Archives at the Crossroads 2007

Open Report to the Minister of Arts and Culture from the Archival Conference "National System, Public Interest" held in April 2007 and co-convened by the National Archives, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the Constitution of Public Intellectual Life Research Project.









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Summary

The triggers that led to the holding of the Conference, various contributions to the Conference, and the discussions that ensued, point unambiguously to an archival system that is *under severe strain* and to a wider archive sector urgently in need of support.

The problems lie in three areas:

- The political and social role of archive and archiving in a democracy and in facilitating the work of building social cohesion in a diverse and historically-fractured society is still not recognized sufficiently, nor is it actively and systematically fostered in and by government and indeed, in the broader public sphere. Furthermore, many of the varied forms and sites of archive and archiving go unrecognized.
- Archival work is seriously under-resourced because its significance is largely unacknowledged.
- Lack of recognition and under-resourcing result in inadequate and unintegrated planning; a low skills-base among personnel; inadequate records management in government departments; absence of clear career-paths for staff; poor service delivery; inadequate conditions of preservation; in short, an archival system under strain and not serving South Africa as it should. Unless remedial action is taken soon, there is the potential for further deterioration, even collapse.

The records of government are a key instrument of efficient administration and planning, and the means by which citizens hold governments accountable to them. The archive and archiving are further central tools of reconciliation and of the recognition of our common humanity embracing all our diversity. They are sites for the ongoing reconsideration of the past in order to enable a better future.

We are at a crossroads. Right now there is a unique opportunity both to fix the problems in the system and to use a rethought, 21st century, postcolonial concept of archive to underpin the urgent national project of social cohesion. On the other hand, there is a danger of the national system being reduced to an observer of poor governance and a loss of historical memory. What is at stake is not simply the survival of the inherited documents of the past, but our hard-won democracy itself and our possible future as a cohesive society.

Background

In response to a range of indicators signaling a troubled state of affairs in the national archival system and in the archival sector more broadly, the National Archives and Records Service, the Nelson Mandela Foundation and the University of the Witwatersrand, with the support of the Minister of Arts and Culture, collaborated in organising a two-day conference (23 and 24 April 2007) to assess the state of the national archival system and the vitality of the broader archival sector.

By national archival system we mean the institutional network of state structures driven by the National Archives, which is charged with the tasks of ensuring the proper management of public records, promoting the preservation and accessibility of South Africa's archival heritage, and overseeing the national system. The system comprises the National Archives, the National Archives Advisory Council, the various provincial archives structures, and a range of related governance structures. In terms of the Constitution, archival responsibility for records of the state generated by structures other than national ones is the responsibility of provincial government.

The broader archival sector includes a range of heritage institutions, a clutch of museums with significant artifact collections, university archives, private and corporate archives, activist and community archives like the Gay and Lesbian Archive (GALA), or the issue-driven South African History Archive (SAHA) which seeks to ensure open access to archives; a variety of archival and memory projects locally, regionally and internationally such as the Nelson Mandela Foundation's Centre of Memory and Dialogue, the Living Landscape Project that performs the archive of Rock Art in a community base, the District Six Museum, and the Mellon-funded digitization projects DISA and ALUKA. It further includes users, creators and theorists of archive, among them professional historians, family history researchers, artists and other cultural workers, identity theorists, academics and countless others.

In the course of this report we refer to "archives," "archiving" and "the archive." We use the term "archives" to refer to collections or storehouses of preserved historical resources, whether documentary, oral, visual, material, virtual or physical. In so doing we deliberately break from an inherited usage of the term "archives" as limited to texts, whether documentary or oral. "Archiving" refers to a range of dynamic processes including the processes by means of which some items get preserved and others do not, how choices are made about systems used to preserve items, and the ways in which access to records is determined.

"The archive" is a conceptual term. It refers to 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.

