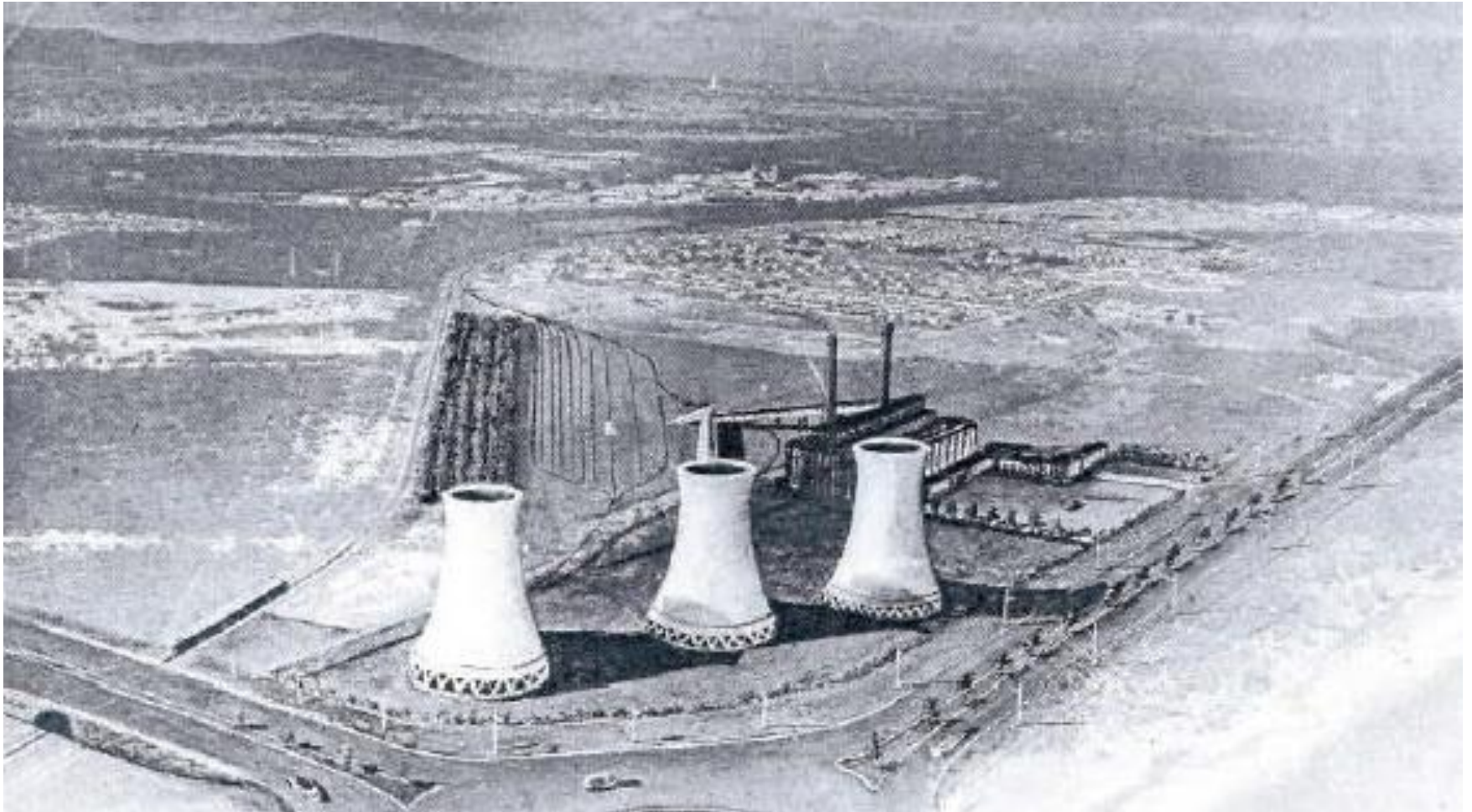


Social Housing as Heritage

Case Study: Langa Hostels

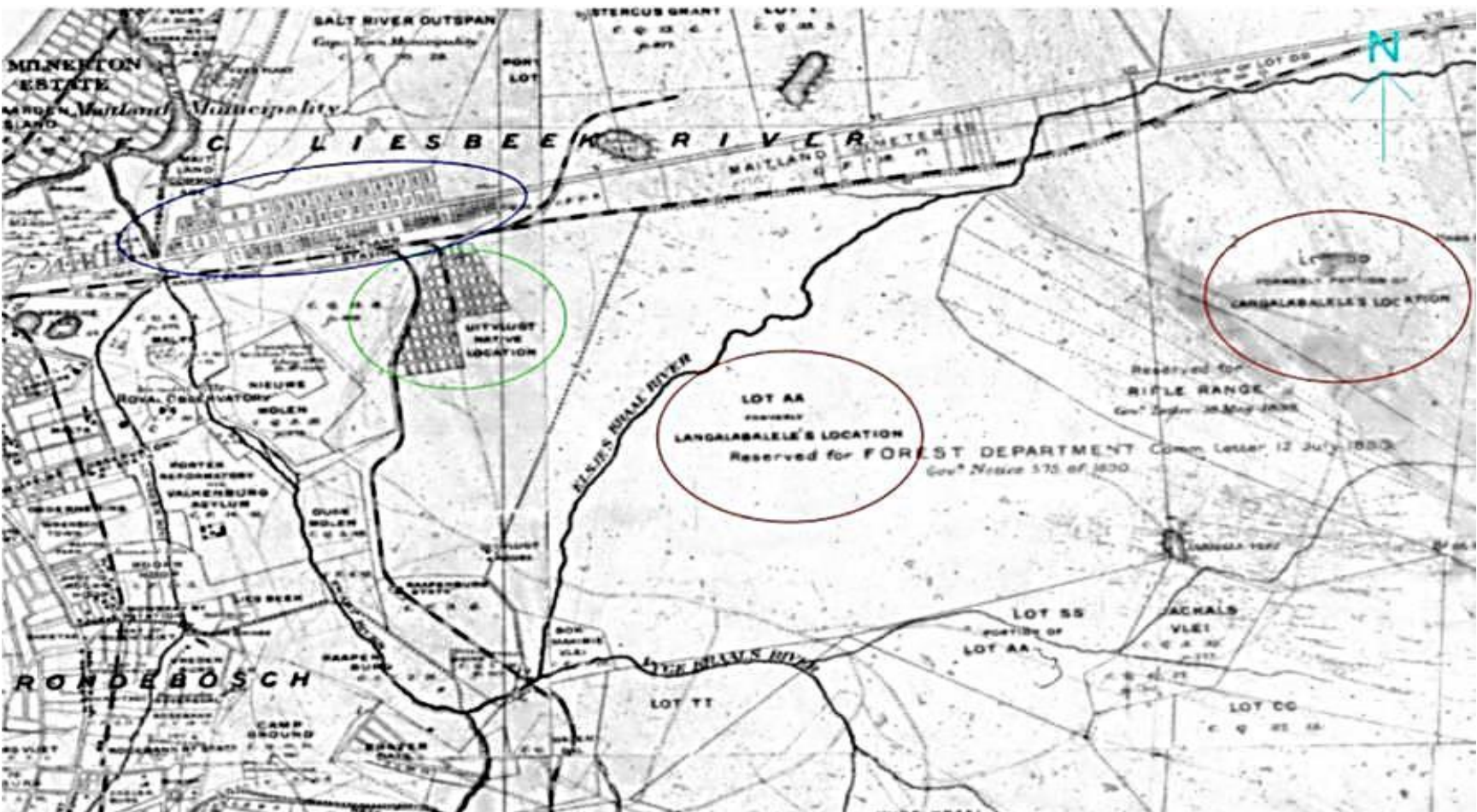
Who's Values and What Significance

Introduction

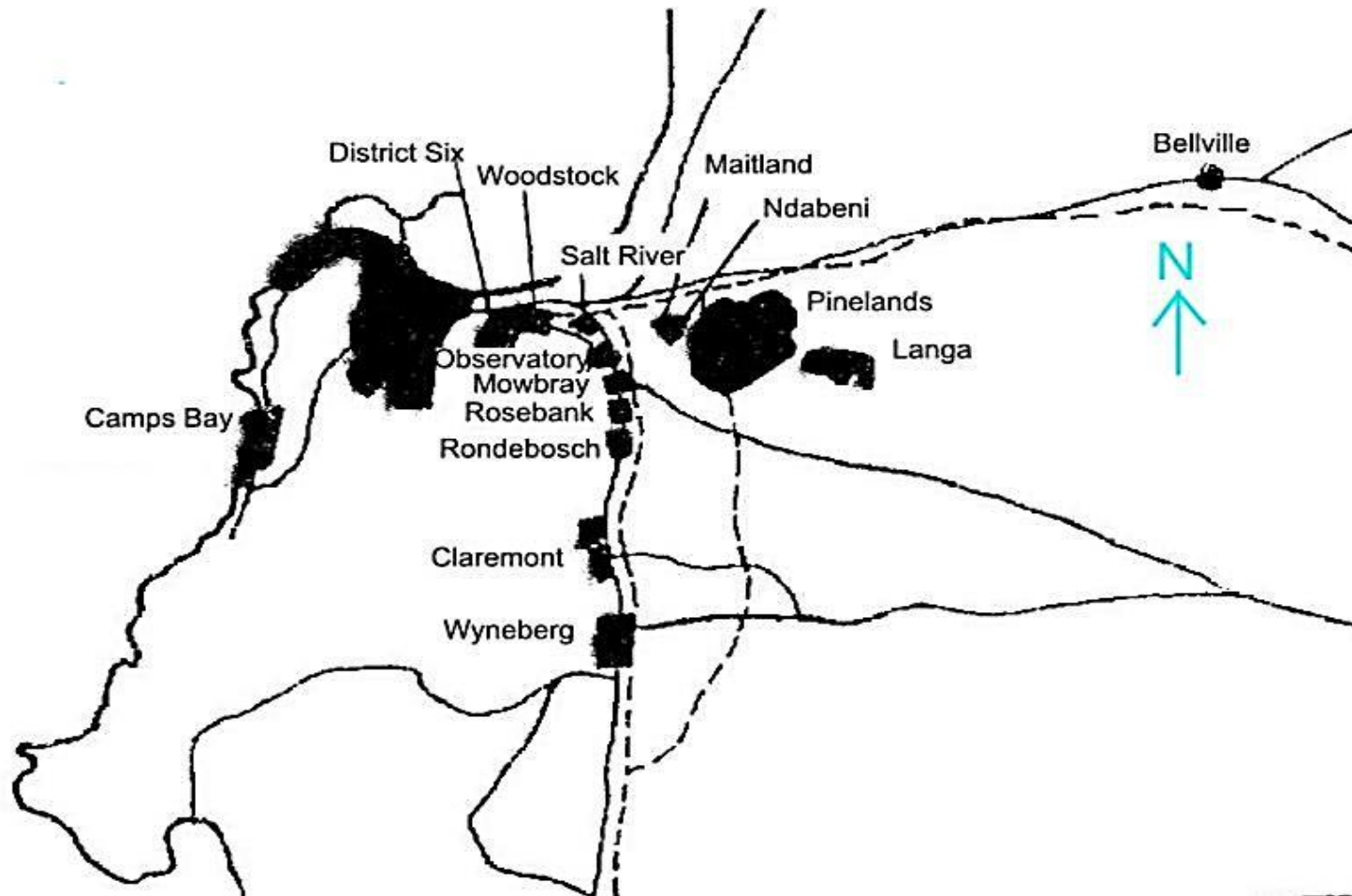


Location





Urban development of Cape Town c.1920



Social housing schemes of concern in this study

Aerial photograph identifying the SAHRA “Grade I” hostels: Red square - Single Quarters (Main) Barracks (1925); Large orange rectangle - Special Quarters (1926) and the Spinsters Quarters (1926) indicated with small orange rectangle; Yellow rectangle - The North Barracks (1927).



Single Quarters (Main Barracks) 1925



Spinster Quarters 1926



Special Quarters 1926



North Barracks 1927



Aim of the research project

- **To determine the extent to which this declaration of high significance reflected the diverse communities of Langa's values** and those of professional conservation practice and, how this "Grade I" status would impact on the communities of Langa.
- A further concern was **whether the communities agreed with such a nomination and whether they had been sufficiently consulted during the determination process**. Given that this is in large part working class communities with limited means and limited education, the difficulties involved in gathering "community" opinion and formulating heritage importance acceptable to the majority would have been considerable.
- I thought that such a study could be useful in not only evaluating the success of the official process undertaken a decade earlier, but to **explore the extent to which the principles and readings expressed then would conform with those expressed today**, should a new study be undertaken.
- Apart from being intrigued by the possible motivations behind the assessment of high significance of the hostels, **I was also interested in understanding what values were at stake and what the descendants of migrant labourers would regard their heritage to be**.
- A further interest lay in **what they would regard important in an urbanised environment where the material and symbolic is often in conflict with traditional values** of rural Transkei and Ciskei from where the hostel residents, or at least their parent's generation, originated.

Research Questions

- 1. How was the statement of cultural significance determined?**
- 2. What process was followed and what criteria were used?**
- 3. Whose values and what significances are being observed through its conservation?**
- 4. Should social housing be regarded as heritage?**
- 5. Do the residents of Langa regard the hostels as heritage?**
- 6. If so, what specifically do they regard as significant about these structures?**
- 7. Have the practical management implications been understood, communicated and accepted?**

Research Methodology

At the inception a literature survey was embarked on to position the work within the broader body of knowledge while exploring attitudes and arguments within the heritage sector.

Archival documentation on Langa heritage, its establishment history, minutes and decisions of meetings, photographs, official records, heritage practitioners' reports on the identification and evaluation of resources of the City of Cape Town and SAHRA as well as a pilot oral history study undertaken by Sean Field in 2001/2 were reviewed. Because the official reports and the SAHRA Submission of 2004 relied on the Field oral histories as basis for the determination of heritage values, he was interviewed in April 2014 for this study. On the other hand, I gathered evidence by means of a series of interviews with individuals, mainly residents of Langa hostels and others having an interest in the study area. After completing the interviews, an analysis of the information gathered took place, correlating and triangulating it with information from other sources and references. The buildings and environment in question were also assessed.

In brief, this is the story of Langa's migrant labour heritage as reflected through the hostels, reconstructed and interrogated for its meaning to the communities of Langa. This was compared with an official evaluation undertaken by the authorities which had resulted in a "Grade I" status being given to four hostel types, various other sites and a large heritage area which comprises most of Langa.

The case study method was chosen for this project since it allows the exploration of a specific environment with a limited geographical area and communities such as those within Langa and its hostels; and, as Yin points out in his Case Study Methods, case studies enable the researcher to "explore and investigate real-life phenomena by means of contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationship" (Yin, 1984:23).

The core of this study is the interviews as this is the source from which new information and insights regarding notions of value and significance informing heritage meaning as understood by the communities in Langa were to be uncovered. It was also the only realistic means through which the communities' values and attitudes towards heritage could be determined.

The approach to the interviews was therefore of critical importance as it: "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of people's experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations" (Kvale, 1996:45).

