

Freedom, Public Deliberation and the Archive

Carolyn Hamilton and Xolela Mangcu¹

Corresponding author: hamiltonc@gsh.wits.ac.za

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Synopsis

This paper proceeds from three central propositions: the first is that ongoing public deliberation is a powerful vehicle for social change and economic progress, and is fundamental to the attainment, and maintenance, of freedom. The second is that public deliberation - around the key questions of our times and our location in South Africa - is inhibited by the limited and biased archive available to us to pursue our deliberations. The third proposition is that every engagement with the archive is always inflected with power. In every society, including our own, there are strong motivations and indeed efforts to exert control over archive, to read it in singular ways, and to exclude alternative and multiple readings. Identity politics of all kinds typically play out their contests in relation to archive.

The paper offers first an analysis of the significance, and the current state, of the relationship between public deliberation and archive in South Africa, focusing on the topics of reconciliation, development and identity politics. As is well-known, the project of reconciliation is predicated on an interrogation of the past in order to identify previous wrongs, on incorporation of their recognition into collective memory, and on the acknowledgement of those who suffered from them. While the project of reconciliation exerts an obvious call on archives to support public deliberation, we do well to remember that the freedom and peace which are the goals of reconciliation, entail freedom to move forward into the future. Freedom is a fundamental human right, but it is one qualified and constrained by political, social and economic opportunities. The maintenance and expansion of freedom is thus both the primary end and the principal means of development. In the current post-development era the project of development can no longer proceed without a struggle for reclaiming the dignity of cultures that have been turned into a set of experimental subjects through the implementation of economic developmentalism. The challenge for a country like South Africa is not only to unveil the foundations of the order of knowledge which defines aspects of our society as underdeveloped but also to explore the potential contributions in this post-development era of modes self-identification and accreditation in the development of self-capability, of indigenous practices and local forms of modernity. The meaning of what it is to be modern and African, a core proposition of South Africa's current development agenda, requires intensive engagement with matters of identity. In South Africa current concepts of identity bear the historic imprimatures of the interventions of past political powers, whether those of precolonial ruling elites, colonial authorities or apartheid ideologues, primarily in the form of efforts to create pure forms of identity able to exclude others from their parameters. The extent to which modern identities are necessarily constrained or facilitated by these past identities remains to be debated. That debate itself requires recourse to the archive, primarily to unpack the current ideologically-loaded webs of argumentation that bind South Africans into historic identities that they may wish to jettison, but also to provide resources for alternative possibilities, appropriate to our post-colonial, and recognizably cosmopolitan, present.

Reconciliation, development and identity politics are by no means the only areas of important public deliberation in South Africa, nor are they the only ones closely tied to archive. But they are sufficiently compelling in our current situation to serve as the primary points of motivation for the arguments regarding public deliberation and the rethinking of archive put

¹ This paper is based on research and debate undertaken in the Public Intellectual Life Project. A number of key ideas presented in this paper were developed in conjunction with Xolela Mangcu, currently Visiting Researcher with the Project. Thanks are also due to the Nelson Mandela Foundation for permission to incorporate into this essay materials and ideas formed in collaboration with Verne Harris and originally presented in texts written for the Foundation.

forward in this paper. Moreover, enormous effort, funding, and feeling has been invested, and continues to be invested, in all three areas. The role of archive in reconciliation, development and identity politics is central, not only in addressing the past, but also in imagining and facilitating the future.

It is a central contention of the paper that informed public deliberation about the past that underpins reconciliation, development and identity politics requires a new set of archival practices and activities including but not confined to the following: open access to existing archives, the augmentation of what are yet often one-sided records with additional materials, in some instances the creation of archives where no records currently exist, training for archivists in new protocols and procedures for recognizing and inaugurating archives, as well as for documenting life histories of the records themselves; training for users in techniques of rereading old archives, in accessing archival materials in new forms and places and in an advanced methodological appreciation of the significance of the life histories of the records. Elements of these various activities are found in South Africa today, mostly isolated in their respective settings. There are powerful potential synergies to be developed in pulling them altogether, in encouraging developments in one area to influence developments in another area, and for the whole to constitute a new archival practice underpinned by new or reconstituted archives, appropriate to a post-colonial and post-apartheid setting.

It is a further contention of this paper that such synergies would allow us to critique the very concept of archive that we have inherited and to redefine it in a way that frees it from its colonial and apartheid heritage, meanings and functions. Most importantly, the paper argues that if archive is a powerful technology of rule, and if that rule is asserted through control of access to the archive, - in the sense of both who uses and what goes into the archive -, as well as control over the form that the materials take, then in the context of a change of political power, say from a totalitarian regime to a democratic one, an endorsement of the archive of the new power is not a sufficiently responsible recognition of the power of the archive. The archive needs continually to have its certitudes questioned and be subjected to the question of difference. It needs to be drawn into the public domain and, where potentially productive, to be engaged in dialogues that may upend its structure and disrupt its conventions. Such dialogues require that the many publics of the archive are vigilant in ensuring that in every invocation of archive the operations of power involved are always interrogated, that the ethical in any archival engagement is always foregrounded, that the archive is conceptualized as a space in which to reflect critically on the self, that it excludes no-one, and that there is a refusal to limit the archive to being a place of recovery of original propriety.