Conference Overview and Objectives

South Africa's post-apartheid national archival system was inaugurated in law when the National Archives of South Africa Act came into operation in January 1997. The Act was an expression of a transformation discourse in archives which had emerged in the late 1980s and gathered momentum in the early 1990s. This discourse focused its energies around two primary imperatives: the building of a new national archival system for South Africa; and the imagining of a post-apartheid archive in South Africa. The Conference set itself the task of assessing how the archival landscape has changed in South Africa since 1997 by asking, on this the tenth anniversary of the Act's implementation, how well the archival system is working. Key questions considered included how transformation discourse has engaged changing realities and what the key challenges are currently both in the national system and in the broader archival sector.

The Conference proposed a review which opens to the future, and which followed the two strands in transformation discourse identified above – building and imagining. Part 1 of the Conference focused on the constituting of a national archival system. Part 2 focused on the interplay of "national interest" and "public interest" in the constituting of archive. The Conference programme is attached as Appendix 1.

The Conference was held on 23 and 24 April 2007, and volunteers from among the participants met again on 25 April to identify the key issues for this report. A list of the working session participants is attached as Appendix 2.

The organizers sought participation from a wide grouping drawn from within the archival profession and from archives stakeholders more broadly. 143 stakeholders registered and participated in the Conference proceedings. Of these 24.5% were from national government and 13.3% from provincial government. Stakeholders from universities across South Africa, and as far afield as Namibia and London made up 17.5% of the total. Activist archives made up 9%, while community-based projects, national research/human rights foundations and the SABC each made up 6.3%. Museums made up 5.5%, and national heritage organistions and individual researchers/heritage practitioners 2.8% each. The corporate sector made up 2.1% of the total,

while the Constitutional Court, the educational/skills development sector (outside the universities) and digitisation projects each made up 0.7%. A full list of participants is attached as Appendix 3.

In the report that follows we sound a very serious warning regarding archives. We identify key problem areas and attempt to show what is at stake if they are not addressed. Throughout we seek to identify where the Department of Arts and Culture and government need to act and what needs to be done. We also flag areas where archival professionals and archival stakeholders can make a contribution to addressing problems. The Conference supported the formation of an inter-institutional, inter-project, regional Archival Platform, with a five-year agenda of promoting interaction amongst the Platform collaborators geared towards responding to the issues identified in this report. A summary of the draft proposal for the formation of the Archival Platform is attached as Appendix 4.

It is important to note that the report that follows is not a commissioned research report that systematically sets out to delineate the archival system and the broader archival sector, and all the germane legislative and policy frameworks. Rather it identifies the key problems in the system and the sector, and the concerns of the personnel and stakeholders who operate within those frameworks. It does this from the position of the concerned intellectuals - the practitioners and users located throughout the system and the sector - who confront these problems in their daily practice and who recognize their implications, both immediate and long-term.

The Role of Records and Archives in a Democracy

It is a fundamental tenet of democracy that government must be accountable to the electorate. Records management and archiving are key tools in fulfilling this responsibility. But records management is not only about holding government accountable. It is of direct benefit to government in the efficient conduct of its day-to-day business, and underpins planning and the development of policies.

However, the Conference noted a failure in the culture of government to prioritise record-keeping and archives. The sad fact is that participant after participant reported that registries are typically regarded as dumping grounds, for both staff and texts. Record-keeping across government is largely without active management and personnel are untrained and unmotivated, though a few exceptions were noted – for instance, encouraging developments in Limpopo Province show what can be achieved where there is a will.

Electronic records management in both the state and private sectors presents further challenges. While physical documents do get consigned to the registries albeit in an often haphazard fashion and while few staff have the requisite skills and knowledge effectively to implement the existing manual systems, electronic communications are at much greater risk of complete erasure. Electronic records personnel require intensive continuing training, ongoing skills updating as well as strategies for the long-term maintenance of digital records, involving soft and hardware migrations, not to mention the introduction of much-needed "industry" standards.