Knight and Ruddock elucidate the aims of qualitative research (and interviews) saying that it "seeks to describe and understand the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects," and that it is especially useful to ascertain the story "behind a participant's experiences" (Knight, 2008:113).

The approach followed during the information-gathering stage of this study, resembles aspects of the "grounded theory" of Glaser and Strauss with respect to initial hypotheses which may change as new knowledge drives the process of discovery. Also, through comparing incidents, theoretical properties are generated as saturation of knowledge is achieved which requires no further information since a tendency has been established (Glaser, 1967:114).

The sample of fifteen interviewees in this study cannot be seen to represent the diverse communities in Langa, so the study should be regarded as a pilot study, indicating tendencies. Nevertheless, because of the potential repetition of incidents, a qualitative case study within a defined geographic area on a specific topic such as this can be particularly helpful in understanding phenomena.

Two interview groups were identified: First, six individuals who represented, or still represent, Langa heritage bodies or cultural organizations in various capacities (some of whom had also been involved in the official process undertaken a decade ago) and, second, nine residents of the Langa hostels. A significant difference of opinion between these two groups were observed with those involved in bodies mostly in favour of some form of restoration/ preservation as opposed to the majority of the resident interviewees who do not seem to share this opinion to the same extend.

Research questions posed during the formal interview sessions can be divided into two categories:

First, eight background establishing questions, followed by ten questions around values and significances.

It is also important to note that large group sessions were not considered as the official heritage survey conducted during the determination of significances in Langa between 2000 and 2003 had used meetings in the hall and library to communicate with the community and this had, in my opinion, proved clearly not to be successful. A temporary community heritage body was established, as mentioned before, by the authorities during the CCT process which was taken to represent the community opinion. This approach was to be avoided completely in this study in order to explore other ways.

This study therefore also explores an alternative approach of engagement with the community in determining values and significances by engaging in a more personal and direct manner. My hope was that people would feel less intimidated and able to express their opinions without having to be concerned about potential negative comments from others, which is often the case in a group situation.

Ramphela, in her research on the living and health conditions in the Langa hostels for her *A Bed Called Home*, made use of a participatory methodology acknowledging the lack of successful models for such research (Ramphela, 1993:136).

It was important from the outset in this research project that **formal heritage language was to be avoided during interviews in order to ensure that the residents of Langa would not feel alienated and would understand the questions posed without ambiguity. For this reason, as well as reasons of respect to the diverse communities in Langa, the service of a resident “interpreter,” who was born and still resides in Langa, was secured. Velile Soha, an artist friend of some twenty five years agreed to facilitate introductions and stand by in case the need for explanations arose and to ensure that no misunderstanding due to language barriers would occur.** Soha’s services proved to be invaluable from the start. Not only because of his detailed knowledge of Langa but also because he is a respected community member familiar to some of the interviewees and other residents. This allowed me to wander about and engage freely without the need to explain my presence beyond the actual interview sessions. This saved a considerable amount of time and established immediate trust with the participants.

This approach also facilitated informal discussion with residents of Langa which presented the opportunity to enquire about general conditions and gather opinions on a neutral and friendly basis which would otherwise not have been possible. Such informal discussions assisted me in orientating myself while establishing a sense of the varied communities and context prior to the formal interviews.

The actual formal interviews were set up without prior warning. This was done intentionally so that the participants would not have the time to consult others which could confuse or manipulate the individual’s opinions. Soha and I would typically engage with a potential participant outside the hostels on a friendly basis while enquiring whether they reside here. After this introductory talk, Soha would explain why we were there after which an interview was requested. This proved to be an effective strategy and the residents were by-and-large helpful, friendly and accommodating.

