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## Documenting South Africa's Liberation Movements: Engaging the Archives at the University of Fort Hare

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*"The purpose of studying history is not to deride human action, nor to weep over it or to hate it, but to understand it—and then to learn from it as we contemplate our future."* Nelson Mandela<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

As the machinery of apartheid was being dismantled, agreements were signed in 1992, designating the University of Fort Hare as the custodian of the "Liberation Archives." The Liberation Archives was conceived as a symbolic union of the archival records from several of the political organizations that had helped bring about the overthrow of apartheid. Organizations agreeing to deposit records and artifacts at Fort Hare included the African National Congress (ANC), the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), the Azanian People's Organization (AZAPO), the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania (BCMA), and the New Unity Movement (NUM). The process of locating and gathering archival material from the liberation organizations had begun in the wake of the national government's historic announcement in 1990 to lift the official bans on the ANC and PAC along with restrictions on nearly three dozen other organizations.

The ANC and PAC archives are by far the largest record groups at the University of Fort Hare and are the main focus of this paper. The records of these organizations were also central to the archival initiatives undertaken jointly by the University of

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<sup>1</sup> Crwys-Williams, Jennifer, editor, *In the Words of Nelson Mandela* (Parktown, South Africa: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 35.



Michigan (U-M) and the University of Fort Hare between 1997 and 2000.<sup>2</sup> In addition to discussing the specific projects undertaken by the U-M, the authors address the context of the University of Fort Hare and the impact of apartheid policies on the documentary record in relation to the ANC and PAC, as well as the political, organizational, and archival issues influencing the archives and its relationship to social memory.

The authors of this paper, both archivists at the U-M's Bentley Historical Library, participated in the U-M/Fort Hare joint initiatives. Their roles included developing an archival processing plan for records housed at Fort Hare's Centre for Cultural Studies,<sup>3</sup> consulting on archival issues with Centre administrators and staff, overseeing the processing and preparation of paper-based and electronic finding aids for the Liberation Archives and other record groups at the Centre and at the University of Fort Hare Library, along with other administrative and archival tasks. Between them they made four trips to the University of Fort Hare in support of archival initiatives.

### Politics of Placement

Without an appreciation of the University of Fort Hare's history, the placement of the archives at this relatively remote location would seem unusual. A researcher seeking to locate the archives of the liberation organizations might at first look to one of the larger urban areas such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Pretoria, or to established research universities in South Africa, or in national research centers or museums, for example, the former Robben Island prison (now a national museum), an institution synonymous with Mandela and other imprisoned freedom fighters. Instead, the archival records reside in one of the oldest historically black universities in Southern and Eastern Africa, the

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<sup>2</sup> These archival initiatives were part of a larger effort by the University of Michigan, Michigan State University, and the University of Fort Hare to assess and assist in improving the cultural heritage programs at Fort Hare, including its archival, art, and museum holdings. For the purpose of this paper, the authors will focus only on the archival components of the project. The University of Michigan received funding from the United States Information Agency and from the Kellogg Foundation to support its work with the University of Fort Hare.

<sup>3</sup> The Centre for Cultural Studies is now known as the National Heritage and Cultural Studies Centre, a name change that occurred in September 1998.



University of Fort Hare, found within a remote, rural, and disadvantaged area of the Eastern Cape. The place where the records of liberation are located attests to the bitter legacy of apartheid – an Afrikaans term meaning “apartness” – and becomes, to a certain degree, part of the archival context.

The agreements to place the archives of the liberation movements at the University of Fort Hare were a recognition of the important role the university played as the primary institution of higher education for black South Africans and as the alma mater of many of the leading liberation figures. To a lesser extent, the decision was a repudiation of the South African State Archives Service for its complicity in legitimizing apartheid.<sup>4</sup> Speaking at the opening of the ANC archives, then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, argued that Fort Hare was “incontestably...the natural home” for the archives.<sup>5</sup> In placing the archives at Fort Hare, Nelson Mandela observed that the history of the ANC is “interwoven” with the history of Fort Hare, and for that reason the ANC “resolved to lodge its archives with the University of Fort Hare.”<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere, Mandela spoke of the “immense importance” of the ANC archives:

These archives are the single most complete record of the ANC, especially in the period after its banning in 1960. They are instrumental in documenting the untold history of South Africa....The organization further recognises that the archival material contains the seeds of our new democratic order. A study of the [ANC] comprises an intrinsic part of our understanding of our society, the transition we have recently experienced and what the future may hold. The ANC archives provide a window into this significant period of our country and fills the vacuum in historical continuity.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Kriger, Ethel, “Redressing Apartheid-Engendered Social Ills: A Core Archival Function? Transformation and the Public Archivist in A Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Archivum*, Vol. 45, 2000, p. 140.

<sup>5</sup> Speech of Deputy President Thabo Mbeki at the opening of the ANC archives: University of Fort Hare. March 17, 1996. Cited at [http://www.ufh.ac.za/collections/Library/ANC\\_Materials/Mbeki-speech.htm](http://www.ufh.ac.za/collections/Library/ANC_Materials/Mbeki-speech.htm).

<sup>6</sup> A message from Nelson Mandela on the placement of the archives at the University of Fort Hare. Original document at Fort Hare. Cited at <http://www.si.umich.edu/fort-hare/mandela.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> “Message from President Mandela” in brochure “Inside the ANC Archives” (Johannesburg: African National Congress, ca. 1996).



Clarence Mlandi Makwetu, PAC president, wrote of the reasons why he thought it appropriate to locate PAC's archival records at Fort Hare:

University. From his utterance then, it was clear that this courageous undergraduate was going to make his mark on the history of our liberation movement. It is therefore most appropriate that our historical archives should be lodged with this Centre, above all others.<sup>8</sup>

The decisions by Mandela, Makwetu and other leaders to place the archives of their liberation movements at the University of Fort Hare were politically and historically motivated. They recognized the central role that the university played in nurturing black African leaders and rewarded Fort Hare with what could be viewed as part of the founding papers of the new South Africa in the post-apartheid period. Certainly their decisions to locate the archives at Fort Hare in a research center focusing on the study of cultural heritage of black South Africans was also an attempt to memorialize the liberation struggle and create a monument to those who participated in the conflict. As the director of the University of Fort Hare's Centre for Cultural Studies wrote:

The historical anti-apartheid role of Fort Hare's student body, which included President Mandela, Robert Sobukwe, and other leaders of the National Struggle for Liberation justify locating this important Archive on the Alice campus. The Archive will function, not only as a major resource for rewriting the history of South Africa, but will be a monument and a record to all who lost their lives in the Struggle.<sup>9</sup>

The archives become a place not only to document South Africa's "untold history," but also a center to support a more inclusive writing of the nation's history as it moves from a society that privileged one group over another to a "non-racial, non-sexist democracy" envisioned by Mandela.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Clarence Mlandi Makwetu: a life of struggle and sacrifice* (Fort Hare: Makwetu Centre, 1999).

<sup>9</sup> *Clarence Mlandi Makwetu: a life of struggle and sacrifice* (Fort Hare: Makwetu Centre, 1999). Among the other significant leaders educated at Fort Hare are Oliver Tambo and Govan Mbeki of the ANC; Mangosuthu Buthe of the Inkatha Freedom Party; Enoch Mphahlele, the first African member of the Kenya Legislative Council; the former president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe; the former prime minister of Lesotho, Mosiuoa Lekota; and the former prime minister of Uganda, Pwarranga Mulikisa.

<sup>10</sup> "Mandela: from President 'Madiba' to hero 'Mandela'" in brochure "Inside the ANC Archives" (Johannesburg: African National Congress, ca. 1999).



The...founding President of PAC, Comrade Robert Sobukwe, as a student leader at Fort Hare, made a profound impact when he, with great passion and dynamism, attacked the white paternalism of the then hierarchy of the University. From his utterance then, it was clear that this courageous undergraduate was going to make his mark on the history of our liberation movement. It is therefore most appropriate that our historical archives should be lodged with this Centre, above all others.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Cited at <http://www.si.mich.edu/fort-hare/makwetu.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Cited at <http://www.ufh.ac.za/collections/NAHECS/Liberation/liberation.html>. Among the other significant leaders educated at Fort Hare are Oliver Tambo and Govan Mbeki of the ANC; Mangosuthu Buthelezi of the Inkatha Freedom Party; Eluid Mathu, the first African member of the Kenya Legislative Council; the former president of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe; the former prime minister of Lesotho, Ntsu Mokhehle; and the former prime minister of Uganda, Fwanyanga Mulikita.

<sup>10</sup> "Message from President Mandela" in brochure "Inside the ANC Archives" (Johannesburg: African National Congress, ca. 1996).