The state has been provided with legislative tools that are amongst the most powerful available world-wide to enable and audit government record-keeping. These tools are not, however, wielded with purpose and effect. Independent research conducted by the Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) as part of its ODAC/SAHRC Openness and Responsiveness Awards programme, inaugurated this year, substantiates and elaborates on the points made above.

This state of affairs effectively is in breach of record-keeping requirements determined ultimately by the Constitution and enshrined in the principles of accountable government, administrative justice and access to information. This is an ethical issue that the Archival Platform will be obliged to address actively. Ideally it would be best if the Department and the Platform could collaborate in this.

This amounts to deeply worrying signs that archives are not being recognized and given status in government. This point was also noted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which suggested that archives needed to be located in the Presidency in order to be appropriately prioritized.

Lack of Access to the Archive

The lack of public access to the archive has been repeatedly addressed in conferences, reports and in the media, yet remains a persistent and especially troubling matter. The culture of locking up materials in the archive persists even in the wake of the TRC, which so forcefully made the case for an open and accessible archive as fundamental for social justice.

It is a matter of national concern that the full TRC record is still not publicly accessible despite the Commission's own request that the record be available for public consultation. The access provisions of the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) need to be reconciled with the public interest in access to this archive.





While political will is clearly a significant factor here, the pending SAHRC report makes it clear that one reason for the lack of access to the archive is inadequate training, notably around the requirements of PAIA, and a poor culture of records management in the departments concerned. As identified above, at root here is a larger political failure to inculcate at the heart of government an appreciation of the role of records and archiving in maintaining a healthy democracy.

Valorised Heritage and Neglected Archive

The Conference noted that heritage occupies a central place in the broad Arts and Culture framework in which archives is also situated. In part their respective concerns overlap. Insofar as heritage policies ensure a recognition of intangible heritage they enable a much-needed widening of the brief of archives. In practice however this has had a limited effect in archives, being confined primarily to an augmentation of the written archive to include oral histories. For the most part, heritage discourse and practice and those of archives remain separate. This is because heritage is commonly regarded as the public face or point of presentation of past inheritances, while archive is regarded as the safe storehouse.

A great deal has been written about heritage as the site where governments, especially those of new nations, claim a particular past to underwrite the emerging national identity. We see this in South Africa in certain well-resourced flagship heritage projects with high impact which promote a particular understanding of the South African past. Some of these projects, like the Robben Island Museum and Freedom Park, have archival components. Government has a clear rationale and motivation for promoting these projects. They validate and preserve the memory of the freedom struggle. This plays an important role in helping South Africans who were involved in the freedom struggle memorialize and value their pasts. And, as many commentators have noted, the heritage and tourism agendas intersect in these projects. However, the matter of the archive is not coterminous with the promotion of heritage.

The Conference was concerned to draw government's attention to the urgent need to facilitate communities' and individual citizens' access to the archive for their own many and diverse projects of identity, to enable them to engage the past, to promote ideas about the past and to contend others. Such access to the archive is further crucial to the project of imagining their futures in South Africa as well as to holding government accountable. We are all deeply aware that there is no one definitive version of the past that holds good for all people at all times. To admit and facilitate a diversity of interpretations of the past is a progressive challenge to politically dangerous exclusivisms. Open and viable

archives are vital in anchoring citizenship and that in turn lies at the heart of social cohesion.

The Conference discussed the existence of a range of community-based initiatives which interrogate those archives that are available to them and use them as ways of achieving understandings of the past and of imagining the future that are not necessarily those that are envisaged in the formal heritage projects of the state. Nonetheless these local projects do important work in assisting those communities to negotiate their identities within contemporary South Africa, allow the communities concerned to valorize those identities and where necessary enable reconciliation over past injustices. In a number of best practice examples they result in archivally-based contemporary cultural initiatives with developmental and employment possibilities. (The Living Landscape project involving the Clanwilliam community provides a case in point.) Such initiatives illustrate vividly the difference between archive and heritage, most notably in archive as an open source for diverse explorations of the past, and heritage as a form of presentation of the past already organized into a story. As such the differences provide pointers for national archival policy.

