

Heritage-making and the dilemma of multivocality in South Africa: a case of Wildebeest Kuil

Abstract

Heritage-making is discussed in this paper as it is made manifest in the South African museum space, specifically that of the Wildebeest Kuil Rock Art Tourism Centre in South Africa's Northern Cape. This is an archaeologically rich site with the histories of diverse peoples having left impressions on the landscape. It is a relevant microcosm of South Africa's past fraught with contending histories. The interpretive space at the tourism centre is an example of the hits and misses within the South African heritage landscape in terms of the practice of multivocality; that is, the co-existence of diverse perspectives and narratives. Discussing transformation and democratisation in the South African museum space, the paper highlights two main interpretive efforts at Wildebeest Kuil, the introductory film and the 31 Battalion military exhibition that show both the progress in decolonising the museum space as well as setbacks to that process.

Keywords: heritage, multivocality, museum, Wildebeest Kuil, diversity

Introduction

With rock art imagery and the ancient /Xam language in South Africa's coat of arms that gave rock art and San groups premium visibility in the re-imaging of the country after democratisation, opportunities were made available in South Africa for rock art tourism and the interpretive centre at Wildebeest Kuil became one of three rock art centres established in the country. The site will be described in detail later in the paper. Because the rock art on-site is recognised as having been created by San peoples, the nature of San representations will also be discussed. The paper begins, however, with a discussion of heritage-making in South Africa and the historical narratives that frame it.

Heritage, under the rubric of culture, points to that which is significant for memorialisation, ritual and identity. The term is used to identify both the product and the process of meaning-making through which individuals make sense of their lives and their place in society (Timothy and Boyd 2003; Hall 2005; Kim, Timothy and Han 2007; Timothy 2007; Timothy and Nyaupane 2009b). These grand narratives are often set by dominant social groups. Socio-political impacts of colonialism since 1652 and institutionalised apartheid between 1948 and the 1994 first democratic elections in South Africa have played a major role in heritage construction and engagement in the democratising state. Dutch and British colonialism and apartheid (separate development based on racial classifications as prescribed by the Afrikaner-led government) were colossal forces that shaped the geographic landscape and mindscape of South Africans, creating racialized divisions.

The interpretation and presentation of heritage in the country is wrought with socio-political and cultural tensions. In the 1960s, for example, British colonial and Cape Dutch architecture were high on the list of heritage priority along with sites associated with 'the Afrikaner struggle for Self-determination' (Marschall 2010, 21). South Africa's grossly inadequate heritage landscape shunned material culture produced by the country's black majority and, in its disavowal, suggested that this majority not only lacked a 'record of achievement' but also had no history to document (Marschall 2010, 21). Racial hierarchies and the justification of racialised domination were fuelled by such implications.

South Africa's move to democracy in the mid-1990s led to a significant power shift and shaped major alterations in the cultural matrix (See Rassool 2000). Monuments and memorials were erected to individuals and groups who were no longer deemed terrorists but anti-apartheid, liberation heroes. The country's heritage narrative was being transformed. A large part of the process of transformation had to do with the inclusion of long-excluded individuals and groups from the national heritage narrative and thus began radical change in what was considered significant for memorialisation.

Lindsay Weiss (2007) identifies competing structural logics within present-day conceptions of heritage such that certain modes of recognition and celebration of historical persons or events inevitably disable other modes and forms of heritage expression. She calls for scholars to critically investigate these modes and their implications in terms of heritage-making. Weiss identifies two conceptions of South African history; that is history to be known (just history) and history to be celebrated (heritage). Others describe 'tactics of forgetting' as typical of South African heritage politics (Meskell and Weiss 2006, 88), and ascribe an 'erasure of the colonial past and its repressive regimes' as characteristic of South Africa in the period of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)¹ (Nutall and Coetzee cited in Meskell and Weiss 2006, 88).

This historic erasure and move to oneness exists in an uneasy relationship with the kind of ethnic essentialism that arose from 'the valorization of previously oppressed identity claims' (Weiss 2007, 414; Meskell 2005). Following Weiss (2007), heritage, as a critical component of the politics of recognition (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998, 2006; Meskell 2002; Brown 2005; Silverman 2005), attempts to resolve the troubled relationship. During South Africa's transition to democracy, the concepts of community and diversity were used in official rhetoric as part of a strategy of national unification that sought to subvert the apartheid use of ethnicity towards subjugation. At the same time, the question of citizenship and belonging was hotly debated in the press (see Barnard 2003; Coombes 2004; Herwitz 2012). Coupled to attempts at restitution and reconciliation was an interdisciplinary valorisation of multivocality in opposition to a single heritage narrative. Multivocality is simply to be many-voiced. Born out of postmodern relativism and the post-structural deferral to a multiplicity of meaning in the text and change of meaning over time, multivocality promotes the co-existence of diverse perspectives and provisions a place to provoke thinking, learning and emotional connection to