Contextual History

- **The story of Langa's origin begins with migrant labour history in SA. Wilson informs that "migrant labour is nothing new in South Africa. One hundred years ago, a decade before the birth of the Witwatersrand gold mining industry, generations before the evolution of the policy of apartheid, the system whereby men oscillate between their home in some rural area and their place of work was already firmly established as part of the country's traditional way of life" (Wilson, 1972:1).**
- **According to Callinicos, prior to the 1870's, within the period of Boer republics and the British colonies of the Cape and Natal, "most Africans in southern Africa lived in independent chiefdoms" (Callinicos, 1987:11). During this period, "farmers in the Western Cape solved the perennial problem of labour shortage, which in previous centuries had been alleviated through the importation of slaves, by recruiting workers from wherever they could be found" by sending agents to Ciskei, Transkei, Mozambique and South West Africa, now Namibia (Wilson, 1979:1). Although this was the birth of large-scale migrant labour in South Africa, "the Pedi, the Tsonga and the southern Sotho were amongst those already engaged in migrant labour in the 1860's. In fact, the Pedi were already working as far afield as the Cape in the 1840's and Natal in the 1850's" (Callinicos, 1987:15).**
- **According to Callinicos, most families from all parts of the country had at least one member working for wages by this time on either the "mines, in towns or on commercial farms." "Among the Pedi a migrant labour system was organised by the chief who sent young men off in regiments to obtain cattle and guns" (Callinicos, 1987:15).**
- **By the time diamonds were discovered in Kimberley during 1867, it was the "independent chiefdoms with established patterns of migrancy that sent their young men to become the first black miners" (Callinicos, 1987:15). "Less than fifty years later an industrial revolution had swept up all these little states and chiefdoms into one large state dominated by white capitalists" (Callinicos, 1987:11).**
- **During the 1880's gold rush on the Witwatersrand, many immigrants flocked to Cape Town because of work opportunities with the extensive harbour development and other projects underway. This influx of residents caused a housing shortage in Cape Town; and it was during this era that Cape Town was divided into six districts under the new Municipal Act.**
- **In 1897 poor living conditions and sanitation in the urban environment of Cape Town gave rise to the Public Health Act as an attempt to improve the situation. The outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War, two years later in 1899 increased the pressure for accommodation in the city once more with around 25 000 foreigners from other parts of the country taking refuge in Cape Town which also accommodated huge numbers of British troops.**
- **The bubonic plague epidemic broke out in the same year that Africans were forcibly removed from the city during 1901, to what was to become the first planned "location" on the eastern outskirts of Cape Town called Uitvlugt, later renamed Ndabeni and gave rise to the Native Reserve Location Act No 40 of 1902. Cape Town had a mixed residential pattern at that stage. Resistance and boycotts took place with socialist political and union movements being formed.**
-
- **When the Union of South Africa was declared in 1910, the Colony became the Cape Province and within three years the Native Land Act came to being, preventing Africans leasing or purchasing land outside of "native reserves".**
- **During 1918 thousands of Capetonians lost their lives due to an outbreak of the influenza epidemic.**

- **The Pinelands Garden City for white and the Maitland Garden City for coloured people were planned in 1919 . In 1923 the Natives (Urban Areas) Act was enforced to move Africans into locations and led to the building of Ndabeni, whose residents were later moved to nearby Langa.** The great depression of the 1930's brought about a demographic change in the workforce of Cape Town resulting in government aid for "poor whites". By 1936 half of the workforce were white and mostly from rural areas. During this period the Bo-Kaap was suffering from overcrowding and dilapidated buildings which led to the area being proclaimed a slum area during the Slum Clearance initiative of 1934.
- **Around 1945, at the time of the Native (Urban Areas) Consolidation Act, light industrial activity expanded which allowed more women into the workforce while many Africans migrated to Cape Town which led to influx control measures.**
- **The Nationalist Government, which introduced formal apartheid, came to power in 1948. The proclamation of the Group Areas Act of 1950 led to the forced removal of about 150 000 mostly Coloured and African Capetonians between 1960 and 1980 to new townships on the Cape Flats. The Separate Amenities Act of 1953 assisted in realising the redevelopment scheme planned for Cape Town .**
- **This led to the Defiance campaign and social uprising.** It was during this time that ID Du Plessis became Commissioner of Coloured Affairs and was instrumental in influencing the prime minister to declare the Western Cape a "Coloured Labour Preference Area" in 1954.
- **During 1957, the Land Tenure Advisory Board (Group Areas Board) declared the first Group Areas leading to formal apartheid planning and forcing relocations under the management of the Department of Community Development specifically created for this purpose in 1961.**
- **Actions by the people such as the 1960 Anti-Pass march from Langa Old Flats, where the police killed 4 people, became widespread.** But the forced relocation process continued until the 1980's despite resistance from many pressure groups, communities (and other countries).
- **The student uprising, against poor education for Black people and the compulsory introduction of Afrikaans, in the form of a march from Langa High School through Mendi Square occurred in 1976 with a child being shot by police.**
- **Local authorities were created in townships and received a form of "puppet" self- governance in 1982, which was widely opposed by the people and resulted in mass actions, anti-apartheid demonstrations and pro-democracy marches through mobilization of a renewed Defiance Campaign.**
- **After the abolition of the Pass Laws in 1986, which had prevented women from rural areas joining the working men in Langa, the conditions in the hostels deteriorated due to congestion and poverty.**
- **During the days leading up to South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, many apartheid laws including the Group Areas Act, Land Act and the Population Registration Act were repealed as part of the political negotiation process between the African National Congress and the National Party.**
- **The South African National Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) was established with the NHRA Act 25 of 1999 to manage the national estate, which refers to "...those heritage resources of South Africa which are of cultural significance or other special value for the present community and for future generations must be considered part of the national estate and fall within the sphere of operations of heritage resources authorities" (NHRA, 1999:12).**

The Story of Langa

“The Structure and Form of Metropolitan Cape Town: Its origins, Influences and Performance”, Working paper No 42 for The Urban Problems Research Unit & The Urban Foundation (Western Cape) by Dewar D, Watson, Bassios and N.Dewar(1990) assisted by Fabio Todeschini, was relied on in tracing the planning policy which led to the construction of the Langa hostels.

Langa Township is named after “amaHlubi chief Langalibalele” (Langa Museum Information, 2013) of “Nguni Royal descent” (SAHRA, 2004:4). “Langalibalele,” is “isiZulu for the sun shines or the sun is hot”. “Langa,” meaning “sun” is an abbreviation of his name. It is claimed that he was involved in South Africa’s first treason trial and found guilty of murder, treason and rebellion for which he was exiled to the Cape Colony from KwaZulu Natal (which was then under British governance) and banished to Robben Island in 1874 for life. One year later in 1875 he was released from Robben Island and sent to Oude Molen on the Uitvlugt reserve (Ndabeni-Langa area) for his remaining incarceration where he died 12 years later. The trial is regarded to have been unjust as he was not allowed counsel and it was conducted in accordance with indigenous people’s law under the influence of those in power. It is further claimed that when he died in 1889 “he was buried in KwaZulu Natal’s Drakensberg area where his grave, kept secret by the amaHlubi for over 60 years.....has been visited by one of his most illustrious blood descendants, Nelson Mandela” (Langa Museum Information, 2013).

The state accepted the need to construct housing for the poor by local authorities with the promulgation of the Housing Act No 35 of 1920. This, in combination with contemporary planning ideas from abroad, based on the principle of separating residential, commercial and industrial zones, while creating Garden City and neighbourhood areas, soon led to the realisation of the first major town planning concepts by a local authority in the history of South Africa (Le Grange, 1985, quoted by Dewar, Watson and Bassios, 1990: 41).

These new residential planning ideas were adopted locally as a result of the potential to solve critical local problems such as health issues due to high densities, and “that of the growing demand on the part of the white population for the residential segregation of the coloured and African population” (Le Grange, 1985, quoted by Dewar, Watson and Bassios, 1990: 41).

The new health and planning legislation ideas were therefore replicated on a large scale throughout South African cities. This meant the removal of people based on racially defined profiles and resulted in mostly coloured and black people being moved to sites on the periphery of the urban edge. These developments, according to Dewar, Watson and Bassios, (1990) were conceived and planned “entirely by a public authority”.

The very first such new development was conceived on a site called Uitvlugt Native Location, which later became known as Ndabeni. “It was laid out on a grid pattern and originally consisted of 615 lean-to huts and 5 dormitories. By the middle of 1901 this area contained a population of some 7 000 people” (Saunders, 1984, quoted by Dewar, Watson and Bassios, 1990:42). It was, according to them, the first low income settlement of people on the Cape Flats. The Native Location Act No 40 of 1902 was promulgated to formalise the Uitvlugt (Ndabeni) development which served as a model for later urban African legislation” (Le Grange, 1985, quoted by Dewar, Watson and Bassios, 1990, 42).

Since 1918, most residential developments in the Cape were based on the Howard model of Garden Cities after a Cape Town councillor visited Letchworth in England and met Ebenezer Howard. The Union Government’s Housing Committee (the Central Housing Board) and the Cape Town City Council accepted the idea as a means of solving the city’s housing problems (Le Grange, 1985:7).

“The Cape Flats, with its flat, easily developable land, and relative proximity to the older spines of the city, provided an obvious area for expansion. Thus Maitland Garden Village was developed for coloured municipal employees in 1919, Pinelands garden city was developed for white occupation in 1922, and Langa for African people shortly thereafter” (Dewar, Watson and Bassios, 1990:42).

Although these developments were based closely on the Howard model in most respects: surrounded by open belts, situated outside the urban edge, inward focused onto local commercial facilities, the concept failed to materialise properly since there was no industrial component and little commercial opportunity. Howard’s concept of self-contained neighbourhoods could not work because people had to continue to travel to shops and jobs in town. An intrinsic part of the Howard model was a socialistic philosophy. This could not be realised here since land was either private or owned by the state - in the case of the working class townships. It was clearly not Howard’s intention that these Garden Cities should be occupied by single class income groups as it happened in South Africa (Dewar, Watson and Bassios, 1990:45).

History of Construction Phases

The history of the construction phases and description of the various hostels which follow, relies primarily on research done by CM Elias undertaken in 1983 at the University of Stellenbosch Research Unit for Sociology of Development.

In 1924, the Langa railway siding was completed while an experiment was underway to see if the “natives” could build the accommodation required themselves. The experiment was a failure according to Superintendent Cook as there were too few skilled masons among the “community”.

As a consequence, call for tenders went out in 1925 to build the first 84 dormitories consisting of 21 blocks to house 2 016 men between 1925 and 1931.

These dormitories were the (single storey) Single Quarters (Main) Barracks in Langa, located between Bhunga Avenue and Jungle Walk. The Barracks were constructed with plastered and painted clay bricks and pitched asbestos roofing with no ceilings. Each dormitory had a combustion stove and were fitted with two lights. Measuring 26- by 24 foot, they accommodated double tier concrete bunks for 24 men each. According to a government report of 1938, this figure exceeded the public health and safety regulations by fourteen men per dormitory.