Isolation of Archive

The Conference noted that the archive is currently understood in a limited way as comprising the isolated institutions of the archival system. This definition of the archive is a colonial and apartheid inheritance that needs to be revised. The collections of material culture in museums, for example, are crucial archival sources for the history of South Africa. Archival policies and projects need to include these holdings.

The inherited definition further fails to acknowledge the presence of archive in countless aspects of cultural and social life: in neighbourhood jazz clubs, marriage and funeral rites, family photo albums, artworks, plays, novels and designer clothing, to name but a few of the many sites. These sites contain valuable archival resources and significant archival energies flourish in them that merit recognition within cultural policy. Indeed, archive needs to be recognized as foundational to much of the work of the Department of Arts and Culture.

The prevailing concept of archive is weighed down by its colonial and apartheid baggage. The fact that the bulk of the documents comprising this archive relate to those regimes contributes further to its isolation. Two important points need to be registered here.

Firstly, it is critically important that the record of oppression be preserved because of its capacity to explain the legacies of those eras that still persist, as well as its ability to account for oppression itself. It is also an important resource in enabling people to do the necessary work of coming to terms with oppression, whether as victims, perpetrators, witnesses, on-lookers or latter-day descendants.

Secondly, the colonial and apartheid 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 from and about the past were thus not annihilated, but insidiously saved, lodged in the colonial and apartheid archives, where they yet lie, many still awaiting recuperation and rehabilitation in the service of post-colonial projects.

The collapse of the South African Society of Archivists and the Association of Archivists and Manuscript Librarians adds a professional isolation on top of this conceptual isolation. And there is no doubt that critical professional energies are drying up as a result of the growing crisis in the teaching of history, both at school and university levels.

Patchy and Failing Archival Services

In 2006 the South African Historical Association wrote to the National Archives Advisory Council expressing extreme concern about the state of disrepair and a failure in the provision of archival services in the national system. This followed an earlier petition from the South African Historical Society. The two interventions were formal registrations of complaints and anxieties about the state of the archival system reported widely in the research community and indeed at preceding archives conferences.

These concerns were addressed at the Conference. There is no doubt that the present archival and record-keeping services are patchy and in some instances collapsing. The pending SAHRC Report mentioned above which explicitly tests public access to records in terms of the Promotion of Access to Information Act confirms this.

Two major factors contributing to these failures were identified: a lack of adequate resources and a lack of skills necessary for the various archives services.

Lack of resources: The Conference deliberations linked the lack of available resources to two points: a national failure to appreciate what is at stake in investing in archive, and secondly the direction of resources into national flagship projects designed to produce politically valuable symbolic capital.

Lack of skills: Three points were raised in relation to the lack of skills within the national archival system:

- 1. Failure in the culture of government to prioritise record-keeping and archives. As noted above record-keeping across government is largely without active management and personnel are untrained.
- 2. Within the National Archives significant training is undertaken but personnel are rapidly lost to more attractive employment elsewhere because salaries are poor and advancement routes into departmental record-keeping structures have not been developed. The critical links between record-keeping in government departments and ultimate archival deposit which would enable such routes have not been developed. Likewise, career advancement routes geared towards introducing archival competencies into other cognate areas of the heritage and culture sectors have not been developed because critical links across these sectors are not in existence.
- 3. The Conference noted that technical training for archivists is available in educational institutions. The quality and range of the skills inculcated is not formally monitored by the profession and the necessary interweaving of technical, management and IT training, and theoretical education is not subject to review and adequate planning. These lacunae are partly a consequence of the collapse of the professional society. The matter needs to be addressed urgently via the Archival Platform. The Conference further noted a plethora of advanced Heritage qualifications but slender offerings in the area of archives. Again, this should be addressed via the Platform.