heritage (see Fawcett, Habu and Matsunaga 2008; Silberman 2008; Tilden 1977). Together with the increased promulgation of these philosophical ideas, social movements around the world gave attention to the underrepresented, with a focus on indigenous peoples and women. At the same time institutionalised colonial structures were declining. Prior colonial powers were thus compelled to make room for the voices of the erstwhile colonised (Fawcett, Habu and Matsunaga, 2008). These influences contributed to the development of “feminism, Marxism, postcolonialism, and multiculturalism during the late 1960s and 1970s” (2008, 3). In addition were transformations in legislation and the adoption of ethical codes of practice in disciplines such as archaeology and anthropology translating into shifting notions of representations of the past and ownership of its narrative (ibid).

Manifesting out of dramatic shifts in the national discourse, the transforming national heritage narrative played a leading role in the set-up of the interpretive centre at Wildebeest Kuil. San cultural iconography was re-contextualised in the national narrative from primitive and animalistic to a unifying point of origin for all South Africans. It became important to preserve and protect rock art in a symbolic appeasement of its ancient makers who were likely hunted and killed in acts of genocide. San peoples became a powerful symbol in post-apartheid South Africa to bring about ‘unity in diversity’—as stated in the Constitution (RSA 1996) and translated from the national coat of arms. The advocacy of ‘San culture’ as a common cultural heritage was in order to avoid ‘the destructive competing nationalisms which threaten to sink the emergence of a non-racial future for this country’ (Tomaselli 1995, vii; Masilela 1987).

On representations and the museum space

In colonial South Africa, San peoples were depicted as depraved, a scourge, and hierarchically lower than human beings (Finlay and Barnabas 2012b; Chidester 1996; Watson 1991; Van Zyl 1980). Exhibitions as part of travelling ‘freak’ shows, anatomical dissections, genocide, and the trafficking of San skeletons and human remains in the nineteenth century illustrate the abject discriminatory and often violent ways in which San peoples were treated. Specious beliefs in the nineteenth century European scientific community became the bedrock on which many museums were founded. At the same time as modern theories of racial segregation were beginning to be examined on a political level, physical anthropology became a dominating force in South Africa perpetuating a belief in the direct correlation

between physical type and evolutionary status (Coombes 2004; Dubow 1995). There is evidence to suggest that the Dutch term, *Bosmanneken* from which *Bushman* is derived, was a literal translation of the Malay word *OrangOutan* meaning ‘man of the forest’ (ibid). Commonly employed as a benign alternative, ‘San’ is believed to be derived from the Khoi *Sonqua* and translated as ‘forager’ (see Barnard 1992). ‘San’ may be interpreted as ‘bandit’ (Gordon, 1992). Both ‘San’ and ‘Bushman’ are terms open to criticism; as homogenising designations of groups with divergent mythologies and cultural practices, and as externally-ascribed colonial constructs ‘created to control subjugated peoples in manageable, depoliticised, arbitrarily bounded enclaves of homogeneity’ (Wilmsen 1996, 188).

An image of people described as San or Bushmen had been used historically in instances of political sensitivity to build an image of South Africa as developing beyond merely another British outpost (Coombes, 2004). An example of this was the incorporation of San people in exhibitions intended to portray South Africa “as an emerging country with its own particular cultural and economic contribution to make within the British Empire” (2004:210). In the Union Pageant of 1910 a group of San appeared as part of a battle re-enactment. In 1936 at the Empire Exhibition in Johannesburg another group featured in a diorama called the ‘Bushmen Camp’ at the same time as there was a public campaign to set up a San reserve in the Kalahari Gemsbok Park (Dubow, 1995).

In April 1996, South African artist and scholar Pippa Skotnes curated an exhibition titled *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of Khoi and San History and Material Culture* at the South African National Gallery. The title invokes an association with body casts of San people at the South African Museum, but is not limited to those figures, rather taking up a debate about the long held misrepresentation of San peoples. *Miscast* ran at a time of increased dialogue for reparations concerning South Africa’s persecutory past and increased sensitivity of such persecution. The TRC was convened and the South African government was in the process of negotiations with the French for the remains of Sara Bartmann² for burial in her native country (Dubin, 2009). In the introduction to the exhibition’s accompanying anthology Skotnes states that *Miscast* was “not, strictly speaking, about ‘Bushmen’ [but was rather a] critical and visual exploration of the term ‘Bushman’ and the various relationships that gave rise to it” (1996:18). A further aim was to make viewers of the installation aware of themselves as complicit in all that was perpetrated against the San. Intended as a “critical engagement with the ways in which the Khoisan were pathologized, dispossessed, and all but

eradicated through colonialism and apartheid” the exhibition was extremely controversial and received mainly critical reviews both locally and internationally (Coombes, 2004:230).