## The University of Fort Hare

The campus of the University of Fort Hare is situated in the town of Alice, along the Tyume River in the rural area of South Africa's Eastern Cape. The town is named for the second daughter of Queen Victoria, and the fort, which gave the university its name, honored John Hare, Lieutenant-Governor of the Eastern Province. The University of Fort Hare, established as the South African Native College during the First World War, is a microcosm of the history and turmoil of South Africa.<sup>11</sup> Its "chequered history," noted Oliver Tambo, the leader of the ANC-in-exile, is "a mirror of the struggles of the oppressed people" in South Africa.<sup>12</sup> The roots of its founding by Scottish missionaries and black educationalists reflected the competing objectives of colonialism and self-determination. An incubator of African nationalism, Fort Hare educated an unparalleled number of black leaders and played a key role in the liberation struggle. The university suffered a fate similar to most African institutions during apartheid when the government extended "Bantu Education" policies to higher education. These policies were meant to take away local autonomy from historically black colleges and universities in favor of state control. The policies transformed Fort Hare from alumnus Nelson Mandela's description as "a beacon for African scholars from all over Southern Central and Eastern Africa," to secondary status as a regional tribal college.<sup>13</sup> Under Bantu administration, admission was restricted primarily to Xhosa-speaking students from the homelands of Transkei and Ciskei.<sup>14</sup> From 1960 until the end of apartheid, Fort Hare endured a steady descent from historic institution to historically disadvantaged institution.

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<sup>11</sup> The South African Native College was affiliated with the University of South Africa until 1951, when it was designated as the University College of Fort Hare and affiliated with Rhodes University. In 1960, administration resided with the Ministry of Bantu Education. In 1970, it gained nominal autonomy as the University of Fort Hare under Ciskei homeland government jurisdiction. Sean Morrow and Khayaletu Gxabalashe, "The Records of the University of Fort Hare," *History in Africa*, Vol. 27, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> "A Message from O. R. Tambo: Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare." Original at the University of Fort Hare. Cited at <http://www.si.umich.edu/fort-hare/tambo.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Mandela, Nelson, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994), p. 43.

<sup>14</sup> Ajayi, J. F. Ade, and Lameck K. H. Goma and G. Ampah Johnson, *The African Experience with Higher Education* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1996), p. 36.



Outside of some general histories and specialized studies, Fort Hare's own history is "remarkably underdeveloped."<sup>15</sup> The university has more prominence in autobiographies, such as those of faculty member Z. K. Matthews and alumnus Nelson Mandela. Even the archives of the University of Fort Hare itself are incomplete and decentralized, thus preventing a more comprehensive study of the university's history. In order to recapture some of its past, the university has sought to exploit the liberation organizations' archives. These archives have restorative potential and are a source of empowerment for the university as it struggles to overcome the inequities created by apartheid. In recent years, instabilities stemming from declining enrollment and charges of fiscal mismanagement have made the post-apartheid transition even more difficult. Critical self-assessments and a new administration have launched a strategic plan seeking to restore Fort Hare to prominence.<sup>16</sup> The archives are an important part of this strategic plan.

## Sense of Place

The University of Fort Hare is in the heart of the area historically inhabited by the Xhosa people, who were among the first to bear the brunt of the westward colonial expansion that in a nod to western historiography, is inextricably linked to the establishment of a permanent outpost on the Cape of Good Hope by the Dutch East India Company in 1652. The military fortifications erected in Alice coincided with the exertion of imperial control following Britain's seizure of the colony from the Dutch in the aftermath of the French Revolution. The colonial expansion tensions gave rise to the distinctive population of current South Africa: the Dutch-related Afrikaners with their unique Afrikaans language and culture, the English-speakers from the British commonwealth, and the various tribes native to South Africa, each with their own language.

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<sup>15</sup> Morrow and Gxabalashe, "The Records of the University of Fort Hare."

<sup>16</sup> Fort Hare's *Strategic Plan 2000* is available online at <http://www.ufh.ac.za>.



To the casual visitor to Fort Hare, there are no outward indications of the university's prominent role in the struggle for liberation. The campus is largely devoid of memorials or monuments. Among the few memorials found on campus are the Historical Monuments Commission tablets affixed to the remains of the Fort Hare military fortifications, which were erected between 1847 and 1883 as part of the British colonial defenses during the frontier wars with the Xhosa chiefdoms. The tablets themselves are representative of the area and its culture, containing terse description in three languages: English and Afrikaans side by side—and Xhosa beneath the two "colonial" languages. One campus area that is notably lacking in memorials or plaques is the quiet plaza symbolically known as "Freedom Square." Surrounded by the Italianate buildings that comprised the original campus and memorialized only in collective memory, Freedom Square was the site of numerous political rallies and was commonly trod upon by generations of students and faculty involved in the struggle for liberation. It is perhaps a part of the landscape history that Kenneth Foote identifies among the forces that shape a society's view of its past.<sup>17</sup> The only memorials to the University of Fort Hare's pivotal role in the struggle to overthrow apartheid are the archives of the liberation movements. The archives detail little of the university's particular history but instead illustrate achievements of many alumni as well as the larger struggle endured by its generations of students, faculty, and the majority of South Africa's population.

Once part of the Ciskei homeland, the region that is home to Fort Hare is beset by high unemployment and an illiteracy rate near 50 percent. For most in this region, English and Afrikaans are not their native languages. Electricity is lacking in large sections of the area and even those that have electricity often find the service unreliable.<sup>18</sup> The socio-economic environment is part of the context in which the archives of the liberation organizations should be read. This terrain is where archivists, ethnographers,

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<sup>17</sup> Foote, Kenneth E., "To Remember and Forget: Archives, Memory, and Culture," *American Archivist* Vol. 53, Summer 1990, pp. 378–392.

<sup>18</sup> Addressing the issue of climate control in South African archives, Sandra Rowoldt notes that the nation faces "diminishing energy resources, the prospect of ever increasing energy costs, and certainly in the Eastern Cape, the unpredictable continuity of energy supply." Rowoldt, Sondra, "Going Archivally Green:



anthropologists, historians and others must converge to develop a common language and shared understandings. Given this set of realities, the population surrounding Fort Hare appears unlikely to yield many eager users of the archives. According to a 1996 study, only 8.8 percent of the South African population use libraries, a figure significantly skewed by higher usage in developed areas.<sup>19</sup> With only a small percentage of library users among the South African population, it is safe to assume that the percentage of archive patrons is even lower. Can one infer then that the archives at Fort Hare would have limited value to the area residents? In terms of physically visiting and conducting scholarly research within the archives, perhaps that is a fair assumption. However, if Mandela's observation rings true, that "ordinary South Africans are determined that the past be known, the better to ensure that it is not repeated," then the statistics are irrelevant when measured against the meaning of the archives.<sup>20</sup> The records serve a symbolic purpose, an idea well articulated by the leaders of the liberation movements when they placed them at Fort Hare. Further, the argument of the archives' value might carry more weight when viewed against the recent efforts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to redress the past within the space of social memory. Although archives may be an unfamiliar concept for a people with a strong oral tradition, the power of memory and the spirit of reconciliation are not. As Antjie Krog writes, it is through the "widest possible compilation of people's perceptions, stories, myths, and experiences" that memory is restored and a new humanity fostered. The Commission's search for this wide truth is "perhaps justice in its deepest sense."<sup>21</sup>

## Politics of Remembering and Forgetting

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Implications of Doing it Naturally in Southern African Archives and Libraries." *South African Journal of Library and Information Science*, Vol. 66, No. 4, December 1998, p. 145.

<sup>19</sup> Mostert, B. J., and W. M. Vermuelen, "Community Libraries: The Concept and its Application by the Pinetown Public Library," *South African Journal of Library and Information Science*, Vol. 66, No. 1, March 1998, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Crwys-Williams, editor, *In the Words of Nelson Mandela*, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> Krog, Antjie, *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa* (New York: Times Books, 1998) pp. 21-22.



The conflict of cultures ultimately leading to the system of apartheid was exacerbated by the discovery of gold and diamonds in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the crude economics predicated on the need for inexpensive and controllable labor for the extractive mining operations. Unlike the colonial plundering of the Congo in the 19<sup>th</sup> century popularly recounted by Adam Hochschild in *King Leopold's Ghost*, the native population of South Africa did not endure the physical holocaust experienced in the Congo. Instead of the large-scale extermination in the Congo, the South African native population was systematically marginalized and disenfranchised through the unique colonialism of apartheid. The politics of remembering and forgetting in South Africa are similar to the situation in the Congo. In the Congo, state records were reportedly burned for eight days in Brussels.<sup>22</sup> As the beginning of a new political order in South Africa was becoming evident, the records of the old regime were subject to massive “unauthorized destruction.” *The Sunday Times* (London) reported a security officer stating:

It was wholesale destruction. At John Vorster square alone something like 35,000 files were dumped. We lost count of how many shredders burnt out in the process, but the beer was flowing and the fires were burning high at the South Africa Police rugby ground at Arthur Bloch Park.<sup>23</sup>

In South Africa, the state archives helped legitimize and sustain apartheid rule through “silences” and “systematic forgetting.” Opposition to apartheid, the “simmering memory of resistance and struggle,” in the words of South African archivist Verne Harris, “was forced into informal spaces and the deeper reaches of the underground.”<sup>24</sup> The liberation movements lived a shadowy existence as they fought to emerge from colonial domination. State control of memory dramatically influenced what was documented. The battle has now moved to the informal spaces of collective memory in the struggle of remembering against forgetting.