The Conference noted that the lack of career path integration between archives, the wider heritage sector, and records management means that the pool to be educated under the current dispensation is too small to warrant educational institution investment in this area without substantial incentives, training investments and bursaries. Currently, what records management training is available is undertaken for departments by private consultants at huge cost and without attention being given to the connections into archives. These are matters that need to be taken up at departmental level.

The frameworks in which the training takes place are the responsibility of government and these are in some disarray: these include the SAQA and standards-generating body frameworks. Development of both of these frameworks

has stalled. There is a lack of clarity around the status of Labour Department concerns in relation to archives and in relation to the operation of SETAs. The MAPPP-SETA for the heritage sector is effectively dysfunctional. Again, these issues which involve other departments must be addressed by the Department of Arts and Culture, with the support of the Platform.

The Digital Future

There are clear indications that digitization can solve many problems related to lack of resources and to access, and indeed to isolation. However, digitization also throws up new resource and practice challenges of its own. Large foreign digitization projects currently dominate the scene, raising fears about the recolonisation of local knowledge. It is essential that the Department take the lead in initiating sector-wide discussions that lead to policies and protocols designed to protect our archive, in all its many manifestations, from foreign appropriation while maximizing use of the available resources, avoiding duplication and ensuring ongoing and enhanced accessibility. Issues of intellectual property require sustained attention under Departmental auspices.

Digitization also offers the means for the Department to negotiate for the return of original documents (currently not prioritised by the Ifa Lethu initiative) that continue to remain in the safe custodies to which they were consigned under apartheid. (The Karis and Carter collection is a typical example.) Digital copies would allow those custodians to retain working copies of the documents in which they have invested preservatory care. However, such negotiations will depend on the prior improvement of local archival facilities. Repatriation of documents from South Africa to their places of provenance is also entailed here.

National Archives Advisory Council

It is vital that the incoming Archives Council be afforded the fullest opportunity to grapple with all the points raised in this report and be fully supported in coming to grips with what is at stake nationally concerning archives. It is also crucial that the Council is enabled to fulfill its obligations ensuring that a full, valid and accessible record of government is available for public consultation. The Department should play a facilitative role here while the Platform should work actively to ensure that the Council is held accountable.

Conclusion

While the current situation is dire indeed, there exists in the acknowledgement of the problem an opening for the Department, Council and the Platform to collaborate in grasping the archival nettle. The Minister is uniquely well-placed at this time to work in partnership with the Platform (a community of diverse institutions positioned across society) to break down inhibiting sectoral barriers and to position the archive at the heart of the national project of social cohesion. This would entail a two-pronged strategy of using the opportunity created by the failing system to attend to the nuts and bolts of the records system, while at the same time casting off an out-of-date notion of archive and inaugurating a fully post-colonial one, informed by our unique and complex archival engagements in situations of repression, liberation, negotiation, reconciliation and development. In so doing we have the opportunity to render service to our democracy, and to contribute our ideas of archive to the cause of social justice the world over

National Archives and Records Service Nelson Mandela Foundation University of the Witwatersrand June 2007









Appendix 1: Conference Programme

Monda	ıy,	23 April	20	007	The Archive and a National System
09h30	-	10h00	Ī	Tea	
10h00	-	10h05	I	Welcome and Introduction	Achmat Dangor, Nelson Mandela Foundation
10h05	-	10h30	Ī	Opening Address	Pallo Jordan, Minister of Arts and Culture
10h30	-	12h30	I	Session 1	Assessing processes of opening the archive, and understanding their continuing role in constituting a post-apartheid archive
			1	Chair	l Graham Dominy, National Archives and Records Service
			1	Panellists	 Sello Hatang, South African Human Rights Commission Ciraj Rassool, University of the Western Cape Verne Harris, Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue Noel Solani, Nelson Mandela Museum Sandra Prosalendis, Heritage Practitioner
12h30	-	13h30	Ī	Lunch	
13h30	-	14h00	Ī	Keynote address	Sarah Tyacke, University of London
14h00	-	16h00	I	Session 2	Assessing the new network of institutions and structures designed to deliver a transformed national archival system
			1	Chair	l Verne Harris, Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue
				Panellists	 I Graham Dominy, National Archives and Records Service I Nkhumbudzeni Tshirado, Western Cape Provincial Archives Service I Brad Abbott, I-Forest I Ellen Namhila, University of Namibia I Sekgothe Mokgoatsana, Oral History Association of South Africa
15h00	-	15h30	I	Tea	