The paper proposes a two-pronged strategy to achieve this. The first prong - conceptualized as an Archival Platform - involves the launching of an archival effort geared towards refiguring the archive along the lines described as necessary above. The second prong - conceptualized as a linked Programme of Public Engagement - involves the fostering and facilitating of public debate and discussion primarily, but not exclusively, around questions of past injustices, current efforts in the creation of self-capability and around identity that draws on and makes use of the refigured archive. The two-pronged strategy hinges on the idea of developments on the archival platform shaping the public debate, and the requirements of the public debate giving impetus to developments on the archival platform, and on the whole being continuously and actively engaged. The proposed two-prong strategy marks a radical break in practice around archives. Where in the past in South Africa, records were assembled or archives were set up to support particular political projects and to provide historical justification for political ideologies, the proposed strategy has been formulated to facilitate public deliberation. The strategy is designed to configure archives to precipitate open public debate and discussion, and in turn, to allow the needs of public deliberation to call forth archival responses.

INTRODUCTION

This position paper proceeds from three central propositions: the first is that ongoing public deliberation is a powerful vehicle for social change and economic progress, and is fundamental to the attainment, and maintenance, of freedom.² The second is that public deliberation - around the key questions of our times and our location in South Africa - is inhibited by the limited and biased archive available to us to pursue our deliberations. The third proposition is that every engagement with the archive is always inflected with power. In every society, including our own, there are strong motivations and indeed efforts to exert control over archive, to read it in singular ways, and to exclude alternative and multiple readings. Identity politics of all kinds typically play out their contests in relation to archive.

By archive we mean both the many items in many different forms from the past, or about the past, that survive in the present to serve as sources about the past, as well as the circumscribed body of knowledge of the past that is historically determined as that which is available to us to draw on when thinking about the past.

The paper offers first an analysis of the significance, and the current state, of the relationship between public deliberation and archive in South Africa, focusing on the topics of reconciliation, development and identity politics. On the basis of that analysis, it goes on to propose a strategy for developing, strengthening and broadening that relationship. The paper does not include a detailed proposal for the structural arrangements needed to implement the strategy.

PUBLIC DELIBERATION AND THE ARCHIVE

The projects of reconciliation, development and of post-apartheid identities are widely recognized as the key challenges facing post-apartheid South Africa. They are by no means the only areas of important public deliberation in South Africa, nor are they the only ones hampered by the archive on which they currently draw. But they are sufficiently compelling in our current situation to serve as the primary points of motivation for the arguments regarding public deliberation and the rethinking of archive put forward in this paper. Moreover, enormous effort, funding, and feeling have been invested, and continue to be invested, in these projects. The role of archive in all of them is central, not only in addressing the past, but also in imagining and facilitating the future.

Reconciliation

The project of reconciliation is predicated on an interrogation of the past in order to identify previous abuses and wrongs, on incorporation of their recognition into collective memory, and on the acknowledgement and commemoration of those who suffered from them. Many political and social commentators, acutely aware of the persistent horrors of ethnic cleansing and other forms of retributive conflict across the globe, argue that past injustices cannot simply be acknowledged: information about them is required for ongoing public discussion, and that it is vital that the events concerned should remain open to scrutiny, investigation and reinterpretation. The primary question is how to ensure a redemptive future rather than entry into cycles of revenge about cruel pasts. It is only in the assurance that the archive of these memories is both secure and always accessible that the freedom to leave the past behind is achieved.³

² Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Anchor Books, New York, 2000, preface. Thanks to Ran Greenstein for guidance through the development literature relevant to this position paper.

³John Torpey's discussion of the extent to which the concern with the past may represent a departure from the traditionally future-orientated stance of progressive politics points out that public deliberation should include serious assessment of whether the turn to the past might not itself be a conservative impulse. (*Making Whole What Has Been Smashed*, Harvard University Press, 2006,) Also see Pradip Datta, "Historic Trauma and the Politics of the Present in India," *Wiser Review*, 1, 2004, on the possibility of looking at the past as "another country" that allows us to see the present as representing a reality that is different from the past. On the persistence of the record of the past see recent events in

In 1995 in South Africa the project of reconciliation was inaugurated, and most strongly driven, by the hearings of the widely-acclaimed and internationally- emulated Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). For all its noteworthy achievements, the work of the TRC has far from completed the project of reconciliation in this country. Indeed, consideration of the work of the TRC draws our attention to three areas of the project of reconciliation that demand continued attention.

1. "The TRC dealt with all that... "

The TRC has, perhaps, too readily come to stand for the act of reconciliation, and as such is in danger of becoming a device that enables a forgetting of the very abuses it sought to uncover, effecting a closing-off of public deliberation and ongoing talk.

