to what we know and do not yet know and the forms our knowledge takes. Attending to the truths others tell in word that may be framed by memory, and in formats that are sometimes unsettling because they are not the ‘master narratives’ is part of that task.

203 Cahill, Writing women’s lives, p. xvi.
204 Cahill, Writing women’s lives, p. xvi.
205 Cahill, Writing women’s lives, p. xvi.
206 Cahill, Writing women’s lives, p. xviii.
From this discussion it is clear that in order to construct a national memory in the context of a democratic South Africa there is a need for opportunities that allow for the recalling, retelling and “re-membering” of the past. This needs to be done in order to re-establish, shape and reshape identities and to create social relationships and spaces that allow for negotiation between the different races and enable black women to take part in these processes. In Chapter II the role that the memory and narrative aspects of orality play in healing and restoring a sense of self, as well as the need to study material culture in order to move away from the fractured social relations, in order to create a better understanding of the “other” have been discussed. Furthermore, the notion was looked at that combined application in the form of story cloths which can be seen as lasting “invented” records which could provide women with a memory space.

Sachs highlights that art and craft in the South African context should be thought of as “a unique way of liberating the human imagination and foregrounding cultural diversity in the new South Africa”. Unlike the apartheid ideal of cultural diversity as “separate and unequal heritages”, this is a spontaneous collision of traditions that allows for the “democratic and participatory power of cultural diversity and the celebratory cross-pollination between traditions” to come to the fore.

If the “new” role of archives is considered, namely no longer primarily concerned with the content of their holdings, but with the contribution that they can make to the community, then story cloth projects could have a central role to play in community rehabilitation programmes. These could then provide black South African women from rural and urban areas with a vehicle to articulate their experiences. These projects could be seen as the physical manifestation of a move beyond the archival institution as sole “repository”. In terms of democratising the historical record and acknowledging the agency of ordinary women, story cloths provide a means that enables these women to communicate despite cultural differences and language barriers. In the foreword to To remember and to heal: Theological and psychological perspectives on truth and reconciliation, Tutu underlines the

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208 Chapter II.
211 Chapter I.
importance of “storytelling” in South Africa. He refers to a quote from Ellen Kuzwayo, namely that “Africa is a place of storytelling. We need more stories, never mind how painful the exercise may be. ... Stories help us to understand, to forgive and to see things through someone else’s eyes”.213

For black women specifically “the simple act of publicly telling a story in their own language has provided, and continues to provide, a sense of symbolic liberation.”214 Story cloths, as community memory craft art projects, could be seen as a step towards addressing the absence of women in history and their role in contributing to the collective memory acknowledged.215 This however does not imply that the women’s stories, as portrayed in these story cloths, can be harmoniously woven into the national memory. “Stitch by stitch it pokes holes in the master narrative of nation building, it challenges the national myth, it questions the hegemony. But these holes are tiny, and they come from way down below against an aloof and uncompromising centre of power.”216

With the emphasis on catharsis, economic empowerment and social transformation, story cloth projects point out that though black South African women may have gained political freedom two decades ago, they are still relative outsiders when considering the way in which their citizenship has been realised since then. Story cloths highlight the “persistent economic and political discrimination against women and the intransigence with which unequal gender roles are inscribed into everyday life”.217 In addition, story cloths contribute towards creating space for women that could give them agency. This requires a reconsideration of citizenship as a concept not only concerned with legal and formal rights, but which also confers a “sense of belonging and which embeds the notion of recognising individuals’ social standing and their historical agency”.218

This then could be considered the value of community archives and memory projects: they add to the notion that the creation of a postcolonial, post-apartheid inclusive memory archive

is significant firstly in memorialising the past, and not only the privileged master narratives, but by keeping multiple versions of a country’s history alive. This includes memories of fracture and dissonance and by resisting “various kinds of amnesia”. Such memory projects are considered as being of “considerable urgency” by a number of scholars as they are seen as playing an “important activist role” by starting to fill the “great blank space of still repressed memory in South Africa.” Their mere existence and the stories they tell could possibly assist researchers in the construction of “an inclusive local and national heritage in which all communities, all relations and interactions are included”. In the archival context, Ketelaar refers to a “community of records” as:

the aggregate of records in all forms generated by multiple layers of actions and interactions between and among people and the institutions within the community.

If these could be stitched together, they could possibly connect “people to places, communities and traditions, and thus contribute to a wider social justice agenda” which in turn could result in a multi-faceted memory of society within a counter-archive.