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<sup>22</sup> Hochschild, Adam, *King Leopold's Ghost* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), p. 294.

<sup>23</sup> Saleh, Razia, “A National Archival Policy for a Democratic South Africa,” (Master of Arts thesis, University of London, 1993), p. 20 as quoted by Lekoko S. Kenosi, “Accountability, Ideology and Documentary Heritage: An Overview of South Africa’s Archival Landscape,” *Escarbica Journal*, Vol. 19, 2000, p. 7.



Hochschild makes a point that also applies to South Africa: "In all of Africa, the colonizers wrote the school textbooks, together with the widespread book-banning and press censorship, this accomplished the act of forgetting for the written record."<sup>25</sup> In South Africa, the historiography has reflected British imperialism and later Afrikaner nationalism. The axiom "who controls power, controls history" holds true in South Africa. In the aftermath of apartheid, an African nationalism historiography has emerged, which, as historian Leonard Thompson cautions, "may lead to partisan works resembling a mirror-image of Afrikaner nationalist writings."<sup>26</sup> Archives figure prominently in these historical debates and become disputed sites in new battles of intellectual nationalism.

In discussing the significant role played by archivists in "moulding the future of our documentary heritage," Canadian archivist Terry Cook reminds archivists of the seriousness of that task. He writes "we are literally...deciding what is remembered and what is forgotten, who in society is visible and who remains invisible, who has a voice and who does not."<sup>27</sup> Wanting to make visible what was invisible and hear what was not heard during the era of apartheid, Mandela saw a need to document "the untold history of South Africa," in essence calling for a rewriting of the nation's history. He understood the power of archives as a tool of subterfuge.

The majority of South Africans have, in the past not only been excluded from the political, economic and social processes of this country, but they have also been deliberately misrepresented in the official history of South Africa. Archival resources that have previously been preserved in our national repositories have condemned this country's African inhabitants to

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<sup>24</sup> Harris, Verne, "The Archive and Secrecy in South Africa: A Personal Perspective," *Janus*, 1999.1, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, p. 299.

<sup>26</sup> Thompson, Leonard, *A History of South Africa* (revised edition) (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>27</sup> Cook, Terry, "From the Record to its Context: The Theory and Practice of Archival Appraisal since Jenkinson," *South African Archives Journal* 37 (1995), p. 33, as quoted by Lekoko S. Kenosi, "Accountability, Ideology and Documentary Heritage: An Overview of South Africa's Archival Landscape," *Escarbica Journal*, Vol. 19, 2000, p. 4.



historical obscurity. The records that do exist serve only to perpetuate the myths and obscure the horrors of apartheid.<sup>28</sup>

Mandela's views are quite apparent – those in power can use or misuse records for their own purposes. Archives can be a tool to conceal or a weapon to reveal. He viewed the availability of the ANC archives as a means to reverse the myths and distortions promulgated in the previous regime – and to aid in the process of remembering, recalling, and rethinking the past in a way that bears more likeness to his own sense of reality.

Who writes the history of South Africa is also contested territory. In placing the AZAPO archives at Fort Hare, Don Nkademeng, the organization's secretary general, suggested that the apartheid-induced "absence of the documentation of the Black resistance" made it "imperative to rewrite the history of the struggle."<sup>29</sup> Shortly after the announcement of the opening of the ANC archives to researchers, a historian was appointed by the ANC to research and write the organization's history. Articles heralding the appointment of Nhlanla Ndebele noted that it was an effort to "rewrite South Africa's past, correcting the slant of four decades of apartheid rule." Ndebele viewed the project as "a way to rewrite history in a very extraordinary way."<sup>30</sup> Even who writes the history of the liberation organizations has been a source of contention. In the preface to *South Africa Belongs to Us: A History of the ANC*, the semi-official history of the ANC, Francis Meli voiced a distrust of others. Meli acknowledged the abundance of published histories of the ANC but complained that they "have been mostly written by people looking in from the outside." Meli further contended that although some of the writers became "experts on the subject," their theories were not always "acceptable or friendly."<sup>31</sup> Tom Lodge, one of the "experts" singled out by Meli, offers an intriguing look at the ANC's historical memory through an analysis of the ANC historiography.

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<sup>28</sup> "Message from President Mandela" in brochure "Inside the ANC Archives" (Johannesburg: African National Congress, ca. 1996).

<sup>29</sup> A message from Don Nkademeng, Secretary General, Azanian People's Organization. Original at Fort Hare. Cited at <http://www.si.umich.edu/fort-hare/nkademeng.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> Lovell, Jeremy, Reuters News Service May 6, 1998 [Cited on Archives and Archivists computer list, "Archives in the News, Part 6" posting by Peter Kurilecz. May 9, 1998.

<http://listserv.muohio.edu/SCRIPTS/WA.EXE?A2=ind9805b&L=archives&F=&S=&P=6379>



Lodge finds that the ANC has a “deeply etched collective memory” but one that encompasses a “mosaic” of “thematic considerations” rather than a single “tradition.”<sup>32</sup>

With archival resources more widely available, archivists administering these materials must exercise caution to avoid becoming entangled in the mediation issues raised by scholars such as Ndebele, Meli, and Lodge. One could argue that the archivists at the University of Fort Hare bring the perspective of the oppressed to the table. Archivists at Fort Hare were all deeply affected by apartheid. The primary archivist working on the ANC archives is a graduate of Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, an institution established and sponsored by exiled ANC members in Tanzania. One of the volunteers who assisted with the archives was the widow of Lionel Forman, a South African writer and academic arrested and tried for treason. For others working with the ANC records, the memories formed during apartheid suggest a sympathy for a history mirroring their personal experiences.

### Politics Influencing Creation

Before turning to the physical archives of the liberation movement, it seems appropriate to address some of the conditions influencing the creation of documentation. The literal “apartness” of apartheid emanated from the legislation that enforced separation between white and black South Africans in rural areas and regulated the presence of blacks in urban areas.<sup>33</sup> Additions to these core statutes of apartheid further eroded the basic rights of black South Africans. The ANC, and its predecessor, the South African Natives National Congress, had been largely ineffective in opposing the various segregation measures and numbered about 5,000 members by the time the Afrikaner Nationalist Party came to power in 1948.

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<sup>31</sup> Meli, Francis, *South Africa Belongs to Us: A History of the ANC* (London: James Curry, 1989), p. vii.

<sup>32</sup> Lodge, Tom, “Charters from the Past: The African National Congress and Its Historiographical Tradition,” pp. 119–143 in *History from South Africa*, edited by Joshua Brown et al (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

<sup>33</sup> The 1913 Native’s Land Act enforced separation in the rural areas, while the 1923 Urban Areas Act dealt with the urban areas.



The creation of an archives was never a central focus of the liberation organizations – nor of most any organization. Records are usually a by-product of activities and transactions. After the transaction is over, the organization may or may not have a business need to keep a record of that transaction. When a record is kept long-term, then it may become a part of the archives because it has continuing administrative or other value. Other organizational and personal records may migrate into an archival environment through luck or serendipity or as an afterthought. The liberation movements were largely grassroots organizations and the business of keeping the organizations vital and mobilized made secondary any serious thought to documenting history. Of the ANC of the late 1940s, Mandela noted that the ANC “did not have a single full-time employee, and was generally poorly organized, operating in a haphazard way,” hardly a structure conducive to good record keeping.<sup>34</sup> Other reasons may also affect the creation of records. An ANC archivist commented in 1998 that “Given the necessarily clandestine nature of some of the ANC’s activities as a revolutionary organization, conventional correspondence and records may have sometimes represented a security risk.”<sup>35</sup> The PAC, established in 1959 by Robert Sobukwe following a rift within the ANC over cooperation with non-Africans, was struggling to develop its own administrative structure along with a constituency. Viability of these organizations, not to mention the capacity to document themselves, was imperiled by the increasingly restrictive legislation imposed by the state aimed at curtailing opposing organizations and points of view.

The Nationalist monopoly on power took control of the past, developing a “political mythology” that “distorted the past for nationalist purposes.”<sup>36</sup> Control of the present was ensured by a stranglehold on media and the implementation of increasingly repressive security and censorship legislation. These policies profoundly altered and

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<sup>34</sup> Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 107.