2. The Ambit of Reconciliation

The reach of the reconciliation project is not limited to the TRC. The Commission's ambit was confined to abuses of the apartheid era, and even within that focus, its activities were highly selective. The injustices, suppressions and wrongs of the past, as well as simply some of the peculiarities and accidental turns of the past that yet require attention in pursuit of reconciliation, reach well into the precolonial past, and include the experience of colonialism.

Three examples allow us to comprehend something of the fuller ambit of the reconciliation project's engagement with past, but the matter of ambit is by no means confined to these examples.

a) The active manipulation and often suppression of aspects of African precolonial history under apartheid demands critical redress, needing to become, not a site of idealisation and romanticisation, but the subject of public discourse and active debate

Colonial administrations recognized that the knowledge tools that operated amongst those whom they sought to rule were powerful resources that could be yoked to their own project of domination. They assiduously collected, and archived, information about the subject peoples, and brought that information, reshaped in all sorts of ways, into play in the practice of rule and into the knowledge system that underpinned that rule. Abundant and potent materials of the precolonial world were thus not annihilated, but insidiously saved, lodged in the colonial archive, where they yet lie many still awaiting recuperation and rehabilitation in service of post-colonial projects.

The research was, of course, strongly biased by colonial needs of that history and by the knowledge categories that the authorities sought to bear on the material they encountered. These categories allowed them to designate certain local ideas as "myth" or "belief," rather than forms of knowledge, thereby effectively dismissing their central tenets. It was these kinds of moves that underpinned the categorization of local societies as lower on a human developmental scheme, effectively, as primitive or savage.

In the first half of the twentieth century the precolonial history of the region was systematically deported to the disciplines of Bantu Studies, ethnology, anthropology, and later archaeology, where it was treated as cultural material derived from what were conceptualized as essentially static societies. Thus, while some African precolonial material was collected by the colonial and apartheid governments, much was excluded from the archive and consigned to museums or oblivion. In this way Africans were effectively excluded from being the subjects of the authoritative practices of history

Guatemala, where, in 2005 the files of the National Police, an agency deeply implicated in human rights abuses during the country's 36 year civil conflict, were discovered, almost ten years after the peace accords that brought the conflict to an end. The discovery has sparked enormous hopes that the archive will clear about outstanding mysteries around assassinations and other abuses.

A key technology of rule, archives became the documentary basis of control of land, people and resources by centralized governments. But the archive is not simply a technology of rule, it is a site in which the politics of knowledge are rooted - a cornerstone of the storehouse model of knowledge. The archive is also a statement of the dominance of the written text over the potential archival potency of artifacts, landscape, orality and performance. A veritable panoply of devices were developed for containing the expression of, and establishing control over, pre-industrial, often oral, forms of knowledge. In all these ways, and in the face of the immensity of possible knowledge, the archive is a powerful way of dividing regulated knowledge off from uncontrolled knowledge.

While pioneering work has been done in the rehabilitation of oral sources as viable historical archives, and their preservation, and in researching and writing the history of precolonial times, the impact of this immense suppression and manipulation still awaits undoing. The writing of the lost histories of precolonial times requires the convening of new archives able to support such exercises and the promotion of methodologies and techniques for the reading "against the grain" of extant colonial and apartheid archives, cultural assemblages and ethnologies.

b) The second example concerns the neglect and negation of black intellectual history. Early mission education sought to create a class of educated Africans imbued with the values, and knowledge categories, of the colonial powers. Literacy and travel opened the door for members of this new intelligentsia to critique the world in which they found themselves, critiques expressed verbally in meetings, and in print in the vernacular press that flourished from the mid-nineteenth century, and in book publication, mostly through the mission presses. These critiques were marked by the inclusion in intellectual thinking of the time of ideas derived from precolonial systems of knowledge and thought and often drew powerfully on historical materials.

With the onset of segregation these intellectual arenas came under increasing pressure. Many of the presses closed down, legislative pressures forced intellectuals to express themselves in fictional and dramatic forms, mostly in their own languages, rather than the increasingly censored and monitored spheres of rational-critical debate and the truth-claiming discourse of history. In many instances, excluded from physical access to the existing archival institutions, and indeed unlikely to find in the ideologically discriminating archival folders the materials need to challenge segregationist and later apartheid views of the African past, African thinkers turned to oral tradition and imaginatively-invoked pasts for the resources they needed to engage in public deliberations. This vital strand of intellectual engagement and intellectual history was doubly excluded from any recognition in the annals of South African historiography and the valorized mainstream intellectual currents of the time, both by what was deemed its failure to adhere to the discipline of history as then constituted and by the limited circulation of texts available only in a particular local language. These very same features did, of course, make such texts available to local language publics, some of whom were wholly unversed in the procedures of professional history and who might not have so readily assimilated texts that ascribed to the tenets of the prevailing evidentiary paradigm. These intellectual traditions await recovery and recognition, and considerable archival effort and innovation is required to underpin the research necessary to affect that recovery.

c) The third example concerns the hidden histories of the struggle against apartheid including the effects of the conflicts and struggles within the liberation movements, the stories of the ordinary people involved in small acts of immense courage, the underbelly histories of the turned askaris, the moral challenges offered by some of the children of apartheid ideologues and supporters to their families and peers, the stories of draft dodgers and the multiple histories of land dispossession. These stories do not find ready sources in the archives, and, in many instances, it is not in the interests of the current masters of the archival institutions to ensure that archives that permit investigation of these topics are preserved.