Miscast may have been a provocative platform for critical debate surrounding the use of museum space and the ways in which artefacts are exhibited to represent historic events. However, for those not already familiar with such debates, which included the majority of patrons having visited the exhibition, *Miscast* did little more than perpetuate the (often) white, dominant voice speaking on behalf of the indigene while having not sought their permission or included them in the process.

In 1994, Nomvuso Tembe, then public relations officer at the National Cultural History Museum in Pretoria noted that ‘[r]esearch has shown that many African people don’t visit museums because they don’t feel part of them. They don’t think that museums preserve their past’ (Cited in Coombes 2004, 166). A further challenge is a concern that in many instances of museum preservation the indigenous perspective is a bleak and scathing one, at times felt as ‘tantamount to keeping a brain-dead body artificially alive on a life-support system; tantamount to freezing the corpse; tantamount to placing one’s dead grandmother’s body on a permanent exhibition’ (Mané-Wheeki cited in Timothy and Nyaupane 2009a, 26). In response South African museums were encouraged by government to foster a holistic, ecologically-minded museum practice (see Küsel, De Jong, Van Coller et al. 1994).

In the 1990s South African museums became increasingly active in the larger imperatives of reconciliation and nation-building (perhaps also attempting to atone for their past sins). Architecturally, Wildebeest Kuil exhibits a new-museological move toward the modest, contrary to the monumental and palatial reinforcement of the establishment’s authority as evident in older, larger (and more influential) museums. Of course it would be erroneous to accept the philosophical shift of new museology as definitive of a total shift in praxis and transformation in perceptions of museum staff and visitors and their conceptions of the space. Certainly the museum is an ideologically subjective space created out of political processes (Wright and Mazel 1991). It is a secular temple where the ‘official’ version of the past is ‘visually symbolised in a standardised and simplified way in the form of displays intended for popular consumption’ (1991, 60).

In their respective presidencies, Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki embarked on a reconstitution of ethnicity, to be celebrated as a strength of the Rainbow Nation³ and not used to subjugate, as it was by the apartheid government (Barnard 2003; Herwitz 2012). Nevertheless, South Africans took to debating who among them was rightfully African (see Combes 2004). Recognising that, within nations, competing nationalisms and divisions persist, what Stuart Hall (2005) and others suggest is a discursive practice, a heritage conversation (Herwitz 2012), or what is otherwise described as an attempt in heritage presentation toward multivocality (see Witz and Rassool 2008; Weiss 2007, 2012; Lange, Müller Jansen, Fisher et al. 2013; Morris 2012, 2013).

Multiple narratives are necessarily provocative and may work to destabilise the normative social order—hinged as this order is on an overriding prescriptive narrative. This may be otherwise described as a ‘deeper multivocality’ (Atalay 2008; Hodder 2008) or a ‘reflexive method’ (Hodder 2000). More than offering a platform for diverse voices, multivocality in practice ‘is meant to challenge dominant interpretive narratives and to create spaces and structures at heritage sites that will promote the co-existence of potentially conflicting approaches and perceptions of the site’s significance’ (Silberman 2008, 141). Ian Hodder describes multivocality as involving ethics and rights, changing practices and contexts to open up the space to disadvantaged groups, and a move away from western frames of reference and methodologies (Hodder 2008). While Hodder’s practice of this within public archaeology at Çatalhöyük has been debated (Hassan 1997; Chadwick 1997, Davies, G. and Hoggett 2001), multivocality practised in this way in the museum space could destabilise ‘unity in diversity’.