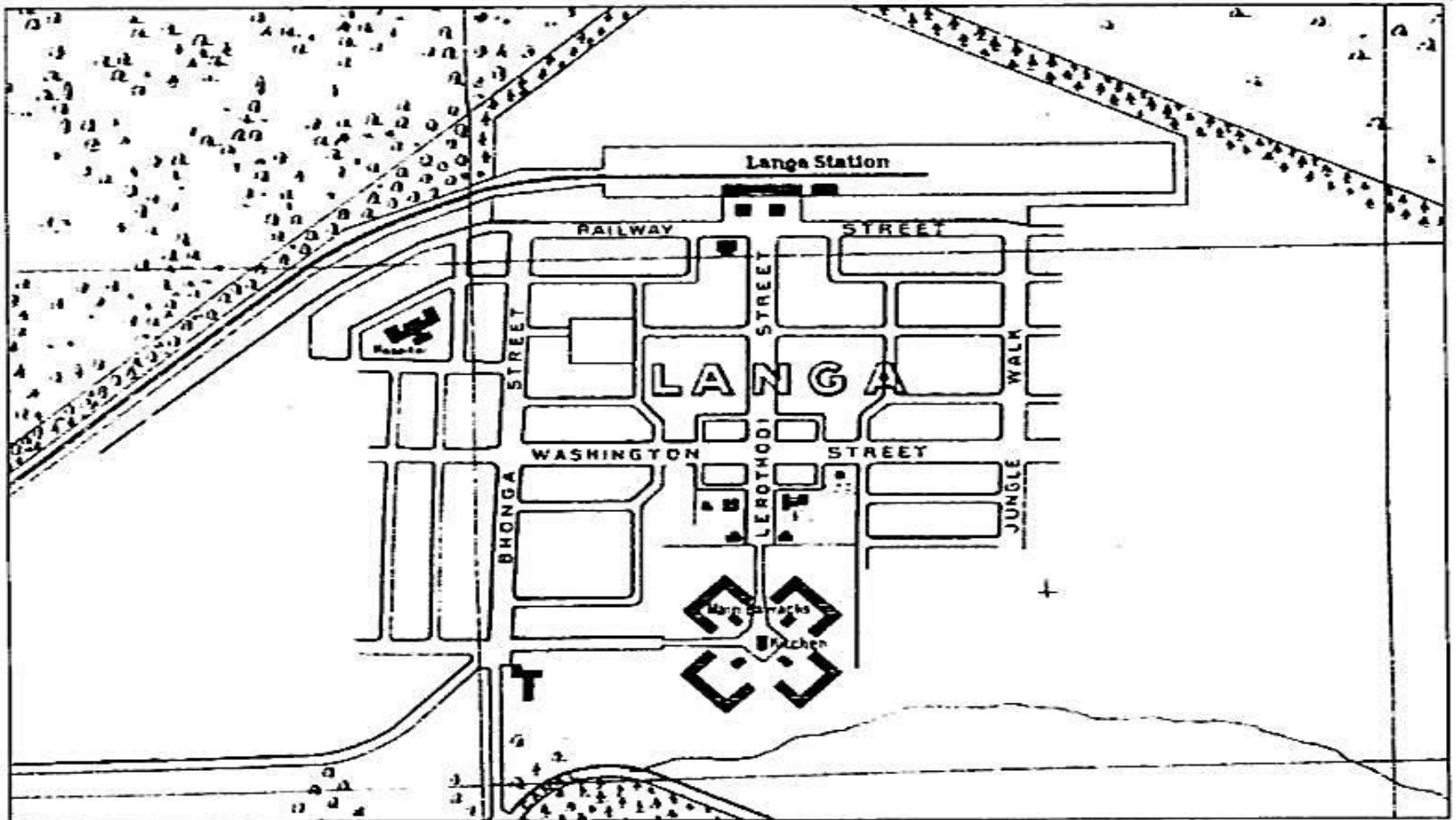
Ablution blocks were built as four separate buildings. Alongside the Barracks a mess served as an eating house (Elias, 1983:13).

During the following year in 1926, (single storey) Special Quarters were erected between Bhunga and Harlem Avenues. Consisting of 8 blocks containing 16 rooms each, this provided 128 single rooms and 36 double rooms. A further 6 blocks with 6 rooms to accommodate single men and 50 double rooms for single women were built serving 200 men and 100 women in total. The women’s rooms, next to Harlem Avenue opposite the hospital, built also in 1926, were known as the (single storey) Spinster Quarters. These rooms were built with plastered and painted clay bricks, pitched asbestos roofing with no ceiling and electricity. Separate ablutions consisting of 5 blocks with communal toilets, showers and wash houses served all the residents (Elias, 1983:13).

An administration building, market hall, superintendent’s accommodation as well as residential facilities for officials formed part of the first 1925 phase of the development.

During 1926, the second development phase commenced, consisting of a hospital, police station, four bakeries, four butcheries, six general dealer shops, ten tea rooms, stores, workshops and stables.

Original site development plan of Langa, (Surveyor General, c 1925).





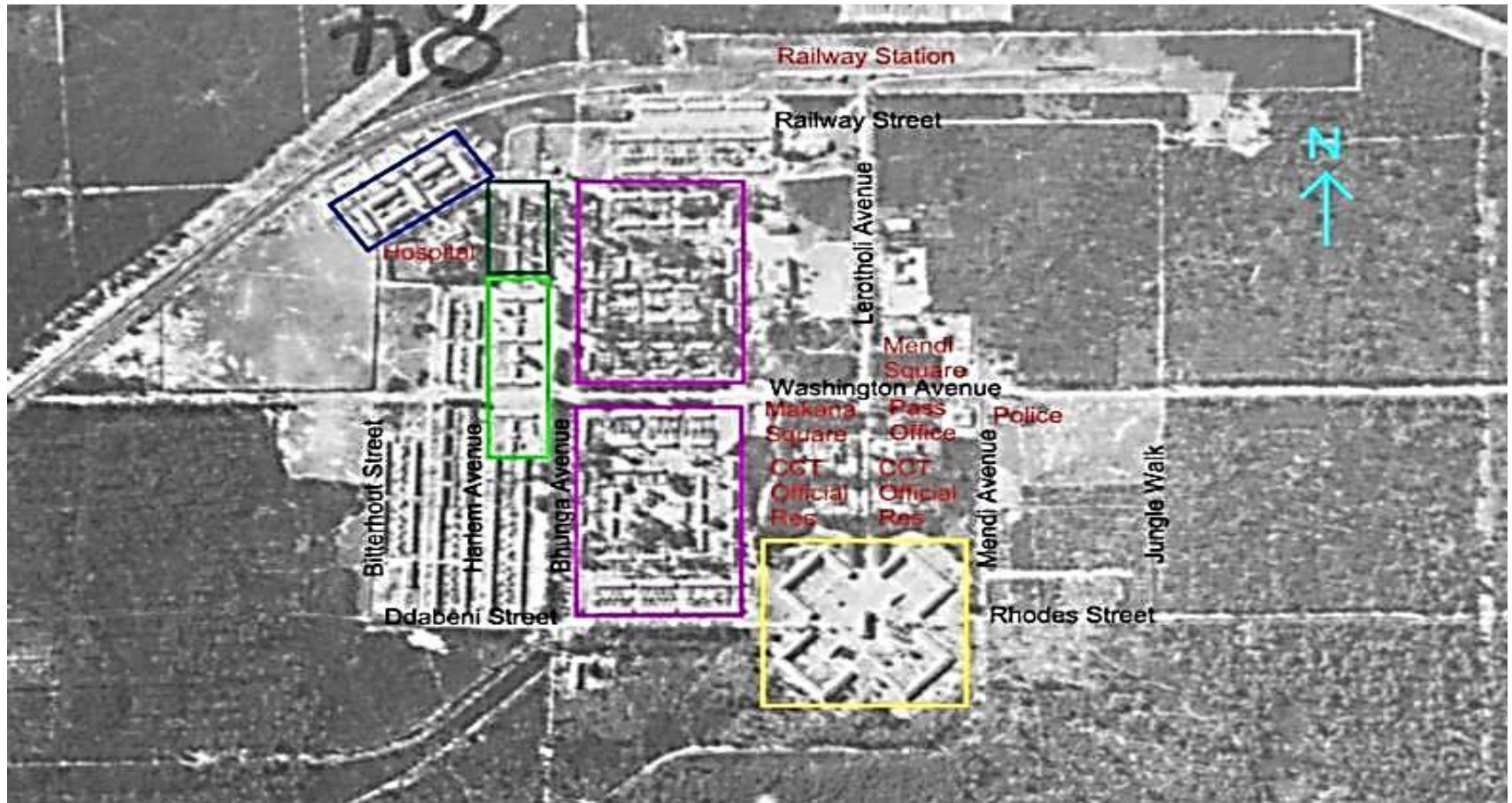








Aerial photograph of Langa showing the first development phase: **Single Quarters (Main) Barracks (1925)** SAHRA "Grade I" indicated with yellow square ; **Special Quarters (1926)** SAHRA "Grade I" indicated with light green rectangle and **Spinster Quarters (1926)** SAHRA "Grade I" indicated in dark green rectangle. Administration facilities, superintendent's accommodation and CCT official residences formed part of this first phase which is indicated with red labels. **Second development phase: Hospital and Police station, labeled in red, together with bakeries, shops, general dealer, tea rooms, workshops and stables. The North Barracks (1927),** SAHRA "Grade I" indicated in blue rectangle was now erected. **The first 300 Married Quarters (1928) were constructed on either side of Washington Street,** indicated in purple rectangles. (Department of Land and Rural Affairs: Chief Directorate National Spatial Information, Detail of 126/38 Strip 84 No. 11582, c 1938).



Construction Phases 1927 onwards

In 1927, the (single storey) North Barracks were erected to accommodate 840 single men. These buildings were similar to the Main Barracks.