<sup>35</sup> Stapleton, T. J., and M. Maamoe, “An Overview of the African National Congress Archives at the University of Fort Hare.” *History in Africa*, Vol. 25, 1998, p. 421.

<sup>36</sup> Thompson, *A History of South Africa*, p. 198.



shaped the nature of the documentary record. Debate within South Africa was stifled and the liberation leaders were effectively silenced leaving a one-sided discourse.

The central piece of legislation was the Suppression of Communism Act instituted in 1950, which allowed the government wide latitude in defining “communism.” Provisions of the act enabled the state to disband organizations, enforce prohibitions on publications, seize documents, and ban or deport individuals. The act can be understood in the broader Cold War context that gave rise to McCarthyism and “Red squads” in the United States, but the South African equivalent continued unabated for several decades and grew increasingly suppressive.<sup>37</sup> Additional legislation made it a punishable offense to even possess banned publications and documents. Beyond influencing what was created, these policies also raise questions about what was *not* recorded.

### The Impact of Censorship

Histories of South Africa are rife with descriptions of the seizure of documents and the banning of publications, organizations, and individuals. In *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa*, Christopher Merrett, a South African librarian, chronicles many such examples while exploring the development and legacy of these policies. Merrett’s background makes him a perceptive observer of the effects of these policies on the information community. The most assiduous measures were the individual banning orders that imposed restrictions and house arrests on targeted individuals. The measures even forbade the quoting of banned persons, a situation described in one source as “executions of minds.”<sup>38</sup>

In light of government restrictions, the creation of archives achieved a symbolic status manifested in a rejection of colonialism and a step toward controlling history. The

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<sup>37</sup> Other key acts include the Riotous Assemblies Act, 1956; the Unlawful Organizations Act, 1960; the Sabotage Act, 1962; the Terrorism Act, 1967; and the Internal Security Act, 1976. These acts are generally described in Thompson, pp. 198–199, and more specifically throughout Merrett.

<sup>38</sup> Merrett, Christopher, *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1995), p. 51.



threat of prison sentences and deportation for possessing banned material served as an obvious deterrent to the creation of archives, but also ascribed an immeasurable value to documentation as a tangible sign of resistance.

The Congress of the People convention held in 1955 represented a high point for the internal liberation movement and also illustrated the lengths the state resorted to in order to silence opposition. The convention preceded adoption of the Freedom Charter, a document equivalent to the Bill of Rights or the Declaration of Independence as a defining national document. Before discussion of the Freedom Charter concluded, the convention was broken up by state security forces citing treason. Subject to a banning order and unable to participate in the convention, Mandela watched from the periphery and described the event: "The police began pushing people off the platform and confiscating documents and photographs" even taking the catering signs.<sup>39</sup> Police took down names of all people as they "slowly filed out, taking with them whatever documents and film they could hide."<sup>40</sup> Thirty years after the adoption of the Freedom Charter, the "struggle of memory against forgetting" was waged by Raymond Suttner and Jeremy Cronin who sought to restore the "crucial historical moment" of the Freedom Charter. Responding to the "books, pamphlets, posters, badges, flags ... censored into silence" by police seizures, the authors conducted interviews to recover the "people's history."<sup>41</sup>

The infamous Treason Trial, which followed passage of the Freedom Charter, was preceded by large-scale seizure of documentation when police raided 460 offices and homes in their search for evidence of treason and sedition, coming away with books, pamphlets, and equipment.<sup>42</sup> In all, 156 individuals were arrested. Mandela, among those arrested, recounted how the first month of the trial was devoted to the submission of evidence by the state: "One by one, every paper, pamphlet, document, book, notebook,

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<sup>39</sup> Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 173.

<sup>40</sup> *Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: The Real Story (Expanded third edition)* (New York: Reader's Digest Association, 1994), p. 389.

<sup>41</sup> Suttner, Raymond, and Jeremy Cronin, *30 Years of the Freedom Charter* (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1986), pp. 4, ix.

<sup>42</sup> Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship*, p. 28.



letter, magazine, and clipping that the police had accumulated in the last three years of searches was produced and numbered; twelve thousand in all.”<sup>43</sup> In one sense, in their efforts to seize documents, the state had inadvertently created an archive, consisting of some 12,000 documents and artifacts. Seventy-five boxes of trial-related records are held by the University of Witwatersrand,<sup>44</sup> but much of the original documentation seized by the state was destroyed between 1990 and 1994 as part of a state campaign of “collective amnesia.”<sup>45</sup>

The most trying days for the ANC and PAC followed the 1960 mass-action anti-pass law protest sponsored by the PAC in an effort to upstage the ANC. The peaceful protest turned violent when police fired on protesters at Sharpeville. The unrest sparked by the “Sharpeville Massacre” led to the declaration of a state of emergency and the outlawing of the ANC and PAC. As Christopher Merrett described it, “In all senses, including documentation, banned organizations entered a twilight zone.”<sup>46</sup> For the PAC, less than a year old, banning was a crippling blow as the administrative structure had not sufficiently developed to support movement underground and the establishment of foreign missions. PAC founder Robert Sobukwe would spend the rest of his life in prison or under house arrest, prohibited from attending gatherings or interacting with other banned individuals.<sup>47</sup>

The ANC had developed preliminary plans for underground and external operations and had dispatched Oliver Tambo out of South Africa before the banning. The ANC internal plans were dealt a severe blow when police raided the underground headquarters in Rivonia in 1963 and confiscated hundreds of additional documents and papers. “In one fell swoop,” noted Mandela, “the police had captured the entire High

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<sup>43</sup> Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 209.

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.wits.ac.za/library/services/sermain.html>.

<sup>45</sup> Harris, Verne, “The Archive and Secrecy in South Africa: A Personal Perspective,” pp. 8-9.

<sup>46</sup> Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship*, p. 58.

<sup>47</sup> For a detailed look at Sobukwe, see Pogrund, Benjamin, *How Can Man Die Better: Sobukwe and Apartheid* (London: Halban, 1990).



Command of Umkhonto we Sizwe” and plans for the ANC’s guerrilla operations.<sup>48</sup> Like the Treason Trial, the Rivonia Trial saw thousands of documents and photographs presented as evidence. Three decades later, the National Archivist admitted that documents used as evidence in the trial were missing: “The official records of the Rivonia Treason Trial transferred to the National Archives Repository by the Supreme Court are missing. The investigation embraces a search for the missing volumes and endeavors to secure copies from other sources.” During the investigation, the National Archivist learned that Harry Oppenheimer, head of the Anglo-American corporation, had purchased “certain Rivonia Treason Trial records from the Chief State Prosecutor at the time.”<sup>49</sup>

For the exiled ANC and PAC, the 1960s would be devoted to consolidating their external structures, fund-raising, promoting international awareness, and coordinating guerrilla and sabotage operations. When the movements turned to armed struggle, the clandestine nature of the guerrilla armies eschewed the generation of documentation. The organizations lacked the luxury enjoyed during the “Great Crusade” of the Second World War when historians like S. L. A. Marshall followed men into battle and conducted post-combat briefings and interviews in the immediate aftermath of battle, creating a form of intentional and instantaneous history.<sup>50</sup> The PAC records at Fort Hare, however, include a fascinating collection of individual dossiers on soldiers in the armed wing, Azanian People’s Liberation Army. While few detailed accounts of guerrilla and sabotage operations exist, additional information about these operations has come to light through the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

## The Impact of Organizational Structure

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<sup>48</sup> Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, p. 350.

<sup>49</sup> *Annual Reports of the National Archivist and State Herald*, Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1995-1997, p. 21.

<sup>50</sup> Marshall served as chief historian, European Theater of Operations. For a prime example of the post-combat interviews, see S. L. A. Marshall, *Night Drop: The American Airborne Invasion of Normandy* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962).



An important adjunct for archives is an understanding of the organizational structure and processes that lead to the creation of documentation.<sup>51</sup> The location of missions had a large influence on the nature of the documentation. Before the ANC was unbanned in 1990, it operated 33 missions and bases. Overseas missions functioned generally as lobbyists and fund-raisers, generating position statements and propaganda, while missions within the African continent detail the development of networks, coalitions, and training sites. The dynamics of the struggle within South Africa result in changes within the documentary records as the external offices responded to changing situations. The early years illustrate the challenges of organizing and building coalitions and arousing international support. The turn to armed struggle and the major influx of exiled Africans after the 1976 Soweto uprisings added training and resettlement to the tasks of the missions. Indeed, the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO) in Tanzania is a prime example of a community and educational institution created for the generation exiled after the Soweto township revolts. SOMAFCO has a profound meaning for many South Africans, and the records, artifacts, and teaching tools of SOMAFCO were among the first to arrive at Fort Hare.<sup>52</sup>

Publications produced by the external missions reflect the differing faces of the mission. Those aimed at cultivating international awareness indicate a stronger self-consciousness in their creation. Other publications served as internal organs and are couched in revolutionary rhetoric. The liberation organizations also frequently reprinted key documents to both educate prospective members as well as to combat censorship and banning orders by virtue of sheer quantity. Revitalizing and reusing prior themes and images was also common within the publications. Sam Nzima's famous 1976 photograph from Soweto of a student carrying fatally wounded Hector Peterson was a

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<sup>51</sup> For detailed histories, including commentary on organizational structures and the work of missions, see Lodge, Tom, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (New York: Longman, Inc., 1983) and Thomas Scott, *The Diplomacy of Liberation: The Foreign Relations of the ANC since 1960* (London: Taurus Academic Studies, 1996).