Nyasha Mboti (2013) argues that the concept of diversity is a counterpoint to the national harmony it seeks to mirror. He attributes the diversity rhetoric to an apartheid codification of the separate races, claiming that ‘[d]iversity is a weasel word linked to apartheid... [which] allows all manner of top-down hegemonies of citizenship to be used to include and exclude’ (2013, 454). It follows then that diversity is a falsity used to mask structures already in place in which we are to place ourselves if we wish to be recognised as citizens. Seen in this way diversity is not a choice but an administrative requirement through which ‘[t]he costs, burdens, losses, ethics and responsibilities of citizenship are glossed over’ (2013, 455). Ien Ang calls diversity a ‘crucial’ yet simultaneously ‘irresolvable’ *predicament* for the museum’

[italics are his own] (2005, 319). Neil Asher Silberman (2008) argues that true multivocality should never offer coherent, easy to follow narratives for mass audiences. Of course visitor numbers remain a significant concern of museums, especially small satellites like Wildebeest Kuil, and the impetus would not be to alienate potential visitors by constructing exhibitions that do not provide some kind of coherent narrative. According to Weiss, the average visitor resists thinking about Wildebeest Kuil outside of a rock art narrative, that is, according to 'complicated and hybrid terms' (2007, 420). David Morris (2012), head archaeologist at the McGregor Museum and the director/curator of the interpretive centre at Wildebeest Kuil, observes that results from the Wildebeest Kuil visitors' questionnaire seem to confirm this view.

Inevitably, diverse heritages proliferate in plural societies and these may be discordant. In 'Biesje Poort as a Rock Art Resource: Conservation and Tourism', Barnabas (2013) mentions the divisive nature of heritage narratives at Biesje Poort, a rock engraving site located near Kakamas in the Northern Cape. These rock engravings occur on a privately owned, remote farm and access to the public is restricted. The competing heritage narratives include those of San peoples, Khoe and colonial and Afrikaans settlers, with possible violent clashes between these groups. Sven Ouzman describes this as an 'against-the-grain intervention in the stultifying 'heritage-as-nation-building' discourse' (2014, 754). Following Ouzman, in its courting of hyper-relativism, multiculturalism hazards 'replacing divisive cultural stereotyping pre-1994 with a collegial connectedness thereafter' (ibid). Further, while multivocality is inclusive it simultaneously has the potential to exclude. This predicament is addressed at Wildebeest Kuil in a number of ways - some of which were successful and others not.

The case at Wildebeest Kuil

Situated in the Northern Cape's semi-arid region bounded by the Vaal and Orange Rivers, Wildebeest Kuil was developed and opened for public access as the Wildebeest Kuil Rock Art Tourism Centre in 2001 and is a declared Provincial Heritage Site. The servitude is a little over 23 hectares in size and is located along the R31 auxiliary road between Kimberley and Barkly West. Dominated by farm lands, the area is close to the Platfontein and Galeshewe peri-urban settlements west of Kimberley. The site boasts over 230 rock engravings and more

than 400 human markings said to be the work of the /Xam speaking San of this region (Morris 2012). The tourism centre includes a craft shop (a retail outlet for contemporary !Xun and Khwe San arts and crafts), two modest exhibition rooms, one of Stone Age tools and other archaeological finds on the site and another interpreting the story of !Xun and Khwe soldiers in the South African armed forces, and a small auditorium in which visitors view an introductory film on the history of the site and its hosts. Originating in Angola and Namibia respectively and having made their home in South Africa for over two decades, the !Xun and Khwe San were recruited by the South African Defence Force (SADF) in South Africa's incursion into Angola in the mid-1970s. They were housed in a tented military camp for over a decade and later (through military savings and government funding) became the owners of the Platfontein, Droogfontein and Wildebeest Kuil farms (see Uys 1993; Robbins c. 2004, 2007). They live on Platfontein, while parts of Wildebeest Kuil is used by renting farmers. The servitude is managed by the McGregor Museum (a larger provincial museum of which Wildebeest Kuil is a satellite) with stakeholders from the South African San Institute (SASI), the Francis Baard Municipality, the Northern Cape Economic Development Agency, and the Northern Cape provincial Tourism department.

The display room and outdoor stations

An early photographic display was removed when it was seen to encourage a homogenising perspective in which the histories, traditions and beliefs of divergent groups were conflated into a single caricature of Sanness. It was replaced by vitrines filled with Stone Age tools and nineteenth-century archaeological finds from the immediate surrounds. The walls of this room are covered in a photographic timeline, beginning with pictures and information blurbs on Stone Age San, and leading to a modern history of the !Xun and Khwe with further site-specific introductory comments. While there lacks a historical connection between the items exhibited in the cases and the rock art history of the site, Lindsay Weiss describes this lack of authorial connectivity, or a grand narrative, as allowing for considerations 'in a meta-historical sense, rather than something that occurred as a series of events in one place' (2012, 223).

Interacting, converging, or related only by their having taken place at the site, parallel histories at Wildebeest Kuil are not easily ordered for museological consumption.