3. The Security and Accessibility of Records.

It is not only those archival records that were deliberately suppressed under apartheid that require rescue today. The records of even government itself are, in many instances, not securely preserved nor readily accessible.

The most compromised area of all concerns the record of repression under apartheid. During the apartheid era the then State Archives Service failed to ensure that the security establishment followed government policies with regard to the lodging of official records. In 1991, as it became clear that a transfer of power was imminent, the National Intelligence Service initiated a wide-ranging disposal exercise that extended across the security establishment and that encompassed classified documents in other departments. Even once the ANC government came into power, it was tardy in approving a moratorium on the destruction of records of state. The National Intelligence Service continued with the systematic destruction of documents until late into 1996. The tide was only finally turned in 1997 when a body outside the official apparatus for securing government records, a TRC investigative team, began to audit surviving security records and documented the extent of this destruction.

The TRC investigative team lobbied for the surviving records of the security establishment to be transferred to the National Archives. In the years that followed, a steady trickle of State Security Council, Police, Justice and Correctional Service records were deposited with the National Archives. The record is patchy, and much material remains unaccounted for. Assiduous follow-up has not been implemented. While a loophole in the current legislation continues to allow Military and National Intelligence records to remain with the creating agencies, the assumption was that the transferred files would become subject to the new 20-year rule in terms of public access. However, in 2000 Parliament passed the Promotion of Access to Information Act, which overrides any other legislation on public access. The Act determines that personal information be protected until 20 years after an individual's death. At issue then are ethical and political questions about the role of the right to privacy weighed against the need for transparent government.

It is not only the key aspects of the record of the apartheid regime that remain out of public reach. Even records generated after the transition to democracy are suppressed. The record of the TRC – supposedly a record of public expiation of guilt- itself was deemed sensitive and placed under a veil of secrecy, despite the Commission's own recommendations that its records be lodged with the National Archives and be as available as possible for public consultation. New security systems at the National Archives have built a wall around the TRC records, and researchers experience difficulties in securing ready access to the materials. Thirty-four boxes of sensitive TRC files were only finally prised out of the Ministry of Intelligence through public intervention in 2007.

Even where the official record has not been actively suppressed, it has often been found to be at risk. In 1994, in terms of the 30-year rule, the Department of Justice transferred to the State Archives Service the official record of the Rivonia trial, the trial which resulted in the sentencing of Nelson Mandela and 7 others to lengthy terms of imprisonment. To the horror of the Service, the record consisted only of fragments. For the next two years, the Service embarked on a thorough investigation into the loss of the bulk of the record, with inconclusive results. The Service did however discover that the prosecutor, Percy Yutar had in his possession a significant collection of prosecution records that constitute part of the record. Yutar and later his son sold these records to wealthy collectors of Africana, Harry Oppenheimer and Douw Steyn, in whose possession they yet remain. Other documents are adrift within the archives system itself, only located through chance observation.

In some cases official records are in physical danger. The records of the sections of the eastern Cape which became the Transkei homeland were transferred into a homeland archival service when the Transkei became "independent.". After 1994 the Transkei Archives Service was absorbed into the new Eastern Cape Provincial Archives Service, and in the course of the attendant reorganization the old Transkei Archives were relegated to a leaking storeroom in the

backyard of the new Nelson Mandela Museum in Mtata. Records were damaged and systems of preservation neglected. Public outcry prompted some improvements but the situation remains of serious concern. Although these records were constructed by successive colonial and later segregationist and apartheid bureaucracies seeking knowledge of the African populations whom they sought to dominate, the record that resulted, biased as it was, was a sustained and systematic project. Read with sensitivity as to the circumstances under which it was compiled, is a record rich in material pertinent to the history of the local African population, both because of the extent to which it laid down elements of precolonial epistemologies, and for the light it casts on the tumultuous transition from a pre-industrial order to a modern one, in the context of emerging segregation.

Government institutions operate in a context in which open access to records is maintained only with difficulty, and where the appreciation of past records assemblages is limited because of the repressive circumstances of their making. The acute resource shortages that dog almost all of the archival repositories are a result of limited recognition among politicians and state officials, and, indeed, the public at large, of the potential of these and other archives in helping South Africans in the imagining of their identities and the discovery of who they are. In many instances such identity projects remain prisoner to the constraints and limitations of the official archive as a product of the colonial and apartheid eras. Few archival professionals have the requisite skills to rethink the colonial and apartheid archival legacy and to inaugurate policies and projects that challenge or reshape it. In addition, all state archives are primarily concerned with preserving the record of government, but, as an arm of government, are vulnerable to political pressure from those in power to safeguard their interests, sometimes at the expense of the public good.