<sup>52</sup> Sean Morrow, in one of the first published studies to utilize the archival holding at Fort Hare, offers a study of SOMAFCO and ANC activities in exile in his article "Dakawa Development Centre: An African National Congress Settlement in Tanzania, 1982-1992," *African Affairs*, Vol. 97, No. 389, October 1998, pp. 497-521.



politicizing image that was used on hundreds of publications, posters, and buttons in the decades that followed.

### **Archival Landscape at Fort Hare**

At the University of Fort Hare, the archives of the liberation organizations are recognized as an important asset, and control of the archives has been nearly as tempestuous as the question of who controls the history. The agreements designating Fort Hare as the repository for the Liberation Archives assigned custody of the archives to the Centre for Cultural Studies. First begun as the Centre for Xhosa Literature, the Centre's mandate broadened sufficiently to encompass a more widely based cultural studies center with jurisdiction over the art gallery and the museum collection of ethnographic artifacts. Shortly after the historical materials began arriving piecemeal from their exiled locations, tensions flared. What the Centre's director referenced as a "raging archives dispute" in his annual report, resulted in demands by the ANC that their archives be placed elsewhere on campus.<sup>53</sup> Lingering political rivalries between the ANC and PAC may have played a part in the removal, but the end result was the relocation of the ANC archives to the University of Fort Hare Library. The political implications of the relocation notwithstanding, the decision strained already limited capacities as two separate facilities and staffs were now required to administer the archives. The removal of the ANC archives also signaled an end to the formal use of the title "Liberation Archives" when representatives of the ANC archives committee reportedly found the title untenable in their desire for complete disassociation. The University of Michigan projects at Fort Hare placed the Michigan staff and students in the midst of these tensions.

For the University of Fort Hare Library, the ANC archives were a tremendous burden on already constrained resources, but they also served to fill in a significant gap in resources pertaining to the liberation struggle. Apartheid policies had barred libraries from acquiring holdings contrary to the state position, particularly those that failed to earn

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<sup>53</sup> Centre for Cultural Studies, "1995–1996 Report," University of Fort Hare, pp. 1, 14–15.



approval from state censors. The result at the Fort Hare Library was a massive void in holdings on the history of South Africa, particularly the growth of African nationalism and the fight for liberation. Librarians at Fort Hare mention another obstacle arising out of Fort Hare's recent administrative and financial instabilities, indicating that for the last five years no new books have been purchased using library funds. Holdings have remained at 120,000 volumes and many serials and book orders have been canceled due to past failures to pay invoices.<sup>54</sup> Given this situation, the archival records assume greater importance as a vital resource for studying and understanding the history of the liberation movement and the broader history of South Africa.

Beyond filling in a major historical gap, the archives also hold other potentials. A campus newspaper went so far as to tout the opening of the ANC archives as "added impetus for tourists interested in the history of South Africa and the liberation struggle."<sup>55</sup> One commercial tourism firm, which developed its reputation for up-close tours of Soweto, now offers the "Liberation Tour" and "Mandela Magic Tour," which focus on sites in the Eastern Cape, including the campus of Fort Hare.<sup>56</sup> There are several local painful reminders of apartheid throughout the area offering potential tour stops as well as additional context. The Bisho stadium resonates with the memory of the 28 ANC supporters killed by Ciskei troops during a rally in 1992 in one of the final gasps of the old order. Close by, outside of King William's Town, is the gravesite of martyred Black Consciousness Movement leader Steven Biko.

## **Building Relationships Between the University of Fort Hare and the University of Michigan**

### ***Beginnings***

In 1991, during the end-years of apartheid in South Africa, a delegation from the University of Michigan, led by Charles Moody, Vice Provost for Minority Affairs, visited

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<sup>54</sup> This information arose in presentations by visiting librarians from Fort Hare during a visit to the University of Michigan in July–August 2000.

<sup>55</sup> "Fort Hare's now a new major tourist attraction," *Fort Hare News*, Vol. 1, May 1996, p. 5.

<sup>56</sup> The tours are described at: <http://www.face2face.co.za/tour4.htm>.



the University of Fort Hare to begin the process of exploring cooperative ventures between the two universities.<sup>57</sup> In 1993, the U-M established the South African Initiative Office (SAIO) under the leadership of Vice Provost Moody. The SAIO's purpose was to initiate and coordinate relations between the U-M and South African institutions, developing strategic relations with South African universities and government agencies in research and research training opportunities, to foster faculty and student exchanges, and to promote long-term collaborations between U-M and South African scholars.

Under this broad mandate, several follow-up meetings were held over the next few years between members of the U-M and Fort Hare administrations and faculties. A U-M grant proposal to the United States Information Agency (USIA) called for a number of projects to promote academic linkages and collaboration between the two institutions. By 1996, the U-M had secured USIA funding for a three-year project in support of several objectives, including these focused on archival activities:

- To establish technology-based collections management at the DeBeers Centenary Art Gallery and the Centre for Cultural Studies at the University of Fort Hare.
- To assist in the development of archives management procedures relevant to the archival holdings of the Centre for Cultural Studies, including preservation and conservation techniques and the application of digital technology to increase access to records.
- To support observation and consultation related to the development of an archival education curriculum, and to facilitate the exchange of archival information, literature and materials.<sup>58</sup>

Professor Margaret Hedstrom, of the U-M School of Information (SI), assumed responsibility for planning the archival (and other) parts of the grant, with logistic assistance from the university's SAIO. The U-M's Bentley Historical Library was brought in as a partner because of its expertise in the administration of modern archival records. In the summer of 1997, Professor Hedstrom conducted a needs assessment of Fort Hare's archival programs and proposed a series of next steps. From the beginning,

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<sup>57</sup> The visit to South Africa had many purposes and included, perhaps most importantly, the presentation to Mandela of an honorary degree conferred on him *in absentia* by the University of Michigan in 1987.



Michigan's approach was to build upon and improve an existing archival capacity at the University of Fort Hare. This effort, if successful, would result in a professional staff educated in archives and records management, knowledgeable about current standards and best practices, and adept in the use and application of appropriate archival tools. Additionally, major segments of Fort Hare's liberation archival holdings would be arranged and described and a digital infrastructure established to support work within the archives. The goal of the USIA grant was not just the completion of several short-term projects within the archives, but the building of an ongoing, professionally run archival program at the University of Fort Hare.

A vision is more easily imagined than realized. Politics, personalities, and unrealistic expectations presented serious obstacles in this project to bringing about all the desired end results. While significant accomplishments were achieved during the three-year period of grant activity under the USIA and Kellogg Foundation grants, the ultimate objective of building archival capacity at the University of Fort Hare still awaits final completion.

Complicating attainment of the main objective was the long illness and then death of Robert J. Kukubo, senior Centre archivist. He previously had worked for several years in the Kenya National Archives and then the Botswana National Archives and Records Service before joining the Centre staff in 1994. Kukubo's death made more difficult the goal of building and enhancing an archival program at the Centre. Resignations within the archival ranks at the Centre also made it more difficult to sustain programmatic growth and made more clear that retention of key staff would be essential to the evolution of the archives.

The situation at the University of Fort Hare Library, which holds the ANC records, was quite different. Several staff members had archival education or training and significant experience working with archives and manuscript collections. For example,

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<sup>58</sup> "Rebuilding for the Future: South African Academic Exchange between the University of Fort Hare and



the acting director of the University Library received her graduate education at the U-M's School of Information, where she took archival courses and was exposed to the work of the university's various archives and manuscript collections. Similarly, the archivist at the Fort Hare Library assigned to process the ANC archives had obtained a master's degree in archival studies from the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom, and had undertaken advanced archival courses at the University of Witwatersrand. Other staff members also had archival training and experience. The Library staff's base level of archival knowledge and skills was promising in terms of further development of a strong archival program.