Nevertheless, an attempt is made on the site tour to introduce visitors to these histories via their inclusion at the information stations on-site. These histories include those of twentieth-century farm-workers descended from San and Khoekhoe people, and colonial-era settler farmers. Tour guides on-site have also been known to include personalised stories for reflective and deeper discussion among visitors, part of which includes challenging prevailing stereotypes about San peoples (Morris 2014; Barnabas 2015). Setswana-speaking⁴ guides have been able to better serve Setswana-speaking learners from school groups that arrive annually at Wildebeest Kuil (Barnabas 2015).

In taking visitors along a pre-determined trail the official site narrative provides the conceptual pre-determined pathway. The addition of personalised anecdotes are a way to take visitors ‘off the beaten track’ into tangential mind-paths. While making connections between mind-paths and histories encourages the creation of a holistic perspective of the site, care is taken at Wildebeest Kuil that such ‘connections’ do not conflate these histories into one. The introductory film is one example.

Filmic presentation at Wildebeest Kuil

Visitors to Wildebeest Kuil are encouraged to watch a short film (in the modest auditorium) which serves as an introduction to the rock engraving site and documents a history of the !Xun and Khwe living in Platfontein. The film includes perspectives, both indigenous and academic, on the rock art, its makers, and aspects of San cosmology. It conveys a sense of wonder, mystery, and the importance of the art without compromising scholarship (see Taçon 2012). Paul Taçon states that film has an advantage in communicating ‘[t]he dynamic nature of rock art imagery, production, study and interpretation’ since this is best done in ‘non-static ways’ (2012, 213). It is in this introductory film that the !Xun and Khwe are described as the hosts at Wildebeest Kuil (*Wildebeest Kuil* 2001). Morris describes the film as having evolved through a number of discussions and consultations with archaeologists and historians; articulating a concern that the project not conflate San histories into one as past popularised filmic attempts have done (Barnabas 2015).

The film works to challenge long-held perceptions in a number of ways. It begins with the image of silhouetted figures carefully moving across a rocky terrain (presumably that of Wildebeest Kuil) against a clear night sky. Accompanied by ambient music, the

representation is one of romance and mystery. The scene changes with an introductory voice-over that states, '[b]efore man walked on Wildebeest Kuil there was fire' (*Wildebeest Kuil* 2001). The romantic imagery is interrupted by that of molten lava spewing out of the earth. A musical change (now with a Baroque sound) augments the dramatic imagery. This is followed by an aerial panning of modern-day Wildebeest Kuil and the Schmidtsdrift tented military camp. The narrator announces that '[t]his is the story of Wildebeest Kuil and the San people who own it' (*Wildebeest Kuil* 2001). Cross-cutting is a filmic technique used here to show the relationship between different sets of actions, events, and people as they converge at Wildebeest Kuil (see Weiss, 2012). Weiss describes the auditorium as eliciting 'reflexivity regarding the narrative form in the presentation of history' (2012, 224). The use of montage to juxtapose different historical trajectories as they intersect on-site affords visitors an opportunity to 'extrapolate from the present complexities of modernity to those same complexities as they continue to inhabit the rock art site throughout time' (ibid). While the narrative form may not altogether resolve the seemingly incongruous histories and epistemological concerns converging at Wildebeest Kuil, it stirs a reception to 'elicitations of the oftentimes perplexing heterogeneity of all the site's genealogies' (2012, 225).

Interviewees look off camera in conversation with the unseen interviewer. Their names appear on-screen and a voice-over provides an English translation for San interviewees. Extreme close-ups (full face) are used for !Xun and Khwe community members while the community leadership, archaeologists, historians, linguists, geologists, and others are framed in medium-shots (head and chest). Close-up shots, where the subject framed by the camera fills the screen, strongly suggest intimacy, 'of having access to the mind or thought processes (including the subconscious) of the character' (Hayward 2013, 332). These shots stress the importance of the subject, placing them central to the film's narrative (ibid). The close-up shots of San respondents in the Wildebeest Kuil introductory film is symbolic of their central place in the direction of the film's narrative and the overall narrative of the site, intimating that it is with these ordinary community members that the most poignant narratives lie.