The issues of security and access raised here suggest powerfully the extent to which the archive, seemingly a neutral space of repository and care, is rather, always a configuration of power, politically saturated and ethically charged. Challenging the appearance of neutrality, reflecting on the operation of power in the archive, and modulating and inflecting that power with the concerns of the overpowered, the powerless or the marginalized, is the corollary of a responsible recognition of power in the archive, and a condition of freedom.

Development

While the project of reconciliation exerts an obvious call on archives to support public deliberation, we do well to remember that the freedom and peace which are the goals of reconciliation, entail freedom to move forward into the future. Freedom is a fundamental human right, but as Amartya Sen has argued, and as our Constitution insists, it is one qualified and constrained by political, social and economic opportunities. The maintenance and expansion of freedom is thus both the primary end and the principal means of development. For much of the second half of the 20th century the project of development was construed as one of ensuring the availability of opportunities underpinned by appropriate infrastructure and skills. The rapid economic progress which such development implied was seen to require painful breaks with the past, as a United Nations document of the time put it, the scrapping of ancient philosophies and the demise of old social institutions.⁴ By the end of the century analysts of the problems of development began to reexamine these assumptions. Setting the agenda for what he viewed as the current postdevelopment era, Arturo Escobar addressed these assumptions, arguing powerfully that the project of development could no longer proceed without a struggle for reclaiming the dignity of cultures that have been turned into a set of experimental subjects through the implementation of economic developmentalism.⁵ Escobar's critique poses a challenge for a country like South Africa, requiring us not only to unveil the foundations of the order of knowledge which define aspects of our society as underdeveloped but also to explore

⁴ United Nations, Department of Social and Economic Affairs, *Measures for the Economic Development of Underdeveloped Countries*, 1951, p.15 cited in Escobar, p.4

⁵ A. Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1995

the potential contributions in this postdevelopment era of modes self-identification and accreditation in the development of self-capability, of indigenous practices and local forms of modernity. Both challenges turn us back on the archive as a critical resource.

Identity Politics

It is a contention of this paper that the meaning of what it is to be modern and African, a core proposition of South Africa's current development agenda, requires intensive engagement with matters of identity. The concept of identity is closely bound up with ideas about the past, origins and heritage. In South Africa current concepts of identity bear the historic imprimatures of the interventions of past political powers, whether those of precolonial ruling elites, colonial authorities or apartheid ideologues. The extent to which modern identities are *necessarily* constrained or facilitated by the past remains to be debated. That debate itself requires recourse to the archive, primarily to unpack the current ideologically-loaded webs of argumentation that bind South Africans into historic identities that they may wish to jettison, but also to provide resources for alternative possibilities, appropriate to our post-colonial, and increasingly cosmopolitan, present.

It is a central contention of this paper that informed public deliberation about the past that underpins reconciliation, development and identity politics requires a new set of archival practices and activities including but not confined to the following: open access to existing archives, the augmentation of what are yet often one-sided records with additional materials, in some instances the creation of archives where no records currently exist, training for archivists in new protocols and procedures for recognizing and inaugurating archives, as well as for documenting life histories of the records themselves⁶; training for users in techniques of rereading old archives, in accessing archival materials in new forms and places and in an advanced methodological appreciation of the significance of the life histories of the records. Elements of these various activities are found in South Africa today, mostly isolated in their respective settings. There are powerful potential synergies to be developed in pulling them altogether, in encouraging developments in one area to influence developments in another area, and for the whole to constitute a new archival practice underpinned by new or reconstituted archives, appropriate to a post-colonial and post-apartheid setting.

It is a further contention of this paper that such synergies would allow us to critique the very concept of archive that we have inherited and to redefine it in a way that frees it from its colonial and apartheid heritage, meanings and functions. Most importantly, the paper argues that if archive is a powerful technology of rule, and if that rule is asserted through control of access to the archive- in the sense of both who uses and what goes into the archive - as well as control over the form that the materials take, then in the context of a change of political power, say from a totalitarian regime to a democratic one, an endorsement of the archive of the new power is not a sufficiently responsible recognition of the power of the archive. The archive needs continually to have its certitudes questioned and be subjected to the question of difference. It needs to be drawn into the public domain and, where potentially productive, to be engaged in dialogues that may upend its structure and disrupt its conventions. Such dialogues require that the many publics of the archive are vigilant in ensuring that in every invocation of archive the operations of power involved are always interrogated, that the ethical in any archival engagement is always

⁶ The double etymology of archive (the Greek *arkhe*) famously signifies not only "command" but also "origin". Thus the documents of the archive are conventionally read as authentic sources, which once interred in the hallowed curatorial sepulchre, are ostensibly fixed in form and content. In every case, however, the so-called source has a long history of making before it is trapped in the archive, and is continually refashioned in the archive as archivists augment and excise, order and contextualise, and as even users and readers, through their publications and other practices, reframe the documents. In no sense is archive a point of origin or its contents pristinely original. For that reason, the latest thinking in archival practice demands that every record warrants the investigation of its own life history.

foregrounded, that the archive is conceptualized as a space in which to reflect critically on the self, that it excludes no-one, and that there is a refusal to limit the archive to being a place of recovery of original propriety. It is vital that in every invocation of archive, the operations of power involved are always interrogated, that our public deliberation involves a dialogue about archive that foregrounds the ethical in any archival engagement, that understands the archive as a space in which to reflect critically on the self, that promotes archive as a space that excludes no-one, and that refuses to limit the archive to being a place of recovery of original propriety.