The first 300 (single storey) Married Quarters were built in 1928 on either side of Washington Avenue. These were 2- and 3- roomed “family” houses built with concrete to reduce cost. A communal tap was shared by four houses. Each house was built with an outside toilet. This development phase occupied the area between Bhunga and Mendi Avenues.

In 1932 the third development phase, referred to as (single storey) Bongweni (“Precious”), was constructed. This development occurred between Mendi and Jungle Walk and comprised of 48 2-roomed and 16 3-roomed additional houses for married couples.

During this time government housing was provided for teachers in Jungle Walk; and further 160 houses were erected in Washington Street opposite Bongweni called (single storey) Thembeni (“Trust”) in 1934. These were built on the same principle as those built in Bongweni and consisted of 2- and 3-roomed houses with a fuel shed and outside toilets. In the same year a sports ground was built as a job creation effort by council to relief unemployment in Langa (Elias, 1983: 14).

The fourth and fifth development phases, built between 1935 and 1940 were regarded as luxury married quarters since they all had electricity, vegetable gardens at the back and flower gardens in the front.

The sixth and seventh developments phases took place with 60 additional (2-, 3- and 4-roomed) houses for married couples being built followed by 36 units in 1936 in Washington Street opposite the High School. These small roomed houses were referred to as (single storey) Bulawayo (“To Kill”) due to the high rent. In 1940 and 1941, another 204 houses were built consisting of 3 rooms each. They were all designed with a sink in the kitchen, own waterborne toilets, electricity (which had to be paid separate from the rental), fuel store and built-in food cupboard. These units were referred to as (single storey) Bubana (“people would die paying the rent”) (Elias, 1983: 16).

The (four storey) “Old Flats” were built on the far eastern end of Washington Street between 1944 and 1948. These single quarters buildings accommodated 1 296 men in the first, second and third floors with the ground floors being utility rooms. Two men occupied each room furnished with a bed, locker and table. Communal ablutions and kitchens are located in the centre of each floor with hot and cold water supplied. The flats were firmly constructed using clay bricks, cement passages, wood-block flooring, concrete stairs, asbestos pitched roof with ceilings and electricity (Elias, 1983: 17). According to Elias, “between 1944 and 1957 eight hundred and fifty small hostels were built to accommodate a further thirteen thousand six hundred single men. This area of the development became known as the (single storey) Zones these units have since been converted to family housing” (Elias, 1983: 17).

The new Pass Office and Court were built in the early 1960’s. The control of the “Dompas” system was until this time administered from the administration building which was built in 1925.

More Single Quarters referred to as the (double storey) “New Flats” were built during the 1970’s at the same time when the new station and the (three storey) Railway Flats were constructed. The “New Flats” were built to replace the temporary reception depot huts.

During the 1980’s the single residential housing between the N2 and the new flats were built, referred to as the Jo Slovo informal settlement. Between 1990 and 2005 the “Hostels to Homes” project took place during which portions of the “New Flats” were extended and converted into family units..

Between 2008 and 2009 the N2 Gateway residential development took place providing higher density housing. Since, many new housing developments has taken place and still continues to keep up with population growth and urbanization.

Aerial photograph indicating **phase three, four, five, six and seven development of Langa: Bongweni housing (1932)**, marked with yellow rectangle, between Mendi Avenue and Jungle Walk on the north side of Washington Street was constructed with accommodation for teachers also provided in Jungle Walk during this time. **Thembeni housing (1934)** was built opposite *Bongweni* to the south of Washington Street between Mendi and Jungle walk. Phase four and five saw more luxury houses for married couples being built opposite the Langa High School in Washington Street, marked with purple rectangle, named Bulawayo (1936). **Between 1940 and 1941 phases six and seven** saw **Bubana housing** being erected opposite this development. Between 1944 and 1948, the “Old Flats”, see blue square, were built on the eastern end of Washington Street. (Department of Land and Rural Affairs: Chief Directorate national Geo Spatial Information. Detail from photograph 335/ 53 Strip 6 No.6051, c 1953).







Managing a living





Jazz & Dancing in the civic hall



Keeping up traditional festivals



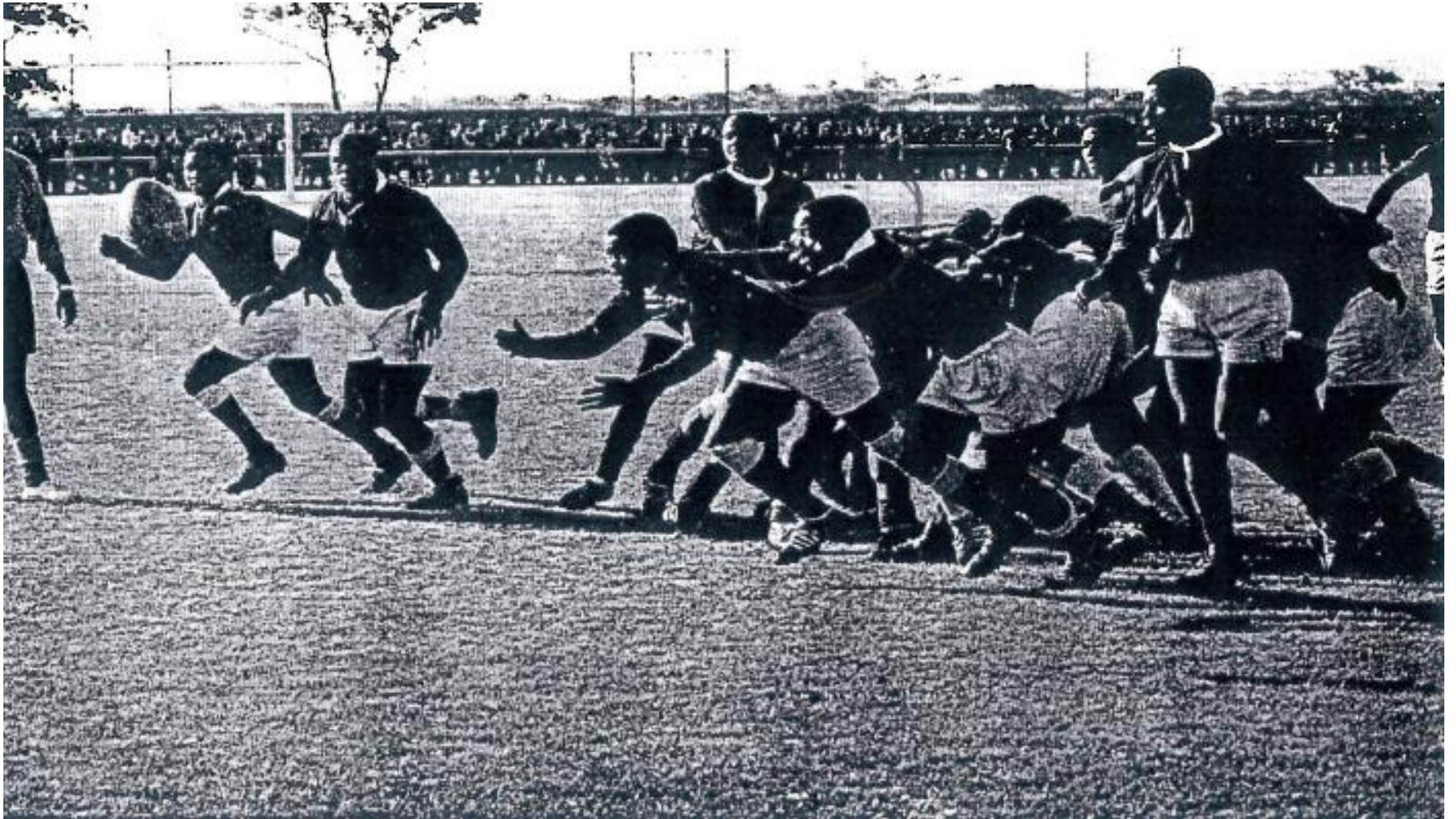
Sports



Tembu Cricket Club, Langa



Rugby



VIGILANCE COMMITTEE and ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS 1947 LANGA



Sitting Left to Right: **BARNEY W. MTYALA**, **M. MATOMANA**, **B. NTSHINGA**, **A. BUTI**, **E. MZA**
Secretary Vice Chairman Chairman Treasurer Asst. Secretary
 Standing Left to Right: **T. LWANA**, **S. MPAXA**, **J. NGWEVELA**, **S. SIFUMBA**, **S. GQWETA**, **J. JAMA**, **W. MVIKV ENI**
Adv. Bd. Adv. Bd. Adv. Bd. Adv. Bd. Adv. Bd. Adv. Bd. Adv. Bd.

VAN KALKER
WOODSTOCK

Review of Criteria used and Values involved in the state led Determination of Significances

The Nara Document on Authenticity recognizes that “judgments about values attributed to cultural properties as well as the credibility of related information sources may differ from culture to culture, and even within the same culture. It is thus not possible to base judgments of values and authenticity within fixed criteria. On the contrary, the respect due to all cultures requires that heritage properties must be considered and judged within the cultural contexts to which they belong” (Nara, 1994:47).

The Burra Charter goes further, defining various types of values and it places a greater emphasis on a relativistic approach referred to as value-based or critical conservation approach allowing more appropriate responses to significance based on national and local rather than international opinion (Burra, 1999:12).

In South African heritage management, these concepts are implicitly recognised in the 1999 NHR Act in the processes of assessment of cultural significance which is defined as “historical, architectural, aesthetic, environmental, social or technical/ scientific value or significance”: Section 3 (3)

The “themes,” which were constructed by the authorities, meaning the state instruments (Cape Town City Council and SAHRA), informed the criteria which were used to establish values by which the articulation and assessment of significance was determined. In other words, “government control and oppression”; “creating a living environment” and the “liberation struggle” were the criteria used to inform the values by which significances was determined by CCT and SAHRA.