Community leaders are shown seated with the tented camp in the background, connoting a sense of distance between themselves and the community at large. This is in contrast to ordinary community members who (external to the interview) are shown to be seated within the tented camp in their daily living areas. Intimacy is thus solely afforded to 'ordinary' !Xun and Khwe community members while their leaders are shot in ways similar to that of the

academics and other non-community interviewees. Medium-shots, where the subjects are shot from the waist or knees up, include sufficient distance such that the subject is viewed in relation to their surrounds. The academics interviewed are depicted on-site at Wildebeest Kuil or similarly out-of-doors, while others are shown at their work desks or within a research facility (the Wits Rock Art Centre). In general, interviews are conducted outdoors. The open air is a trope inter-woven within the abiding narrative of San peoples as spiritually connected to the natural landscape. Academics in the film symbolically point to places where meaning is made; the natural landscape giving source to ancient knowledge.

Other filmic techniques include the use of sepia and black and white filters for scenes depicting historic San peoples. A sepia filter, for example, is used in a scene where a lone hunter walks through the veldt dressed in skins. Alternating black and white and sepia filters are used in depictions of !Xun and Khwe in the military camps of Namibia. These images are grainy—possibly due to the age of the film reels from which they were sourced yet simultaneously symbolic of the pastness of their representations. This is especially so in contrast to the bright and colourful shots of contemporary San peoples.

The first person on-screen is a San woman, Baita Dumba, who begins a discussion of the transition from ancestral worship to Christian monotheism. Religion is thus the first (and abiding) theme discussed. Comments from various community members include a positive acceptance of the Christian God; a disavowal of ‘the San god’; disappointment at this disavowal; and ambivalence (*Wildebeest Kuil* 2001). The film discusses ancient San religious beliefs and how these relate to the rock art and contemporary customs of the !Xun and Khwe. Shifting perceptions of rock art are addressed in relation to specific examples of images at Wildebeest Kuil. Morris draws the viewer’s attention to the image of an incomplete rhinoceros (ibid). He notes that it was initially believed that this was an unfinished image but it is now considered to have been purposefully half-etched. Stemming from the Shamanism theory, this perspective holds that the rhinoceros seems to emerge out of the rock, symbolic of it inhabiting both the spiritual and material worlds. In contrast to generalised, child-like, primitivising representations of San peoples and their art, the film highlights the precision with which the engravings were created.⁵ Archaeologist Peter Beaumont, describes San artists as ‘Van Goghs... in the *koppies* [hills]’ (ibid) illustrating the skill with which the engravings were created and portraying these cultural groups as complex and dynamic. Describing rock

art sites as sacred, Jatti Bredekamp, a patron of Khoe-San heritage, emphasises the significance of sites such as Wildebeest Kuil in terms of heritage preservation (ibid).

While the film differentiates between the ancient makers of the rock art and the contemporary !Xun and Khwe now inhabiting the land, it maintains that echoes of the old ways are still manifest in these contemporary peoples, thus valorising their Sanness. This Sanness is significant in terms of their affinity to the rock art at Wildebeest Kuil and in terms of political and social motivations regarding belonging and identity. One of the community members interviewed in the film says, '[t]his art was made by our grandparents' parents. Yes they made it...' (*Wildebeest Kuil* 2001). Another community member says, '...I'm always glad in my heart when I see the rock art at Wildebeest Kuil. But my spirit has questions. I ask, 'Where are these people now? Are they still alive somewhere? Because when I look at this art I know in my soul that it was my people who made this' (ibid). These reflections suggest that the !Xun and Khwe 'see in the art a link (as do other Khoe-San descendants in the region) to a broad Khoe-San cultural inheritance in Southern Africa' (Morris 2004, 3). Even so, the film advances an argument for diversity, reiterating that it is a common misconception to think of San peoples as a homogenous group.

Wildebeest Kuil (2001) highlights the need for a transition of perception. In the film historian John Wright warns against viewing contemporary San peoples as remnants of a romantic past, stating rather that they are a people part of modern history. The film goes on to discuss a transition of perception on both a personal and public level for San peoples to overcome entrenched stereotypes and myths about themselves. !Xun and Khwe community members describe their wish to contribute to and be part of contemporary society. In one scene, a woman, speaking in her native tongue, expresses the importance of learning to use a computer. Morris observes that this is a representation of a culture not 'frozen (and flawed) in some imagined past, nor fixed in an essentialised expression of present-day 'authenticity', but 21st century people addressing 21st century issues' (2012, 238). Their struggles and challenges are not overlooked; their journey from the SADF military bases is documented along with their time in Schmidtsdrift. The audience is made aware that this is not a group of San living in a primitive idyll but a contemporary people facing modern, real-world challenges.