THE WAY FORWARD

This paper proposes a two-pronged strategy to address these gaps in the current efforts at reconciliation and development, and indeed, to underpin many other areas of vital public deliberation where archive is involved.

The first prong - conceptualized as an Archival Platform - involves the launching of an archival effort geared towards refiguring the archive along the lines described as necessary above. The second prong - conceptualized as a linked Programme of Public Engagement - involves the fostering and facilitating of public debate and discussion primarily around questions of past injustices, and around current efforts in the creation of self-capability (the central archive – linked questions within reconciliation and development respectively) that draws on and makes use of the refigured archive. The two-pronged strategy hinges on the idea of developments on the archival platform shaping the public debate, and the requirements of the public debate giving impetus to developments on the archival platform.

The vision is to establish a shared archival platform for all archival stakeholders supported by three pillars of archival innovation:

- a project for the radical interrogation of the role of archive in knowledge production, a project primarily organized around the question of how a different archive might allow us more effectively to critique colonial and apartheid knowledge production, and open avenues for the development of new forms of knowledge. This is a currently stalled issue that is inhibiting fundamental transformation in our higher education institutions;
- a project for the promotion of memory and dialogue for justice; a project that involves facilitating dialogue around politically-charged memories and filling politically-charged gaps in the archival record in the course of dialogue rather than through authoritative and appropriative collection practices; enabling the collective negotiation of memory and more specifically, ensuring that the voices from society's margins are involved in that collective negotiation; and in ensuring that collective memories thus negotiated are not consigned to oblivion, but continue to find a place in public deliberation;
- a project of ready and mutual electronic access across the various repositories (locally and outside of South Africa), governed by a commitment to open access, and underpinned by ongoing innovations geared towards enabling the virtual circulation of archival records, along with the life histories, and their contextual details;

and for that archival platform to take up and service key issues of public deliberation

The proposed two-prong strategy marks a radical break in practice around archives. Where in the past in South Africa, records were assembled or archives were set up to support particular political projects and to provide historical justification for political ideologies, the proposed strategy has been formulated to facilitate public deliberation. The strategy is designed to configure archives to precipitate open public debate and discussion, and in turn, to allow the needs of public deliberation to call forth archival responses.

The Archival Platform

The Archival Platform is conceptualized as a shared space of interaction between three kinds of archival stakeholders: archival repositories, memory activists, and archival users. While the position paper treats each of these in turn, in practice, the categories often overlap.

The space of interaction is conceptualized as having a strongly utilitarian aspect (primarily the development of electronic systems of mutual access, and of protocols governing that mutuality of access, all founded on the principal of open access), a fundamentally intellectual aspect (an ongoing project of redefining and reshaping archives and the associated categories of knowledge), and an activist dimension. The paper deals in turn with each group of stakeholders, and with the three pillars undergirding the space of interaction

A. Stakeholders

Archival Repositories and Institutions

This category of stakeholders may, for convenience of apprehension, be divided into three types of documentary repositories - government institutions, private or alternative institutions, and virtual collections. Each type occupies a different structural space, accesses different forms of funding, and faces particular challenges. The position paper proposes a fourth category of repository which cuts across all three types, non-documentary repositories of archival materials (which may be objects of material culture - artworks, films, music, oral materials, items of popular culture and so on - some of which, in certain instances, may be acknowledged and incorporated into the archival institutions, but most of which are denoted as non-archival and consigned to museums as objects of cultural interest).

It is beyond the scope of this position paper to analyse in depth the current, very substantial, difficulties faced by the various repositories. The paper merely suggests how the proposed Platform may support the repositories in addressing some of their existing difficulties, as well as encouraging and enabling them to respond to the challenges identified in this paper.

(i) Government institutions

The largest and most significant of these institutions is the National Archives and Records Service with the responsibility for ensuring proper record keeping by national government structures, and for preserving the actual records of those structures. It is further responsible for setting national standards in the area of archives and co-ordinating national archival resources. The National Archives has the further, vaguely articulated, responsibility for ensuring that an archive of civil society is kept. The National Archives falls under the Department of Arts and Culture which ensures compliance with government needs, and it is assisted by a council whose responsibility is merely advisory and whose membership is made up of regional representatives appointed by the Minister. The council replaced the previous National Archives Commission, a body appointed through a process of public nomination, which had the responsibility of ensuring that the National Archives operated in terms of the public good. Under the present dispensation, the capacity of the National Archives to act in terms of the public good, as opposed to narrow governmental interests, is limited.

A number of non-official archives of various kinds also fall under the Department of Arts and Culture, the Mayibuye Archive on Robben Island (the latter a national museum), being a case in point. Local and provincial government records are the responsibility of the provincial archives services, which operate under many of the same conditions as the National Archives, though often with less appreciation of their significance, limited funding and less capacity to service the public good.