### *U-M's Planning for the Fort Hare Project*

Even before Professor Hedstrom's needs assessment study in 1997, the U-M and Fort Hare implemented some parts of the collaborative project, most importantly providing educational opportunities for Fort Hare Library and Centre staff. Advanced education and training for select staff members were key elements of the overall plan to build archival capacity at Fort Hare. Hedstrom also envisioned the involvement of SI graduate students in the project. Through SI's practical engagement program, students had an opportunity to apply their knowledge and skills to real archival situations at Fort Hare. Possible projects identified for the SI students included conducting a preservation needs assessment for the archival collections, developing a records retention schedule for university records, developing digital conversion projects, developing a World Wide Web site for the Centre, and customizing software for an electronic collections management system.<sup>59</sup>

Hedstrom, Francis Blouin (director of the Bentley Historical Library and SI faculty member), and Bentley Library archivists met in fall 1997 to discuss preliminary plans regarding the archival initiatives at Fort Hare and the selection process for the SI

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the University of Michigan," grant proposal from University of Michigan to USIA, 1996.

<sup>59</sup> Hedstrom, et al., "Preservation, Management, and Use of Archives and Museum Collections at the University of Fort Hare," unpublished consultants' report, September 18, 1997, pp. 21-22.



students who would participate in the work at Fort Hare.<sup>60</sup> Brian Williams and Bill Wallach, both experienced in project and program planning, were asked to travel to South Africa in early spring 1998 to develop and refine a work plan for the processing of the liberation movement archives housed in Fort Hare's Centre for Cultural Studies. Archival processing involves several steps: the appraisal or identification of records that should be preserved long-term because of their administrative, historical, financial, or other value; the ordering of these records into a useful scheme to promote physical retrievability; reboxing/refoldering of the records to promote their preservation; and the description of the archival records according to agreed-upon conventions and best practices to promote intellectual access. After the pre-processing planning by the U-M archivists, SI students traveled to Fort Hare in early summer for six weeks to implement the processing plan developed earlier by Wallach and Williams. According to the terms of the joint agreement, the SI students worked in partnership with Fort Hare undergraduates on some of their projects in order to introduce them to archival practice.

### *Project Goals and Planning at Fort Hare*

Upon arriving at Fort Hare, Wallach and Williams met with the Centre's director and immediately realized that his understanding of the project was somewhat different from that which they had understood. In a memorandum handed to them that first morning, he listed four top priorities, each one of which he expected to be completed by the end of the two-week visit. They included the following:

- Developing a records management strategy that will expedite accessing of records.
- Advising on specifications for our automation programme.
- Reviewing our project proposal for funding furniture and equipment and advising on potential funders we shall approach jointly.
- Advising on Archives Administration Programme to be hosted by our Department of Library Science.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> The Bentley Historical Library, established in 1935, serves both as the University of Michigan Archives and as a collecting archives, with a focus on the history of the state of Michigan, its people and non-governmental institutions and organizations.



To these priorities were added others, including a training workshop on accessing the World Wide Web, training staff to digitize records in anticipation of placing them on a Centre website, and creating a plan for environmental and security controls for a new building under construction to house the Centre and the liberation movement archives.

While the value of most of the additional priorities were understood, the task of developing a processing plan for the archives would occupy most of the two weeks in South Africa. It was quite evident upon the initial survey of the situation that during the first summer's work not much attention could be given to other project goals articulated in the grant proposal. Processing of the paper, audio, and visual archives, which were in disarray, had to precede digitization projects and other project goals. During a series of negotiations with the director the focus was returned to processing the records of the liberation movement. Arguments were made about their centrality to the Centre, the importance of processing the paper records, and the limited amount of time available to undertake the complicated task of preparing a processing plan for the summer. None of these arguments fully convinced the director. For him, the archives already existed and were physically accessible. Focusing on intellectual access was too time consuming and not a high priority.

After much discussion, it was apparent that his real priority was to prepare the archives for a move into the Centre's new handsome brick building, in time for an upcoming dedication ceremony in September 1998. Dignitaries from around South Africa, including several leaders of the liberation movement organizations, would attend the dedication, making it imperative for the liberation movement collections to be "presentable." The "archives" as a structure, a monument, and a memorial to the struggle for freedom was more important than intellectual access. A new archives structure building filled with neat rows of boxes containing historical records was a fitting memorial. If the archivists could bring order to the disorder of the archives, that was fine.

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<sup>61</sup> Memorandum from Themba Sirayi to the authors, March 20, 1998.



But if not, the facade of order would temporarily meet the expectations of the officers of the liberation movement organizations.

### *Status of the Archival Records at Fort Hare Prior to the U-M Project*

The liberation movement archives that arrived at Fort Hare did not arrive complete. They were the end product of liberation, the residue of revolution, the records of offices abruptly closed after the startling end of apartheid. The materials came in sporadic shipments from the exiled outposts where the liberation movements had once operated in their effort to raise international awareness and coordinate the internal struggle from abroad. Banning and censorship had driven the organizations underground and abroad to sympathetic nations. Records from the ANC arrived after preliminary processing at Luthuli House, the ANC headquarters in Johannesburg. The records included administrative files, financial records, correspondence, topical files, publications, photographs, audio-visual material, and artifacts ranging from buttons and t-shirts to posters and artwork. On the whole, there is little documentation generated from within South Africa before the lifting of apartheid, and the bulk of the documentation is from the 1980s and early 1990s with limited material from the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>62</sup>

Following the agreement in 1992 to deposit the PAC archives at Fort Hare's Centre for Cultural Studies, M. Gqobose, a member of the PAC's National Executive Committee for the Eastern Cape region, sent a memorandum to all PAC offices and missions around the world seeking information about the quality and nature of the records and requesting that the records be shipped to Fort Hare. After listing the types of archival and museum items of interest, he wrote, "[W]e entreat you to avoid destroying any of the above mentioned materials in your office. We...implore you not to allow anybody to destroy, or release to any other person or institution" the archival and museum materials.<sup>63</sup> His appeal worked and in spring 1995, the Centre began receiving PAC

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<sup>62</sup> Stapleton, T. J., and M. Maamoe, "An Overview of the African National Congress Archives at the University of Fort Hare." *History in Africa*, Vol. 25, 1998, pp. 414, 421.

<sup>63</sup> M. Gqobose to Chief Representative, PAC Offices, March 1, 1994. Gqobose wrote that he and the Centre director were interested in a variety of archival and museum material, including: printed documents such as birth, death, and marriage records; political statements, speeches, conference/solidarity body



records and artifacts: 11 large metal shipping trunks from Tanzania were delivered, each of which contained disordered and unfolded piles of administrative records; 62 cartons arrived from the New York PAC office/UN mission, which also were in no apparent order; and 22 boxes were shipped from the London PAC office. The boxes and trunks contained administrative records and publications, much like those received from the ANC and described above. Other PAC offices and missions in Zimbabwe and elsewhere that had managed to save documentation also transferred them to Fort Hare. Exiled officers who had retained records sent them to the new liberation movement archives.<sup>64</sup>

The return from exile adds another dimension to the archives as it becomes a history recovered. It is a theme with other implications—the physical exile of both records and people provokes a debate that exists as an undercurrent. A seldom described tension exists between those who remained within South Africa and those who chose or were forced into exile. Inferences exist that those not in exile were not part of the struggle. The politicizing power of such inferences are broad, and such tensions are part of the social fabric at Fort Hare.

### *Devising and Implementing the Processing Plan*

Working with an assistant archivist trainee at Fort Hare's Centre, the U-M archivists surveyed the liberation archives (primarily the PAC archives), identified its organizational structures, devised a processing plan, identified individual record subgroups and possible series within these subgroups, defined appraisal criteria to apply in identifying what records to retain and what was of no archival value, developed a finding aid model, and agreed on final products, including cataloging records and encoded finding aids to enhance intellectual access to information about the archives. Brian Williams returned to Fort Hare in May-June 1998 to help coordinate the SI students' processing work based on the plan developed by Wallach and Williams. Others

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records; non-printed audio and video tapes, photographs, and oral recordings of political deliberations; promotional items including posters, stickers, buttons, paintings, and calendars; museum items such as sculptures, flags, guerilla uniforms, and woven items; and publications including official organs and journals.

<sup>64</sup> Centre for Cultural Studies, "1995-1996 Report," University of Fort Hare, pp. 12-13.



including U-M faculty members Margaret Hedstrom and David Wallace and doctoral candidate Denise Anthony shared coordinating responsibilities over the students' six-week period in South Africa. The SI students intensively processed PAC records during this first summer's visit to Fort Hare. After the return of the U-M faculty, staff and students to Michigan and throughout the fall semester, several students continued working on the project. They completed catalog records and finding aids for the PAC missions processed during the summer, created EAD (encoded archival description) versions of the finding aids while others further developed the website for the Centre for Cultural Studies. The Centre was renamed the National Heritage and Cultural Studies Centre (NAHECS) at the dedication of the new building in September 1998. Versions of the website are available both on servers at SI and at the University of Fort Hare.<sup>65</sup> Much of the archival work was accomplished in time for the dedication of the new Centre building, while additional work remained for future visits to South Africa.