The film ends with the same imagery with which it began—silhouetted figures carefully moving across a rocky terrain. A closer look reveals that the figures are wearing modern-day

apparel; pants and sandals can be made out as the darkened figures walk across the rocks. This echoes the film's common trope, that contemporary San peoples are modern-day peoples and should not be locked into a state of romantic primitivism. The film ends positively, highlighting the community's hope for future development and their pride as the hosts at Wildebeest Kuil.⁶ This kind of filmic representation is exemplar of progressive attitudinal changes in terms of representing San peoples (especially in light of nostalgic representations à la Laurens van der Post). Similarly progressive perspectives were not to be found in the military exhibition.

The 31 Battalion Military Exhibition

Opened on 18 May 2013, and overseen by the McGregor Museum's conflict historian who worked closely with one time 31 Battalion Commanding Officer Scholtz van Wyk, the exhibition *Angola to Platfontein: !Xun and Khwe and 31 Bn [Battalion]* consists of wall panels with script and photographs depicting soldiers in pose, scenes from the military camps and paraphernalia such as flags and medals. One of the panels reads '[t]o assist the !Xun and Khwe in adjusting to their new environment, the military built a community centre, opened on 26 May 1992. It provided basic adult education as well as needlework and cookery classes. An art project was also started' (Swanepoel 2013). The paternalism evident here persists throughout the exhibition and is pointedly emphasised in the final sentence of the last panel which reads: '[f]inally in December 2003 military vehicles brought the majority of the !Xun and Khwe to their newly-built homes at Platfontein' (ibid). The military vehicles, and not the !Xun and Khwe, are the subject of this sentence. The !Xun and Khwe are in fact the object upon which the act of 'bringing' is applied.

Lacking source information (frequent in heritage presentation), the material provided is conveyed as fact. The narrative thus becomes, not a particular version of history, but The History. This is in addition to the lack of voices of San soldiers and their dependents who had experienced life in the military camps and who now live in Platfontein. In this disavowal, the treatment of the !Xun and Khwe as under the care and authority of the white military leadership is perpetuated. The !Xun and Khwe are narrativised as supporting cast members to the story of their white superiors and the exclusion of !Xun and Khwe voices and perspectives is critically evident. An aspect of this exclusion is the fact that, to garner their consent, copies of the information panels were sent to community leaders in English, a language in which

they are not fully adept. Afrikaans copies were later put into booklet form for the community when the exhibition was ready to be launched. Under two-hundred booklets were made; some of these copies were also available at the opening ceremony (Barnabas 2015).

My colleague Julie Grant called my attention to a photograph in the exhibition of three children sitting in a field together with an SADF aeroplane in the distance (May 2013). The caption read, 'Zelrine van Wyk, daughter of Scholtz van Wyk, the last officer commanding 203 Bn⁷, playing with San children oblivious to the momentous processes of re-settlement going on around them' (Swanepoel 2013). The white child and her father are named, thus securing her identity, while the San children remain unknown and unknowable. They sit with their backs to the camera while the Van Wyk child faces the lens; they are secondary to her and, through their collective status and homogenous treatment, become representational of all San children within the army camps. This is in contrast to the exhibition's title which foregrounds the !Xun and Khwe and suggests that the narrative is theirs. The exhibition largely relies on information easily gleaned from reference books; clearly absent are the personal stories of still-living San soldiers or their dependents who remember life in the military camps. This is antithetical to Tilden's (1977) proposition of revelatory heritage interpretation which underlines that the interpretation should be more than merely factual but rather that it seek to reveal meaning and relationships particular to the history and culture on display.

Once in Schmidtsdrift, the !Xun and Khwe became disillusioned with the military. They complained that the promise of housing was not fulfilled. They now had to make do with canvas tents while they had left timber dwellings back at Omega. The community's sense of dislocation was deepened with the disbanding of the battalion. Some of the soldiers were transferred to other units in different parts of the country, leaving their families at Schmidtsdrift. This was cause for a greater sense of loss and alienation. While life in the tented camp went on, it remained a life of instability; the community were 'left without a centre, without a purpose, certainly without houses, and perhaps without hope' (Uys 1993, 23). More than two decades later hopelessness pervades.

Ian Uys (1993) and David Robbins (c. 2004, 2007) have documented fierce debates around the conscription of the San soldiers by the SADF. Nevertheless, the exhibition at Wildebeest Kuil is celebratory and none of the above is mentioned. A colleague of mine, a Chinese

national, observed during a visit to the exhibition that the !Xun and Khwe had had a 'glorious past' because 'they were soldiers' (Personal communication, 9 June 2014). The exhibition ignores the experience of women in the camps, impacts of the moves across national borders, the effects of war on the community, family life within the camps, and the cultural breach that developed between the soldiers and children on the one hand, and the women on the other (see Uys 1993), which caused a change in household hierarchy evident in Platfontein today. Military life is romanticised in the exhibition in a nostalgic gazing upon the past. This corresponds with a selective history promoted by typically patriarchal power bases that focus on 'great men' and overlooks 'women, children, disabled groups and ethnic minorities, who are typically depicted (if at all) as lending support to the male, central figure' (Timothy and Boyd 2003, 262; see also McLean 1998; Hubbard and Lilley 2000).