Tuesday	2	A A muil	20	007	The Austine and the Dublic Interest
Tuesday,					The Archive and the Public Interest
09h00 -		09h30	1	Tea	
09h30 -		12h00	1	Session 3	Exploring colonial and apartheid archives in post-colonial contexts
				Chair Panellists	I Carolyn Hamilton, University of the Witwatersrand I Jabulani Sithole, University of KwaZulu-Natal I Patricia Hayes, University of the Western Cape I Geoff Blundell, Origins Museum I Achmat Dangor,
					Nelson Mandela Foundation
12h00 -		13h00	ī	Lunch	
13h00 -		15h00	I	Session 4	Exploring the distinctions between "national interest" and "public interest", and understanding the role of archive in relation to both
			I	Chair	l Achmat Dangor, Nelson Mandela Foundation
			I	Panellists	 I Xolela Mangcu, University of the Witwatersrand I Albie Sachs, Constitutional Court Judge I Ali Hlongwane, Hector Pieterson Museum I Yasmin Sooka, Foundation for Human Rights
15h00 -		15h30	Ī	Tea	
15h30 -		14h30	1	Carolyn Hamilton and Xolela Mangcu	The Way Forward: Draft proposal for a national Archival Platform A presentation of the current thinking on the possibilities and potentialities of an Archival Platform, which is conceptualised as a five-year long, crossinstitutional/cross-projects, conversation about the post-colonial South African archive

Appendix 2: Working Session Participants, 25 April 2007

Name	Email
Ali K. Hlongwane	alih@joburg.org.za
Boniswa Qabaka	boniswa@nelsonmandela.org
Brett Pyper	Brett.pyper@wits.ac.za
Carolyn Hamilton	carolyn.hamilton@wits.ac.za
Ciraj Rassool	crassool@uwc.ac.za
Ethel Arends	ethel@nelsonmandela.org
Graham Dominy	graham.dominy@dac.gov.za
Jabu Nkatingi	nkatingij@sac.norprov.gov.za
Jabulani Sithole	sithole@ukzn.ac.za
Neo Ramoupi	neor@nelsonmandela.org
Nkhumbudzeni Tshirado	ntshirado@pgwc.gov.za
Noel Solani	Mandelamuseum 10@intekom.co.za
Oliver Barstow	oliver.barstow@gmail.com
Razia Saleh	razias@nelsonmandela.org
Sandra Prosalendis	sandraprosalendis@gmail.com
Sarah Tyacke	styacke@blueyonder.co.uk
Sekgothe Mokgoatsana	sekgothem@ul.ac.za
Verne Harris	verne@nelsonmandela.org
Yolisa Soul	ysoul@ufh.ac.za

Appendix 3: Attendance Register

In	stitution	Last Name	First Name	Contact
1.		Mafumadi	Thembeka	thembekav@telksomsa.net
2.	Africa Alive Foundation	Hamlin	Anna	annahamlin@msn.com
3.	Alexandra Community Library	Matopa	Winnie	
4.	Alexandra Heritage Agency	Khonou	Boitumelo	khunou101@yahoo.com
5.	Alexandra Heritage Agency	Matsebe	Kgomotso	kgomzaro@webmail.co.za
6.	Alexandra Heritage Agency	Pine	Frederick	fredericpine@yahoo.com
7.	Aluka	Nygren	Tom	Tom.nygren@aluka.org
8.	ANC Archives	Gugwini	Nokubonga	ngugwini@anc.org.za
9.	ANC Archives	Mvunelo	Zolile	zmvunelo@anc.org.za