(ii) Private or alternative archives. University archives are perhaps the most extensive non-government archives. In certain instances the universities hold collections which are rightly regarded as national treasures, the Bleek/Lloyd collection which is housed in part at UCT, and the James Stuart collection at the UKZN being the leading examples. These two collections are the two largest and most significant archives of materials pertaining to South Africa's precolonial past, with lengthy texts very possibly recorded verbatim, or nearly verbatim, from San and Zulu-speaking narrators.⁷

⁷ Other University archives of note are the collections of the Alan Paton Center, UKZN, and of the archives at Fort Hare University.

Although in part funded by the government subsidies to the universities, the strongly asserted independence of the universities shields these archives from the structural pressures that are brought to bear on the governmental archives. The acquisition policies of the university collections are highly diverse and the contents sometimes strongly oppositional, sometimes astonishingly esoteric, in character. The holdings of Wits University's Historical Papers provides a case in point. This archive contains the records of, amongst other things, the trade union movement and through its affiliate, the Gay and Lesbian Archive, (GALA), of lesbian sangomas! GALA is of course a prime example of an alternative archive, while its sister organization, the South African History Archive, which collects internal anti-apartheid struggle materials was historically an alternative archive, which now finds its collection to be part of an emerging new mainstream of archival interest.

The category private archives is a broad one, encompassing Harry Oppenheimer's Brenthurst Archive, a collection of rare southern African historical material, as much as the corporate archives such as Barlow Rand and Standard Bank. The Hidden Years Music Archive owned by 3rd Ear Music Company (<http://www.3rdear.com>) is yet another example of a private archive. Comprising decades of 'alternative' South African words and music (political, commercial, traditional, contemporary and community, in diverse styles –Urban Folk, Township Jazz, Country Rock and Masakanda), recorded live and in-studio production, the Archive also includes photos, programmes, and posters. Private archives typically have a narrow sectoral focus and often service the direct interests of their promoters.

(iii) Virtual Archives.

Where government and private or alternative archives are all physical repositories of documents or things, where some of the "things" might be digital documents, or digital copies of documents, and are defined as collections by the terms of their provenance, the relatively new phenomena of virtual archives are fully ether-based, and are called into being as archives by virtue of categories selected by the webmaker "archivist". Perhaps the most pertinent example of such an archive is Ntongela Masilela's *New African Movement* website which attempts to construct an archive of the writings of various South African intellectuals, drawn from sources all over the world.. We should also note in this context the creation of the digital version of the Lloyd/Bleek archive, elements of which are physically located in three separate institutions (Iziko: The South African Museum, UCT and the National Library) but which are now being digitized and made available as a single virtual archive.⁸

Virtual archives present new kinds of challenges, some of which, presumably, are yet to present themselves. Criteria of access are immediately different: the researcher, or his/her proxy, does not need to be present at an archival site in order to access the document; the way in which the material is understood to be original is different from that of a conventional archive; the archival assemblage may be subject-based rather than provenance-based and thus unhinged from its contextual companions prior to its insertion in the virtual archive, or it may be an extract from a larger text.

Significantly virtual archives offer an opportunity for novel challenges to the power exerted by historically established archives. The Masilela archive illustrates this nicely. Where the articles in African language newspapers that constitute the core of this archive may have been categorized as "Bantu journalism" in an archive with its origins in apartheid times, the Masilela project reassembles them in virtual form as an archive of African intellectual thought. Such acts of contemporary archival assemblage, through their ability to challenge powerful colonial taxonomies and categories of knowledge, hold the radical potential of constructing post-colonial archives out the elements of colonial ones.

⁸ See www.lloydbleekcollection.uct.ac.za

(iv) Non-documentary repositories: this position paper draws attention to the historical processes that excluded certain materials from the archive and consigned them to museums or oblivion. One of the most devastating effects of the colonial concept of archives was its limitation to documents, an approach which effectively denied precolonial African societies an archive prior to the introduction of literate recorders, many of whom were initially not even of the societies concerned. In much of sub-Saharan Africa objects (memory boards, ancestor figures, royal staffs, *mregho* sticks, divination instruments and so on), landscape (both topography and landmarks), and oral texts and performances served as memory repositories. The archival capacities of these materials were undermined by the delimitation of the objects as cultural exotica, the renaming of the landscape and its subjection to colonial mapping, and the consignment of many of the oral materials to the realms of myth or religion. Reconceptualised as archival materials, these forms have the potential of greatly enriching the archive of historically non-literate communities. The historical value of these items is currently recognized in national policy as “living heritage”, but their archival potential and status has yet to be recognized and developed.

Memory Activists

Organisations and institutions like the South African History Archive, The FXI (Freedom of Expression Institute), Open Democracy Advice Centre, the Centre for Memory at the Nelson Mandela Foundation, the National Heritage Council and its implementing body, the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA), and organizations which advocate the collection of oral histories (eg. Centre for Popular Memory) are themselves not primarily archival repositories (although they may have considerable holdings). They are perhaps best understood as activists operating in the archival field, seeking, variously, to ensure that new kinds of archives are established, that underrepresented areas in archival collections receive attention, that open access to archives is protected, that attention is drawn to the operations of power in the archive and that that power is used to serve the ends of justice.