Conclusions

The title of this paper pointed to a dilemma of multivocality. What is that dilemma? Is it that there are conflicting narratives to make somehow cohere into a single heritage interpretation? Is it that, even in the name of multivocal heritage construction, some indigenous voices are left out? Both these concerns apply. On the whole, the interpretation at Wildebeest Kuil presents the !Xun and Khwe as forward-moving. Roshi Naidoo refers to such presentation as 'sleight-of-hand' such that 'the project of modernity appears alive and well and functioning for the gradual betterment of all' (2005, 41). At the same time, the presentation of the !Xun and Khwe as modern-day citizens deconstructs romanticised perceptions of San peoples as archaeological remnants. While the film does well in this regard, the exhibition promotes the idea that the upheavals of war have been all but resolved for the !Xun and Khwe and that the SADF played a principal role in making this happen. In this way political ideologies and prevailing structures are not only left unassessed but are celebrated. While purporting to provide a narrative of 31 Bn the exhibition fails to include voices of the soldiers and their dependents and consequently provides an account not unlike past anthropological descriptions that objectified San peoples. In this way the exhibition fails to ascribe to the objectives of multivocality.

Steven Dubin notes that the word commonly used to describe the state of South African museums is 'transitional' (2009, 209). He claims that 'transformation has occurred clumsily: for every step forward, there have been forces that have held or even pushed museums

backward' (ibid). As evident in the case of Wildebeest Kuil, there can be a stepping back and forth in a single museum's offerings. Nevertheless, the rock art landscape provides favourable offerings for multivocality. Authors of *Engraved Landscape: Biesje Poort, Many Voices* (2013) discuss landscape as inseparable from peoples living or passing through and events having taken place there. Following Tim Ingold they describe an environment that is 'more archi-textural than architectural' (Ingold 2007, 81). This is an environment of 'entanglement' coming into being in relation to peoples, animals, objects and events (Morris 2013, 53). As Morris states of the Biesje Poort rock art site, fragmented and fragile traces 'frustrate construction of any definitive synthesis' (2013, 54) revealing an inherent multivocality that proffers the occasion for alternative narratives to come to the fore (see Weiss 2012). This multivocality innately challenges 'constructions of place and storyline in the present' (Morris 2013, 55; see also Weiss 2007, 2012). Rock art as a powerful resource for multivocality in the heritage narrative is subdued when sites are presented in a chronologically determined singular narrative. When this occurs, the lack in the historical record is glossed over, as are the genealogies of power responsible for it. The potential for reflexivity is similarly lost. Alternative accounts of the nation start with re-thinking the post-apartheid or postcolonial nation 'in terms of its fragments', that is, 'those parts and those peoples who do not easily belong to it, who exist at the margins and peripheries of society' (Young 2003, 63). In contradistinction to the promulgation of dominant narratives of elites, Robert Young states that these fragments 'are the means through which the nation relates to itself' (ibid). Rock art sites are possibly the best place to begin with such an approach as they are opportune sites to challenge traditional narrative forms (Weiss 2012); the manifold layers of histories, like strata on rock, telling the larger story of a place.

¹ The TRC was a televised commission that sought to make reparations for great injustices suffered during apartheid and catalyze healing in the country as a whole.

² Sara (Sarah, Saartjie or Saartje) Baartman was a Khoer woman known as the Hottentot Venus, and put on public display in London and New York between 1810 and 1815 when she died. Her display continued posthumously for many years (Crais & Scully 2009; Robins 1998). Debate over the life and narrative of Bartmann has been controversial.

³ A term coined by Archbishop Desmond Tutu to describe a democratic South Africa in which ethnic diversity and multiculturalism is to be celebrated.

⁴ Setswana is the second most frequently spoken home language in the Northern Cape followed by isiXhosa, while Afrikaans is the most dominant language spoken in the province (Statistics South Africa 2006).

⁵ The pecking technique "is achieved either by direct vertical percussion, or by removing small chips at an angle to the surface using a punch of some kind". Sharp stones were the likely tools used (Parkington et al. 2008, 41).

⁶ The film was made in a time when that hope was alive.

⁷ This was another 'Bushman' Battalion.

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