With funding from USIA and the Kellogg Foundation, Hedstrom planned two additional trips for faculty and graduate students to work on a variety of projects at Fort Hare in the summers of 1999 and 2000. During these trips archival projects focused on processing and improving access to the ANC records at the Fort Hare Library. Project staff also developed a unified website for the NAHECS and the Library, a major breakthrough given the hostilities between the two units. The website, titled "The University of Fort Hare Collections," offers one portal through which researchers can link to information about liberation movement and other holdings at the Fort Hare Library or NAHECS. The lack of cooperation between the Library and NAHECS does not bode well for the research community in the long run. There is no doubt that access to information about the liberation archives has been greatly enhanced not only through the processing of the records, but also through the establishment of websites about the collections. Disputes between the two Fort Hare units eventually led to intervention by top university administrators. In the *Strategic Plan 2000* to restructure Fort Hare, the university's Vice Chancellor announced plans to settle the archives dispute and "establish

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<sup>65</sup> See <http://www.si.umich.edu/fort-hare> and <http://www.ufh.ac.za/collections/index.html>.



unified, centralised and efficient management of University-held archives.”<sup>66</sup> Implementing the *Strategic Plan* is underway at Fort Hare, but it is too early to tell if the goals set for unifying and centralising archival collections at the university will be successful.

### ***Appraisal Assumptions: A Cautionary Tale***

While engaged in the planning phase of the project in Spring 1998, the authors worked in Henderson Hall, one of the campus's original buildings located on Freedom Square. The archives of the liberation movement and other holdings were in temporary quarters while awaiting completion of the new NAHECS structure. The archives in Henderson Hall were stored in a long narrow room filled with shelving and little working space. Several of the long metal storage trunks that sat on the floor and publications piled everywhere impeded movement and slowed the work pace considerably, a situation that would have been exacerbated once the U-M students arrived to do processing. Work could not proceed without creating sufficient work space to survey and do an initial sorting of the records. A quick survey of records in the room revealed there were about 500 feet of records stored both in labeled boxes and unboxed and unfolded records piled on shelves. The enormous trunks contained records in chaotic order from several PAC missions. The Michigan archivists found that most of the records housed within labeled boxes, which were presumably processed, tended to be unrelated records that needed to be resorted, reboxed, and redescribed.

The survey revealed many duplicate publications, most of which were issued by the PAC. The duplicates of each title/issue often numbered in the hundreds. The visiting archivists asked permission of the director to move these duplicate publications temporarily to a hallway adjacent to the archives in order to create a viable work area. Receiving permission from the director, surplus copies were removed. Upon returning the next day, an officer of the Pan Africanist Congress visited the archives and expressed curiosity about what was being done. Explanations about the purpose and scope of the

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<sup>66</sup> *Strategic Plan 2000*, <http://www/ufh.ac.za/>



cooperative project were offered, stressing the significance of the archival record of the liberation movement and how single copies were being retained for the archives. It was obvious that the officer was disturbed and dissatisfied with the explanations. Soon it was learned that several students had approached the local PAC officer and informed him of discarded PAC publications flowing out of garbage cans in and around Freedom Square, placed there by a diligent custodian after filling the available receptacles in Henderson Hall. Mortified to learn of this mistake, the archivists met with the Centre director, who had just been called by a top PAC officer from Johannesburg, who wanted to know why the historical records they had painstakingly collected and shipped to Fort Hare were being thrown out. The overtones of two foreign archivists working on records of a revolutionary organization that had advocated an Africa for Africans, and had split from the ANC over the issue of cooperation with non-Africans, were very much present.

While permission had been given to move the duplicates out of the archives, it had not occurred to us that they would immediately be removed for disposal. In truth, such disposal most likely would have been recommended at the end of the project. It is usually considered to be best practice in western nations to eliminate duplicates and retain a single archival copy. Less space is taken up in the archives, fewer resources are required to administer the unique copy, and more resources and effort can be turned to providing adequate intellectual and physical access and long-term preservation measures. While these are on the whole established archival practices, in this particular instance they did not work nor were they appropriate. The political and emotional significance attached to *any* documents tied to the struggle for freedom, whether they were truly unique or duplicated many times over, was the controlling appraisal criterion rather than any established best practice. The PAC officer explained that the duplicates need not be saved in the archives, but strategies should be developed to distribute them to schoolchildren so they could understand and be touched by the liberation movement that set them free. This made clear in a way that would be hard to duplicate, the power that once banned publications and documents could have on a people, who had lived most of their lives under a horrific system of injustice. Assumptions about appraisal procedures



and a level of insensitivity to alternate uses of duplicate materials made for an interesting morning. Much of it was spent gathering up the duplicates and placing them in a locked storage area until the director could decide how best to distribute these duplicate copies of PAC publications.

### Meaning of the Archives

In his speech at the opening of the ANC archives at the University of Fort Hare on March 17, 1996, Thabo Mbeki spoke to the “living reality of the archives” and the archives as a “school both for the philosophers and the historians as well as the agitators and the activists.”<sup>67</sup> As mentioned previously, Nelson Mandela identified the archives as the “single most complete record of the ANC” and a vital link in “documenting the untold history of South Africa.”<sup>68</sup> The archives are both more than that and also less than that. The archives assume an almost ethereal quality as a monument to triumph over supreme adversity, yet fall to earth mired in the minutia of polemics, propaganda, and the mundane tasks of administration. It is difficult to separate the rhetoric of freedom from actual content. The archives are part and parcel of the mirroring of the “humaneness of the actors in the process of making history.”<sup>69</sup> Mandela and other liberation movement figures have become veiled in romance, and the archives at once reinforce these notions while also stripping away the shroud of myth to reveal an underlying humanity. The archivist working with the ANC records at the University of Fort Hare sounds a more realistic tone noting that “it is unlikely that the archives will meet the lofty goals of stimulating the complete revision of South African history” as indicated at the ceremony opening the archives.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Speech of the Deputy President Thabo Mbeki at the opening of the ANC Archives: University of Fort Hare. March 17, 1996. Cited at [http://www.ufh.ac.za/collections/Library/ANC\\_Materials/Mbeki-speech.htm](http://www.ufh.ac.za/collections/Library/ANC_Materials/Mbeki-speech.htm).

<sup>68</sup> “Message from President Mandela” in brochure “Inside the ANC Archives” (Johannesburg: African National Congress, ca. 1996).

<sup>69</sup> Tambo, Oliver, “A Message from O. R. Tambo: Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare.” Original at the University of Fort Hare. See <sup>69</sup> <http://www.si.umich.edu/fort-hare/tambo.html>.



## Foreign and Domestic Engagement in Fort Hare's Archives

Perhaps because of the cachet of Fort Hare's famous alumni and its historical significance, or because of the desire to redress the past, several players, both foreign and domestic, have rushed in to support the University of Fort Hare. Businesses that made their fortunes in gold and diamonds have donated facilities and equipment. Fort Hare's art gallery bears the DeBeers name, and the Anglo-American corporation funded the building of the facilities for the National Heritage and Cultural Studies Centre, the newest campus building. Hosts of universities, primarily American, have cultivated exchange programs and joint projects. In the past, many of these initiatives have gone uncoordinated, negotiated without the benefit of centralized input. There has been no shortage of players willing to help with the Liberation Archives and matters of cultural heritage. Good intentions notwithstanding, to some it might be construed as a more benign form of imperialism, the last vestiges of colonialism. At least four North American institutions advanced various plans and programs aimed at developing the cultural heritage resources at Fort Hare.<sup>71</sup>

Preeminent among these perhaps is a partnership involving the University of Connecticut and the ANC, signed in March 1999. The agreement links the ANC, the University of Connecticut and the University of Fort Hare in a variety of projects including archival cooperation, oral history programs, conferences, exchanges, and training. The most notable aspect of the agreement designates the University of Connecticut as the official repository for ANC materials in North America. Under terms of the agreement, University of Connecticut archivists will direct the copying of ANC records for "safekeeping" and will organize and catalog the materials, sharing some of the

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<sup>70</sup> Stapleton, T. J., and M. Maamoe, "An Overview of the African National Congress Archives at the University of Fort Hare." *History in Africa*, Vol. 25, 1998, p. 422.

<sup>71</sup> Institutions with programs include the University of Michigan (<http://www.umich.si.edu/fort-hare/>); Michigan State University (<http://www.isp.msu.edu/AfricanStudies/msufacs4.htm> and <http://www.matrix.msu.edu/partnership/>); University of Connecticut (<http://www.advance.uconn.edu/000402.htm>); and Howard University (<http://www.founders.howard.edu/hursap9798.htm>).



materials on the Web.<sup>72</sup> Publicity for the Connecticut project is abundant and alludes to the creation of a North American mirror site, although the means used to copy the archives have not been specified. While the Connecticut agreement opens the ANC archives to a wider audience and enables additional scholarship, the agreement is interpreted by some less positively at the University of Fort Hare.