Archival Users

Amongst the many kinds of archival users we identify two categories of archival researchers: researchers who use archival holdings as resources for investigations into events and processes of the past; and researchers who investigate the archival past itself, that is, how archives of various kinds came into being in the shape and form that they inhabit. In addition, there is a small grouping of researchers and intellectuals who are beginning to critique both the content and organization of existing archives, and the underpinnings of the concept itself.

The archivists' professional body, the South Africa Society of Archivists, has effectively collapsed. In part this is because of the multifaceted crisis around archive itself which this paper points up. It is a crisis that extends well beyond questions of professional competence and ethics, and involves stakeholders outside the bounds of the professional body. The Archival Platform would be a timely intervention, able to draw these categories of stakeholders together and to support emerging new archival practices in a way that the defunct body no longer can.

B. The Space of Interaction

The envisaged archival platform would provide organizational, networking and intellectual connections between all participating archival repositories and archive-orientated projects and activities. This would take the form of, inter alia, promoting the development of a common, or mutually accessible, technological foundation for the archiving institutions; promoting the digitization of records⁹; on-line access to digitized records; organising common access portals;

⁹ We note here the work of the Mellon-funded Digital Imaging Project of South Africa and its two projects, DISA 1 (“Southern Africa’s Struggle for Democracy: Anti-apartheid Periodicals, 1960-1994”) and DISA 2 (Southern African Freedom Struggles, c.1950-1994), and its commitment to building digital imaging capacities in South Africa. The project, which involves cross-institutional

identifying alienated or fragmented archival collections and promoting their emergence in public domain, or where relevant, their return to South Africa; promoting the establishment of new archives; and establishing protocols for all of these forms of interaction; engaging in sustained investigation of the circumstances establishment of existing archives and the forms they have taken (the creation of the life histories referred to earlier), as well as of the concept of archive that is our colonial inheritance, and attempting to rethink that concept; enabling memory for justice and open access.

The primary purpose of the Platform will be to ensure that these components are fundamentally interconnected, their respective work is informed in each case by thinking in the other areas, and that their respective interests are represented in and inform joint projects.

An Instrument for the Promotion of Public Deliberation

The linking of the archival platform to a project for the promotion of archivally-informed public deliberation is designed to ensure that the archives serve public deliberation and that their contents circulate in the public domain, subject to continual review and assessment. This marks a break with conventional archival practice which is geared towards ensuring that archival documents are closeted safely out of circulation.

The arrest of documents in the archive - the key rationale for the archive – typically removes them from circulation in the public domain. The very idea of historical traces taken out of circulation is itself a particular tactic foundational to positivist epistemology, and is fundamentally at odds with systems that view knowledge as negotiated.

Many archives are public institutions, supported by government funding. Yet the public that has recourse to the archives is mostly a highly select group of researchers who need not only the necessary literacy to use the catalogues, fill out the request slips and read the documents, but also an institutional literacy that enables them to participate in the rituals of the archives, to imagine the documents that they need, and to track down their location (often only to find that secrecy clauses and twenty-year closures conspire to keep them from the documents).

It is vital that the activities on the Platform are informed by developments in the arena of public deliberation, and in turn that processes of public deliberation find support and resources on the Archival Platform. This paper proposes that an instrument be created for ensuring this synergy that involves: media education and solicits media engagement around archive-linked matters of public interest; publication projects (archival biographies, hidden histories; published records etc.); and the giving of explicit space in public discussion to the archival component of major public issues.

CONCLUSION

If archive is a powerful technology of rule, and if that rule is asserted through control of access to the archive- in the sense of both who uses and what goes into the archive - as well as control over the form that the materials take, then in the context of a change of political power, say from a totalitarian regime to a democratic one, an endorsement of the archive of the new power is not a sufficiently responsible recognition of the power of the archive.

The archive needs continually to have its certitudes questioned and be subjected to the question of difference. It needs to be drawn into the public domain and, where potentially productive, to be engaged in dialogues that may upend its structure and disrupt its conventions. Such dialogues require that archivists surrender the idea of clear custodial neutrality, and enter spaces of negotiation and imagination about what best practices might be.

collaboration, has not addressed the questions of mutual open access in terms of the range proposed here.

New possibilities, not only for the preservation of sources, but the engagement of memory, both social and individual, are part of that potential productivity. The concept of memory is founded in ideas of transmission and circulation, and admits of textual change over time, partiality of recall, imagination and processes of representation. Oral texts, artifacts, landscape and the body can all be sites of memory. Memory is, by definition, active in the present where the archive poses as inert.

Traces of the past are treasures - and fragments of past lives, even suspect lives, are rare materials. Appreciation of them requires a passionate commitment that is mindful of their powers. Even as we recognize and value these traces, however, we must remain vigilant in the protection of the freedom to transcend the past, and endlessly to engage the archive.