A review of the Sean Field oral histories, which was undertaken as part of the heritage identification process to establish values and significances, understandably reflects responses with socio-political issues being of primary concern at the time. Being the very first opportunity for the residents of Langa to have had their voices heard and documented with their interests in mind, one can sense the anger and frustration in many of the respondent's interviews. Stories of inhumane treatment, pass controls, forced removals, humiliation, lack of privacy and space and general hardship are common themes.

This response and values expressed was very typical of most of the interviews during the 2001/2 oral history survey which was meant to inform criteria to establish what the people find significant in Langa and which, it is contended, informed the Phaphamani report. However, if we go back to the first section of this chapter and re-read the Phaphamani heritage report on values, it states that “in this context social value is about collective attachment to places that embody meanings important to a community” (emphasis added).

In the same section the Phaphamani report referred to Cultural Significance as “any place [which] tends to describe the value that the place has to *the community* and that includes the social, historical, aesthetic, scientific, spiritual or religious importance of the place for the present, past or future generations” (emphasis added). The report describes these as “assessing criteria” which was used to determine significances in the Langa heritage landscape.

The problem faced with here is, with reference to Harries 2010, Mason 2006, Hobsbawm 1983 et al, **to what extent can we confidently say that the values on which the criteria were based to identify significance during the official heritage surveys in Langa, was relevant. Indeed, it is clear that the questions posed to the “community” during the oral history project referred to, had to cover such a wide range of topics that they were not very helpful in determining values related to the built environment. This fact was confirmed during a review of the transcripts of the oral history records undertaken by Sean Field in 2002. In these transcripts, Beyond the walls: Sites and Stories in Langa of 2002, only two hostel residents’ interviews were captured.**

As Field points out “Langa provides a plethora of examples such as homes, schools and churches where significant political or cultural events occurred. But the ‘will to remember’ in working-class communities is shaped by contestations created by the scarcity of housing, jobs and basic infrastructure.

These contestations are exacerbated by an under-funded heritage sector and competing views about what should be publicly represented and for whose benefit. **The politics of memory and representation are therefore not merely about empirical reproduction, but involve “debate over the production of pasts” (Field quoting Witz, 2003:7).**

Field suggests that “insufficient representation with regards to the migrant hostel dwellers took place” (Field, Interview, 2014). In fact, among twenty interviewees at the time, only two residents from hostels were interviewed by Field in 2002.

As part of the official heritage survey a Langa Heritage Reference Group was established which consisted of “community leaders and elders from Langa, and officials from the development facilitation Unit and Heritage Resources section of the City of Cape Town City Council” (Field, 2007:34). The establishment of a “Heritage Reference Group” by CCT to assist in identifying the significances in Langa, led to limited layered meanings (thinning of content) and in effect could be seen as a top-down form of Authorised Heritage Discourse being acted out.

If heritage is “...that part of the past that we select in the present for contemporary purposes, whether these be for economic or cultural (including political and social factors) and choose to bequeath to a future, whatever posterity may choose to do with it” (Ashworth, Graham and Tunbridge, 2007”35), then how we go about determining what is selected in the present becomes a critical matter.

For this very reason it was important to establish what was meant by the use of the term “community”, because throughout all the official documents, surveys and recordings reference are made to a single community. It became clear to me that the residents of Langa were perceived by the authorities as a homogeneous “community” with a single culture, value system and sense of what is significant.

Field further commented that he believes that “a certain bias towards house dwellers as opposed to hostel dwellers was present” (Field, Interview, 2014). Field’s observations and comments, supported by the oral history recordings referred to, certainly suggests that certain assumptions could have been made and that a level of “top-down” decision making may have been acted out during the 2001/2 heritage identification process by the authorities. If this was not the case, surely much broader opinion among the various hostel residents would have been elicited to have arrived at the high “Grade I” level of significance.

Determining the Hostel Communities Values and Significances

Since the main interest here lies in exploring tendencies in layers of cultural meaning within the Langa communities in terms of the personal, public, unofficial, “community” values, the two interview groups are “community-based”. Evidence obtained from the “community” interviews are used to compare with the official evaluations allowing analysis of findings to arrive at a conclusion on the concerns raised in the introduction being: to establish whether conservation is an appropriate response in an environment of material, economic and social needs and if so to what extent? Also of interest, is whether the communities agree with the evaluation of significance ascribed to the hostels? Do they understand and agree with the way “their” heritage has been articulated?

On this issue, both the Phaphamani Heritage Report (2002) and Mamphela Ramphele’s research on life in the migrant labour hostels (1993:139) pointed out various problematics which affected outcome during their respective research. The Phaphamani report suggested “due to the fact that the “community” were not yet familiar with the activities of SAHRA caused them to be skeptical regarding participation” (2002:1).

A further problematic also pointed out in the same report, referred to internal political struggles which divided the people on issues. Similar power relations was also discovered by Ramphele who noted that: “those not chosen [to participate in her research] were bitter, and in one area where the local chairperson of the women’s committee was overlooked, used her influence to put a spanner in the works, resulting in a much lower response rate than had been expected” (Ramphele, 1993:139). **In some hostels the response rate was as low as 1%. The residents blamed the Hostel Dwellers Association, which had strong political associations, for poor organization and problems involving some executive members.** Talk of campaigning by local town committees against the HDA led to threats of violence against the research team which had to withdraw on occasion (Ramphele, 1993:140).

It is for these reasons that this survey deliberately used no political, ideological or official heritage jargon in order to achieve its aims in finding out what the people of Langa really value about the hostels, if anything at all.

Interview groups

1. Individuals of Langa Communities' Heritage Bodies/ Organizations interviewed:

A sample group of six individuals who are or were involved in such bodies or cultural projects were selected. There were two persons who served on the original Langa Heritage Foundation and another who represents the Langa Museum, a past representative of the Hostels Committee, one Trade Unionist and a cultural worker who have been actively involved in community projects. The two people from this group interviewed who participated in the oral history project by Sean Field in 2001/2 both served on the Langa Heritage Foundation.

The reason for not engaging the Heritage Bodies and Organizations more directly or extensively on a “official basis,” but rather to **focus on individuals**, was that I realised during reviewing reports such as those referred to, and early exploratory interviews, that such bodies are to a large extent part of the “establishment” or state-led heritage management institutions with particular personal or political goals and aims, and therefore ideologically driven which detracts from what this research project was trying to achieve.

2. Langa Communities/ Residents interviewed:

A sample group of nine residents, all of whom reside in one of the various hostels, were interviewed. No more than two participants from one type of hostel were interviewed in order to gain a broad spectrum of opinions which would be representative of most of the hostel types and circumstances.

To refer to the Langa “community” in the singular as a homogeneous society which shares the same values would be misleading. No less than eleven different religious denominations are active in Langa with as many church buildings present. This does not take into account less formal or traditional religious practices which may exist. Other forms of pluralisation also exist beyond formal structures of definition such as those referred to by Wilson and Mafeje in the previous chapter. Ramphele also observed similar divisions which clearly indicate that Langa is made up of various communities with different values and class distinctions.

Ramphele, also pointed out the **divide between the permanent residents living in the married quarters and the migrant labourers of the hostels. Special names were created among the residents to refer to the various “types” of residents having to live within the engineered system. Amakhaya for instance referred to “home” people who come from a place near your own.** Many migrant labourers who refused mentoring (to save money for annual visits home) or control, surrendered to alcoholism or to other bad habits and social behavior due to the lack of contact with their rural base and the family, became known as amarusha (lost to Xhosa customs). Among these men there were those who became be tshiphe (completely lost to the city) (Ramphele,1993:58).

From this I presume that some residents of Langa regarded the rural value system as something to uphold as opposed to the values to be found in the urban environment of the city which were seen as negative. As Kqwevela pointed out: “I used to go to the hostels as a child to find out information on cultural things”, and “youngsters did not roam around because we were family units”. “You were kept disciplined. I miss the discipline which used to be present” (Kqwevela, interview, 02.12.2013).

During my engagement with the different communities, it became evident that the social structure of Langa changed much over the years with many “newcomers”, as expressed by a resident in the special Quarters:

“In the old days it was like a big family, everyone knew each other. I knew who lived behind every ‘door’, not like today” (Ndaba, interview 12.09.2013).

In attempting to establish what the residents value about Langa in general the following responses are summarised: “friendship; togetherness; shared experiences; close to everything; near transport; sport; music; good sense of orientation; can see Table Mountain; binds everything together such as ancestors; family and friends; provides identity; sense of belonging; Washington Street”.

Which hostel/ barracks building do you like and why? Herewith some responses received:

- “The Barracks and Old Flats” (Kqwevela, interview, 2013).
- “The Barracks for me, because of the open courtyard space. And, it will be easy to make bigger” (Limba, interview, 2013).
- “Old Flats, affordable, one room for one person” (Makhala, interview, 2013).
- “None especially, all the same to me” Malefane, interview, 2013).
- “Washington Street, old history” (Malusi, interview, 2013)
- “The Zones to Mendi Street is home for me, I can talk to the ancestors. You feel at home because your people know you here” (Maqwaca, interview 12.09.2013).
- “Old Flats, they are strong” (Mnukwa, interview, 2013).
- “New flats, it’s clean and safe” (MNYamtse, interview, 2013).
- “The history of the place, it provides identity” (Mqikela, interview, 2013).
- “Special Quarters, because it accommodates the family” (Ndaba, interview, 2013).
- “Barracks, because of its history of the origins of Langa” (Ndlela, interview, 2013).
- “The hostels because it is part of the development history of the country” (Nolutshungu, interview, 2014).
- “Old Flats, all the political history” (Ntsomi, interview, 2013).
- “The new flats, enough space, kitchen, toilet and so on” (Nyati, interview, 2013).
- “Old Flats, lots of family history memories there. Also the Makana square, Beer hall and the Civi hall” (Soha, interview, 2013).

Some interviewees referred to Langa as KwaLanga, Kwa being Xhosa for 'belong', as opposed to E'Khayelitsha, 'E' meaning there. This is a clear indication of a sense of belonging and pride of place which exists among some residents.