ANC archival records arrive at Fort Hare after review and preliminary processing at the ANC's Johannesburg headquarters. The flow of records from Johannesburg to the Fort Hare Library has ceased, perhaps since the 1996 dedication of the ANC archives at Fort Hare, fueling speculation about when or if remaining archival records will be sent and whether the University of Connecticut agreement has impacted transfers to Fort Hare. The entry of another institution – the University of Connecticut – taking on the responsibility of guardian of the ANC historical records has caused some concern at Fort Hare, even if the records at Connecticut are copies. No matter how beneficial the relationship and how good the intentions might be for the ANC and the University of Connecticut, some at Fort Hare view the new partnership as a diminishment of the University's role as the designated archival repository for the African National Congress, the "incontestably...natural home" for the ANC archives, as Mbeki wrote.<sup>73</sup> They also ask whether the significance of the archives can be fully appreciated outside of the context of Fort Hare and the surrounding area. The agreement and further written documents from Connecticut raise questions about the extent of archival expertise at Fort Hare, which standards and descriptive practices will be used, and if changes made at one institution require changes at all institutions. When the archives are seen in the light of a documentary heritage once prohibited and painfully recaptured, and now made accessible by the professional archival staff at the Fort Hare Library, the act of sending copies outside of South Africa takes on greater meaning. Does sending copies of the ANC archives to the United States raise questions of cultural imperialism, even if clothed in the

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<sup>72</sup> "African National Congress- Partners with UConn," *NEA Newsletter*, July 1999, p. 15. Also see <http://www.advance.uconn.edu/03089901.htm>.

<sup>73</sup> [http://www.ufh.ac.za/collections/Library/ANC\\_Materials/Mbeki-speech.htm](http://www.ufh.ac.za/collections/Library/ANC_Materials/Mbeki-speech.htm)



most benign of intentions? Control of history and historical documentation are important issues and take center stage in South Africa's transition to a new democracy.

### The Larger South African Archival Scene

The changeover to a democratic society has opened a new dialogue of memory of which the archives are a vital part. Just as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided a forum for both victims and perpetrators to contest memory and understand their experiences, so have archives become more than silos of memory as they document both the oppressed and the oppressor. The archives at the University of Fort Hare are part of the larger South African archival heritage. As Eric Ketelaar reminds us: "Archives are neither red nor brown, black nor white. Archives document, black *on* white, the diversity of activities and actions—right or wrong—on all sides."<sup>74</sup>

It is important to note that the archives of liberation movements at Fort Hare are not the sole source of information about South Africa's struggle for democracy. Several other institutions house archival record groups and personal papers documenting both the anti-apartheid movement and those organizations in favor of the policy of apartness. The "archives" of South Africa's liberation struggle cannot be found in any one archives or library, but are held throughout the nation and worldwide in fragmentary pieces. For example, the University of Witwatersrand's Historical Papers department has a wide variety of materials, serves as the official repository for organizations such as the South African Institute of Race Relations, and holds political and trial material dating from the 1950s to the 1990s.<sup>75</sup> Also housed at Witswatersrand is the South African History Archive (SAHA), which deposited their materials at the university in 1994. SAHA was established in 1988 by the United Democratic Front and the Congress of South African Trade Unions to document the history of opposition to apartheid.<sup>76</sup> The University of the

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<sup>74</sup> Ketelaar, Eric, *The Archival Image: Collected Essays*, (Hilversum: Verloren, 1997), p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> See <http://www.wits.ac.za/histp/home.htm>.

<sup>76</sup> See <http://www.wits.ac.za/saha/>. Also, Saleh, Razia, "The South African History Archive," *Innovation* no. 4, June 1992.



Western Cape's Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in South Africa focuses on all aspects of apartheid, resistance, social life and culture in South Africa. The Robben Island Museum, where Mandela and many other anti-apartheid leaders were imprisoned, is also collecting archival material to document the long struggle for freedom.<sup>77</sup> A national collaborative program called DISA, or Digital Imaging South Africa, has taken on a project, located at the University of Natal, titled "South Africa's Struggle for Democracy: Anti-Apartheid Periodicals, 1960-1990," covering a period of three key decades in the growth of opposition to apartheid rule.<sup>78</sup> Additionally, supporters and scholars of the liberation movement throughout the world have collected primary source materials and have issued them in printed volumes and microfilm. Among the foremost of these is the projected 7-volume *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990*. This work includes a compilation of primary sources plus explanatory text placing the documents into historical context. The documents, interviews, and biographical materials used to produce volumes 1-3 were microfilmed and published in 1977 as *South African Political Materials: A Catalogue of the Carter-Karis Collection*, which is available worldwide.<sup>79</sup> These collections and projects add to the universe of documentation on the struggle for liberation. The concern of those at the University of Fort Hare is whether the archives of the liberation movements held at the university will be marginalized by other resources at better-funded institutions. Isolated, poorly funded, and beset by internal conflicts that diminish what resources are available at the university, the opportunity to play a prominent role as a repository of the nation's memory is at risk.

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<sup>77</sup> See <http://www.robber-island.org.za>.

<sup>78</sup> See <http://disa.nu.ac.za>. Staff from Cornell University have played a role in consulting on digital imaging technology for this project.

<sup>79</sup> Karis, Thomas and Gwendolen M. Carter, eds., *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964*, vol. 1-4, (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1972-). Volume 5 in this series is edited by Thomas Karis and Gail M. Gerhart. Also see, Wynne, Susan G., compiler, *South African Political Materials: A Catalogue of the Carter-Karis Collection*. (Bloomington, Ind.: Southern African Research Archives Project, 1977). This is a guide to the collection microfilmed by the Cooperative Africana Microform Project from the material deposited in the Melville J. Herskovits Africana collection of Northwestern University Library.



The new democratic government in South Africa affirmed the importance of archives by making the National Archives of South Africa Act the first major piece of cultural legislation enacted. The act acknowledges the role of archives and archivists as shapers of social memory, while stressing transparency of motives and accountability. It also highlighted past imbalances, noting “the need to document aspects of the nation’s experience neglected by archives repositories in the past.”<sup>80</sup> The archives act was developed amid what public archivists in South Africa describe as a “transformative discourse” that has replaced the “sterile, outmoded archival discourse” and epistemologies rooted in the 1950s.<sup>81</sup> The discourse rooted in the 1950s was also cast in the language and practices of apartheid.

The transformative discourse has acknowledged the public archives role as “willing lackey” of the apartheid government and identified a set of exclusionary obstacles beyond the realm of collecting policies.<sup>82</sup> The reservation of archival jobs for whites not only prevented blacks from becoming archivists, it produced generations of archivists trained under apartheid models. The very language of apartheid left much of the archival discourse and description in the language of apartheid. Transformation has created some bilingual guides in English and Afrikaans, but it still excludes the population for whom these are not their native languages. Outreach and inclusion is further hindered by the high illiteracy rates and the distant location of state archives from the rural areas. Appraisal in the public archives is being reshaped, adopting macro-appraisal models advocated by Canadian archivist Terry Cook, and in the words of South African National Archivist Marie Olivier, ensuring that “the heritage of all the country’s people can be nurtured and conserved without prejudice.”<sup>83</sup> For the University of Fort

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<sup>80</sup> Section 3(d), referenced in Harris, Verne, *Exploring Archives: An Introduction to Archival Ideas and Practice in South Africa* (Pretoria: National Archives of South Africa, 1997), p. 61.

<sup>81</sup> Harris, Verne, “Redefining Archives in South Africa: Public Archives and Society in Transition, 1990–1996,” *Archivaria*, No. 42, Fall 1996, p. 6. (see also Harris, Verne, “Transforming Discourse and Legislation: A Perspective on South Africa’s New National Archives Act,” *Archives News*, Vol. 39, No. 2, December 1996).

<sup>82</sup> Kriger, Ethel, “Redressing Apartheid-Engendered Social Ills: A Core Archival Function? Transformation and the Public Archivist in A Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Archivum*, Vol. 45, 2000, pp. 138, 140.

<sup>83</sup> Olivier, Marie, “New Societal and Technological Realities: Challenges for the National Archives of South Africa,” *Place, Interface and Cyberspace: Archives at the Edge. Proceedings of the Australian*



Hare, the archives of the liberation struggle remain a defense against previous policies that “condemned” South Africa’s “African inhabitants to historical obscurity.”<sup>84</sup>

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*Society of Archivists Conference Fremantle 6-8 August 1998* (Canberra: Australian Society of Archivists Incorporated, 1999), p. 101.

<sup>84</sup> “Message from President Mandela” in brochure “Inside the ANC Archives” (Johannesburg: African National Congress, ca. 1996).