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222 Ketelaar, “Archives as spaces of memory”, p. 17.
Title of Research Project: Story clothes as a counter-archive: The MCADE embroidery project

Please attach a short research proposal including main objectives, research design, research requirements and project duration to this application form.

Please attach your current CV to this application form and complete the following details:

Name: Ria van der Merwe
Telephone: 012-420 2123
Fax:
Cell: 083-8576 654
Email: ria.vandermerwe@up.ac.za
Address: 67 Ysterhaut Ave, Val de Grace, 0184
Country of Origin: RSA

Name of Research Institution: University of Pretoria
Address: UP, Lynnwood Road, Hillcrest 0002

Name of Research Supervisor: Prof. Lize Kriel
Title/Department: Dept. of Historical and Heritage Studies
Name of sponsor/funding body:
Member of the Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation

Letter of introduction

I, Ria van der Merwe (student no. s2489562), am currently enrolled for a Doctoral degree in History at the University of Pretoria. I am conducting research on the embroidered story cloths that are produced at the Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation. I would like to know more about the way in which the cloths are made, the stories that they convey and the impact that this project has had on your life. Prof Karen Harris (012 420 2665; karen.harris@up.ac.za) will act as my supervisor.

I hereby request permission to interview you as participant in the embroidery project of the Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation. I will not expect you to divulge any information that might compromise yourselves or your community in any way and you may withdraw from discussions or interviews at any time without any consequences. Furthermore, your input will be acknowledged according to the footnoting reference system prescribed by the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies.

Yours sincerely,

____________________________    _____________________
D. M. Van der Merwe         Date
__________________________________________________________________________________
I, the undersigned, have read the above and I understand the nature and objectives of the research project of Ria van der Merwe as well as my potential role in it and my right to withdraw from it at any stage. I voluntarily consent to participate in all discussions and interviews.

__________________________________________________________________________________
Full name of participant          Signature of participant           Date

Human Sciences 18-13
University of Pretoria
PRETORIA 0002
Republic of South Africa

012 420 2323 (tel)         history@up.ac.za
012 420 2656 (fax)         www.up.ac.za
Leloko la Kagišo ya Mogalakwena y Tšweletšopele ya Bokgabo bja Tiroatla

**Lengwalo la tlhagišo**

Gona bjale nna, Ria van der Merwe (moithuti wa no s2489452), ke mongwadišwa wa tikrii / ü ya Bongaka bja Histori mo Yunibesithing ya Pretoria. Ke ikemišedišše go naykišiša mašela a dikanegelo tša morokokgabišo a a rokwago mo Kagišong ya Mogalakwena ya Tšweletšopele ya Bokgabo bja Tiroatla. Nyakišišo ya ka e tlo nepiša mokgwa wo mašela ao a rokwago ka wona, le dikanegelo tšo tša morokokgabišo, le ka mo projeke ye e tutuetšago le go nola batho ba tikologo yeo ka gona. Mohlahli wa ka ke Moprofesa Karen Harris (012 420 2665; karen.harris@up.ac.za).

Ka lengwalo le ke kgopela tumelelo ya go boledišana le lena ka lebaka la gore ke lena modirišani wa projeke ya Kagišo ya Mogalakwena ya Tšweletšopele ya Bokgabo bja Tiroatla. Ga ke nyake tshedimošo ye le ka rego e tlogo šulafatša lena le batho ba tikologo yeol Eupša ge go le bjalo le ka gan go tšwela pele ka poledišano ye ka ntle le ditlamorago. Ke gatelela taba ye ya gore thušo ya lena le tshedimošo ye le tlogo re fa yona e tlo amogelwa ka tshwanelo ka tsela ye e beetšwego ya go ngwadiša pego ke kgoro y Dithuto tša Histori le Bohwa.

**Ke tlhompho**

__________________________________________________________________________________

D. M. van der Merwe                          Tšatšikgwedi

__________________________________________________________________________

Nna, ke saennego mo fase, ke badile tše di ngwadilwego mo godimo le go kwešiša gabotse se projeke ya nyakišišo ya Ria van der Merwe e lego sona, le ditebanyo tša yona, le ka mo nna nka mo thušago ka gona, le go gana nako ye ngwe le ye ngwe ka go tšwela pele ka thušo yeo ge nka re go sa ne le mohola go yona. Ke dumela go šomišana le yena ka ntle le kgapeletšo ge go swerwe dipoledišano le ditherišano tšeo.

__________________________________________________________________________

Maina a a tletšego a modirišani Tshaeno y a modrišami Tšatšikgwedi

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V PERSONAL INFORMATION

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