With regard to my concern whether the residents of Langa feel that the process followed during the determination of significances was adequate, with particular reference to community involvement, the feedback received was that not enough people participated. This sentiment was among others conveyed by a resident who participated in the Sean Field oral history project (during which 20 people were interviewed of whom 2 were hostel residents) and who served on the "Langa Heritage Reference Group", which later became the Langa Heritage Forum. It was clear that this applied to both that and the study. "We were called together in the hall, but too few people participated" (Kgwevela, interview, 02.12.2013).

Focusing on the hostel's significance specifically, it was established that half of the interviewees felt that the buildings were somewhat special for associative reasons such as: personal meaning and identity through family histories and memories as expressed. On the questions: what do these buildings mean to you? Are they special? The following are some of the responses received:

- "It reminds me of the migrant workers who lived here. They are bit special" (Kgwevela, interview, 02.12.2013).
- "Remind me of my father who worked here. No, not special" (Limba, interview, 2013).
- "No, not anymore, falling apart. No special meaning" (Makhala, interview, 2013).
- "Just a place to stay. Not special" (Malefane, interview 12.09.2013).
- "Old history, 1960's shooting here. Yes, the Old Flats is special" (Malusi, 12.09.2013)
- "My uncle lived in the hostels and I grew up with children from the hostels. Telling us what life was like for migrant workers in those days. Yes, they are special" (Magwaca, interview 12.09.2013).
- "Yes, they are safe" (Mnukwa, interview, 2013).
- "No, too old" (Mnyamtse, interview 12.09.2013).
- "Accommodated the migrant labour single males. Families were not allowed access to their fathers. No, not special, only family memories" (Mgikela, interview, 12.09.2013).
- "No, not anymore. Too small" (Ndaba, interview, 2013).
- "Its home. Yes, that is special" (Ndlela, interview, 2013).
- "Yes, they are special, lots of memories" (Nolutshungu, interview, 2014).
- "They will always remind me of the bad old days. No, not special" (Ntsomi, interview, 12.09.2013).
- "No meaning. Not special" (Nyati, interview 12.09.2013).
- "Related to people coming from the homelands, Transkei and Ciskei. Also, extended family lived there. Yes, the Old flats is special" (Soha, interview 04.09.2013)

In terms of intrinsic architectural value of the building fabric itself, two participants' responses summarises the general opinions received:

- **“Safe, no cold, no fires, built stronger” (Malusi, interview 12.09.2013).** Malusi have been living in the new units since 2007 after having lived in the “Old Flats” for 35 years.
- **Another resident commented that they are “strong, safe, secure, wind tight” (Mnukwa, Interview 12.09.2013).**

These architectural qualities have not been observed before: in fact, Julian Cook, who undertook some work on the hostels in the past states: “Hostels are an unusual topic for a journal of architecture. They are a negative element in the urban landscape and without architectural quality” (Cook, 2007:64).

Contrary to this, **the quality of materials used and the strength of the old hostel structures (certainly basic architectural values) were specifically pointed out to me as aspects highly valued by most interviewees. These qualities were constantly compared with the new flats, built during the past decade or so which, according to them, are inferior in this respect. This is indeed a negative commentary on contemporary low cost housing building standards.**

With regards to aesthetic values, on the question whether the buildings are nice to look at, eleven out of fifteen residents replied “no”. I have to agree with the majority of the residents interviewed, not having observed any aspect which could be regarded as aesthetically pleasing or vaguely interesting about the hostel buildings. The only exception is perhaps the “Old Flats” which poses a sense of scale, rhythm and presence with landmark qualities. However, these qualities are overpowered by the lack of utility and ability to accommodate. Eight of the interviewees did indicate that they like the “Old Flats”.

Most residents interviewed had some idea of the historic and identity value of the hostels in relation to migrant labour history with many references to family members who used to live in the hostels in the old days. Some interviewees also referred to political violence during the apartheid era.

On the question posed whether the hostels/ barracks buildings may be demolished to build new structures, six respondents out of fifteen responded “no”. However, of these six, one suggested that the “Old Flats” should remain; another that one should be retained as a museum; another that all the flats should be turned into 2-and 3- roomed units; another that they should be renovated and improved; another that as long as there is a place to stay while they build new buildings and yet another was concerned about losing the safety.

The residents' reference to the hostels vary from calling them eMaholoweni (Xhosa for hollow place/ hall); Amaholo (Hostels); Kwa Maxhaseni (people from the Eastern Cape) to just calling them hostels or by the name of the particular hostel, ie. North Barracks, Old Flats, etc.

It was evident that the majority of residents interviewed would not object to the demolition of most of the hostels as long as the people have the security of a home while new improved structures are being built. **Nine out of fifteen residents indicated this tendency.** Another aspect which was articulated in no uncertain terms was that the **residents will not be satisfied with poor quality materials and the lack of space and privacy.**

The sentiments expressed with regard to which hostel building the residents prefer and want to see conserved or restored, were mostly related to their own hostel. These responses could merely be as a result of familiarity linked with the security of what they know and have experience of. **However, the Old hostels, which are ungraded, were mentioned and praised more than any other structures in Langa by the interviewees. Specific mention was made to its strength of materials used, quality construction which is wind tight, waterproof and safe.**

Regarding the residents' social lived experience of the hostels, many memories were shared. On the question: what is your experience of these buildings? The following are some of the answers received:

- "Just a place to stay really" (Nyati, interview, 2013).
- "Despite the conditions, the men made the best of it, they were happy. They would slaughter a cow in the new year and share with us. Invokes personal memories. I remember going over there to sell hobs" (Nolutshungu, interview 09.01.2014).
- "Extended family from home utilised them because the family houses were small. Memories of family living there. Amasoka, not married people lived there" (Soha, interview 04.09.2013).
- "I lived here for 35 years, lots of history here for me" (Malusi, interview 12.09.2013).
- "Stayed with my uncle who was not registered here, had to sleep under the bed due to little space. Don't go there anymore. Depressing, I don't want to live in the past. Also reminds me of how badly African people were treated in the apartheid system" (Ntsoni, interview, 12.09.2013).
- "Reminds me of my father who used to live here" (Limba, interview 12.09.2013). "To me it reminds me of the divorce between my mother and father" (Mgikela, interview 12.09.2013).
- "Our fathers stayed here. Mother came to visit for three weeks" (Ndelela, interview 12.09.2013).
- "My uncles lived there. Grew up together with the children from the hostels. Also, they tell us something about what life was like for migrant workers" (Maqwaca, interview, 2013).
- "No special meaning for me" Makhala, interview, 2013).
- "It was just a place for bachelors" (Malefane, interview, 2013).
- "Just a place to stay. No water inside, too little space with a shared toilet" (Mnyamtse, interview, 2013).
- "Yes, it's the migrant labour history. Youngsters did not roam around" (Kqwevela, interview, 2013).
- "Lived in the Old Flats for 30 years. They are safe, secure and wind tight. Strong" (Mnukwa, interview, 2013).
- "Our fathers lived in them" (Ndaba, 2013).

In summary of the communities values determined in this study, I discovered associative values, intrinsic architectural values, historic values and social values through lived experiences. This is somewhat contrary to the official assessment which referred mostly to socio-political and historic values with reference to the hostels.

By way of comparing the values expressed during the Field oral history project in 2002 with the tendencies of values expressed during the 2013 study discussed above, herewith an extract from the transcripts of the two hostel residents interviewed by Field during the oral history recordings. Although they were not specific about the issues this study is concerned with regarding heritage values of the hostels in particular, they do provide a sense of living conditions and life-style in the hostels:

“There were contrasting conditions between the hostels in the Zones and the main barracks. This interviewee described the hostels in the Zones in the following way”:

Mr S. Mxolose (Cllr.), born 1965 in Guguletu, 34 years of age at the time of the interview:

- For instance the zones, it was just a house with rooms and we shared the dining room. We shared everything, even the rooms, in the rooms there were 3 beds, those beds were owned by men and of course men grew to families. So we used to stay like that. The hostel that still resembles those is zone 1, it is still like the ones we used to stay in and they are still staying in the same condition that we used to (Mxolose, interviewed by Field, 2002).

“Whereas the Main barracks were”:

- Wow! It was worse, it was far better in the zones. Even there for instance the homeboys stay together. Like my people were 74, 78, 80 and 84, we knew those people were coming from our area. But the conditions were worse than those cause you stay in one big hall. There was bed up, there was bed below. The situation was worse because there was no form of privacy. Even though there was no privacy in that other place at least there was homes. Here everyone is staying in that big hall. For instance, my father he got a bed and I used to sleep just in front of his bed because that's where I slept with my brothers. It was better in the zones the toilets were inside, now I have to go some distance to the communal block toilets and the showers on the other side. Cooking was done outside, then they were using three-legged pots, these blacklegged pots and they were cooking outside (Mxolose, interviewed by Field, 2002).

Mr H Mahamba, born 1937 in Mbogotwana, 47 years old at the time of the interview:

“The flats were described in the following manner”:

- OK, in the new flats, first of all...there's 16 people in the hostel. The elect one man and they can call that man sibanda. If someone done something wrong, he will call the meeting and first of all we sit together...everytime someone have to clean the room at such and such a time and plus the toilet and all that, so if he do not do that I'm going to call the meeting. A charge will be so much, also controlling of noise, no noise after 10pm all those kinds of things (Mahamba, Interviewed by Field, 2002).

These two transcripts extracts are typical of the type of interviews on oral histories which were conducted during 2002 by Sean Field. It is however evident that the interviewees gave little or no indication that they value or regard the hostel buildings in any positive way. The Field oral history report nevertheless, recommended that: “The site identifications of the Heritage Reference Group are confirmed”; “the identified sites need to be protected and conserved” and that the identified sites are of profound significance to the community, especially older generations” (Field, 2002:31). The need for further research was also identified and recommended in the report.

Debating Heritage Values and Significances

- **Davies posed critical questions** in a paper entitled *Black Heritage in South Africa: Issues and Dilemmas* by asking “**why would blacks, emerging from an experience of oppression wish to conserve fabric [such as the Langa hostels] that illustrates and symbolizes their past lack of control and humiliation?**” He further points out “**the fact that these areas were the products of outsider repression and exploitation, produces a whole series of difficult questions on the appropriateness of designating these areas**” (Davies, 2001:7).
- **These concerns raised by Davies are being echoed in international heritage discourse through a renewed interest in “working class peoples” heritage which has been significantly neglected within heritage research and practice** (Shackel, Smith and Campbell, 2001:291).
- **“Heritage is not a thing with defined meanings and values, but an ‘inherently political and discordant’ practice that performs the cultural ‘work’ of the present. It can be utilised by different intent-groups and individuals for different purposes and with varying degrees of hegemony and legitimacy**” (Smith, 2006:11).
- **Logan and Smith states in the foreword of *Heritage, Labour and the Working Classes* (2011) “It is time to look again at the contestation that inevitably surrounds the identification and evaluation of heritage and to find new ways to elucidate the many layers of meaning that heritage places and intangible cultural expressions have acquired”. They also point out that:**

It is time, too, to recognize more fully that heritage protection does not depend on top-down interventions by governments or the expert actions of heritage industry professionals, but must involve local communities and communities of interest. It is imperative that the values and practices of communities, together with traditional management systems, are fully understood, respected, encouraged and accommodated in management plans and policy documents if heritage resources are to be sustained into the future. Communities need to have a sense of ‘ownership’ of their heritage; this reaffirms their worth as a community, their ways of going about things, their ‘culture’ (Smith, Shackel and Campbell, 2011:xv).

Without critical engagements by communities on issues of heritage, it is clear that only the officially constructed national narratives will prevail causing a superficial thinning of content and leading to what Samuel (1994) referred to as “commercial misrepresentation that dishonestly stands in for a real history” instead of being “a theatre of memory where active, complex and nuanced representations of working class life have contemporary resonance” (quoted in Smith, Shackel and Campbell, 2011:3); (see also Witz, 2011).

Conclusion

This case study, in which tendencies were determined, was initiated by asking some critical questions about heritage and its meaning within the context of communities in material need, in relation to authorised assignation of significance with particular reference to the Langa hostels. During the research, archival documents were examined to ascertain criteria used and the process followed in order to reconstruct the official heritage-making process which led to the “Grade I” status by SAHRA in 2004.

Published literature on community and working class heritage was surveyed to establish firm theoretical ground with particular reference to the process of determining values and significances. This showed that subaltern heritages such as working class heritage has been largely neglected or, worse, being choreographed to fit into an “Authorised Heritage Discourse” (see Smith, 2006), such as national narratives.

Recently, a more critical approach referred to as “critical heritage studies” (Harrison, 2010) argued for the “broadening of heritage analysis” since it needs to be understood “that heritage ‘does’ things in society” (Smith, Shackel and Campbell, 2011) this means:

It requires **embracing the dissonant and not simply acknowledging the multiplicity of values and cultural meanings that heritage places and practices may have, but also understanding their wider social consequences and ideological significances (Smith and Shackel, 2011:4).**

It is in the light of these arguments that I realised the value of seeking out the very contestations in a context as it presents opportunities for new meanings to be revealed allowing more constructive heritage-articulation which goes beyond superficially constructed dominant narratives.

These observations guided me to conduct interviews with a number of communities in Langa on a one-on-one basis to ascertain what they value and find significant regarding one class of artifacts identified earlier as heritage, the hostels.

Two ideas emerged:

One - the majority of interviewees referred to memories of lived experiences or to those of extended family having resided in the various hostels;

Two - a few expressed the wish to see the rehabilitation (renovation & improvement) as opposed to demolition.

However, the opinions of the second group were by far in the minority with most residents being concerned primarily with security, privacy, safety and better utilitarian use. The lack of space, shared ablutions and need for maintenance weaved a common thread of complaints.

After conducting my interviews with members of the hostel communities, **I was under the impression that sentiments must have shifted from residents regarding the hostel buildings with a high degree of value and significance assigned to them during the official survey undertaken a decade ago.**

However, during my interview with Sean Field and after reading his oral history transcripts from 2002, it became clear that my findings in the 2013 survey, which focused on the hostels and its residents, contradict the earlier survey with regards the high significance assigned to the buildings. Because the **interviews done a decade ago were bias towards the house dwellers, few opinions were obtained from the hostel dwellers themselves, which resulted in the incorrect perception created in the SAHRA 2004 Submission which suggests that the residents regard the hostels with a high level of significance.**

Through a series of interviews with residents, it became clear that **an attenuation of content took place during the official process of determining significances in the Langa communities in 2001/2.** This was **probably as a result of a lack of proper “community” engagement, as concerns were expressed in this regard in the 2002 Phaphamani heritage report and by some of my interviewees in 2013.**
Sean Field

also confirmed that a certain bias towards house dwellers were present during the process. One of my interviewees, Nolutshungu, expressly stated: “the councillors praise people who live in houses” (Nolutshungu, interview, 2014). These comments clearly indicates a tendency which cannot be ignored in the overall analysis as it could only have contributed to an incorrect reading of values and significances within the Langa communities.

The method employed, seems to have produced indifferent results with regards to what the communities find important and value most about the hostel buildings. The “strength of the materials” (structural firmness), security, protection against the elements, recalling memories of family members and kinship, as well as a traditional sense of discipline due to togetherness, and linkages to rural traditions which were present in the past in the Langa hostels, surfaced as the most significant qualities associated with the hostels during this study.

This is somewhat contrary to the dominant reference in the official surveys which refer almost solely to the hostels as political space, a place of struggle and of government control and oppression. These values may well also be present, and in my opinion are, but are certainly not all encompassing as expressed in the SAHRA submission of 2004.

This research project indicates tendencies which either shows that the communities of Langa's sentiments have shifted over the past decade for reasons unbeknown (since the interviews by Field) from being predominantly socio-politically charged to a greater focus on immediate concerns of security, materiality and improved utility today. Alternatively, the 2001/2 surveys were too broad in its emphasis and not specific enough to establish the communities' values regarding the built environment, thus enabling SAHRA's and CCT's apparent "top-down" determination of criteria of significance. A further possibility could be the method of enquiry used which produced indifferent results.

This would explain why the values on which the criteria were based to determine significance during the official process in 2001/2 differ from those expressed in this 2013 tendency survey. However, the findings may also indicate the possibility that the way in which the criteria were established in the first instance was indeed based on premature establishment of significance prior to in-depth knowledge of the communities' values. Should this be the case, which the evidence in this study seems to indicate, then I am of the opinion that a level of "top-down" decision making did take place during the determination process.

The core problematic which needs to be resolved in determining heritage values and significances in communities such as Langa rests in the appropriate methodological approach as well as less political involvement by the authorities in the actual process of determination of significance. Independent practitioners should be engaged in this task (which includes the participation process of the communities) without authority interference. In fact, when dealing with vulnerable communities and potentially contested situations, it is my opinion that more than one multi-disciplinary team should be appointed independently to ascertain the communities' values and significances in order to have a measure of quality control and to establish a means of comparison.

In conclusion I would like to briefly revisit my original concerns at the inception of the project to ascertain to what extent these can be answered.

The community engagement leading up to the 2004 SAHRA submission was not ideal. The process followed should have included other layers of meaning less important to the grand politically motivated themes which were prematurely established in my opinion.

The residents do not regard the hostel buildings as such particularly special or important. Associative references, memories of family lived experiences, political history and links to rural culture, can be articulated and memorialized through other means. The architectural significances which the residents have pointed out about the hostels were the strength of materials, safety and firmness of structure which are architectural principles which new structures could provide. Subtle nuances and symbolism such as the notion of the “door” can also find expression through new architecture.

Regarding my concern as to whether social housing could be regarded as heritage, I would postulate that all housing which accommodates the needs of its residents and continues to allow its future occupants to make a home in it, may be regarded as heritage. In the case of the Langa hostels, this notion is clearly not present, or put differently, not exposed in this 2013 study.

Ramphela came to a similar conclusion in her earlier research suggesting that: “they are neither acknowledged as legitimate extensions of the working environment, nor defined as domestic space accessible to the families of those living there” (Ramphela, 1993:4).

The core issues explored here are to what extent conservation of the built form should play a role in communities and environments such as Langa, if at all; whether built form conservation is called for in the midst of pressing social needs; and most importantly, whether it is heritage at all. **Questions such as: whose values and what significance is at stake in conservation efforts in Langa and to what degree were the articulated significances influenced by the residents or controlled by the establishment to suit the national narrative?**

These questions were explored by tracing the criteria used and process followed during the identification and determination of the significance(s) of the hostels by SAHRA; and then, a decade later a reconstruction of the process through archival material and relevant documentation, together with resident interviews, indicated that the process was conceived to conform to an official narrative, reflecting critical assumptions made about values on which criteria were grounded in order to determine significances. **The assumptions that were made and bias that were observed seems to indicate that a fundamentally top-down approach, influencing meaning and the reading of the heritage of Langa was present.**

The problematic identified, is political and methodological of nature. Criteria were prematurely established without an in-depth knowledge of the various communities' values present in Langa which resulted in a deficiency of heritage content to suit an established template. The mere reference to Langa as though it is a singular “community” and the observation that a certain level of bias towards one “community” took place during the official survey, seems to indicate at least two levels of a top-down approach to suit pre-determined ideas about heritage in Langa.

What is argued here is not whether heritage management should play a role in the communities of Langa, or whether heritage significances exist or not, but rather how the significances should be determined to deliver layered meanings. Also, to what extent a preservation approach of treating buildings-as-documents (as opposed to a critical approach which considers peoples' values and what they find significant) should be adopted, is in question.

I am closing with a quote from Waterton and colleagues who suggest: “**that whilst the Burra Charter encourages wider participation in defining meaning in the historic environment, it does not relinquish control from the experts over defining cultural significance, the key measure guiding management decisions.** (Waterton quoted by Gibson 2009:10)