Inst	itution	Last Name	First Name	Contact
10.	ANC Caucus Support Services	Kula	Fungiwe	fukula@parliament.gov.za
11.	ANC Caucus Support Services	Mpuma	Bomikazi	bmpuma@parliament.gov.za
12.	ANC Caucus Support Services	Thompson	Renee	rthompson@parliament.gov.za
13.	Auditor General	Ngoepe	Mpho	mphon@agsa.co.za
14.	Auditor General	Yedwa	Mntuwekhaya K	kaya@agsa.co.za
15.	Constitution Hill	Khumalo	Nomsa	nomsa@constitutionhill.org.za
16.	Constitution Hill	Masemola	Clement	clement@constitutionhill.org.za
17.	Department of Correctional Services (DCS)	Mkhulise	Simpiwe	Mavuso.thembi@dcs.gov.za
18.	Department of Correctional Services (DCS)	Nxumalo	Felicity S	Felicity.Nxumalo@dcs.gov.za
19.	Department of Defence Documentation Centre	Jooste	Louisa	sandfdoc@mweb.co.za
20.	Department of Defence Documentation Centre	Van Jaarsveldt	Annette	sandfdoc@mweb.co.za
21.	Department of Science and Technology	Ntsoane	Otsile	
22.	Department of Science and Technology	Van Wyk	Carol	carol.vanwyk@dst.gov.za
23.	Eastern Cape Provincial Archives	Van Zyl	Johan	Johan.vanzyl@srac.ecprov.gov.za
24.	Ekurhuleni Metro	Hlohlongoane	Busisiwe	Tryphinah@Ekurhuleni.com
25.	Ekurhuleni Metro	Makwela	Diane	dianem@ekurhuleni.com
26.	Ekurhuleni Metro	Rapatsa	Sohloane	rapatsas@ekurhuleni.com
27.	Freedom Park Trust	Ndaba	Lubi	lubi@freedompark.co.za
28.	Gauteng Archives Service	Madlepe	Eddie	Eddie.madlepe@gauteng.gov.za
29.	Gauteng Archives Service	Nxele	Nonhlanhla	Nonhlanhla.nxele@gauteng.gov.za
30.	Hector Pieterson Museum	Ramncwana	Babalwa	babalwar@joburg.org.za
31.	Ifa-Lethu	Maaba	Brown	brown@ifalethu.org.za
32.	Independent Researcher	Godfrey	Mulaudzi L	Godfrey@union.org.za
33.	International Labour Organisation	Komane	Thwadi	komane@ilo.org.za
34.	Khulumani Support Group	Le Roux	Pierre Gideon	info@khulumani.net
35.	Kungwini Local Municipality	Mmisi	Jacqueline	mnyathe@kungwinimun.co.za

Inst	itution	Last Name	First Name	Contact
36.	Limpopo Office of the Premier	Makhuvele	Regina	makhuveler@premier.norprov.gov.za
37.	Limpopo Provincial Archives	Nkatingi	Jabu	NkatingiJ@sac.norprov.gov.za
38.	Lusito	Uamusse	Abel C	lusito@webmail.co.za
39.	Lusito	Uamusse	Khanyi Ellen	lusito@webmail.co.za
40.	MAPPP-SETA	Khota	Charlotte N	charlotte@mappp-seta.co.za
41.	Mpumalanga Dept of Culture, Sport & Recreation	Sedibe	Doris Ntombi	dnsedibe@nel.mpu.gov.za
42.	National Archives of South Africa	Dambuza	Karabo	KaraboD@dac.gov.za
43.	National Archives of South Africa	Dikeledi	Khukhele	dikeledik@dac.gov.za
44.	National Archives of South Africa	Hickey	Margaret	Margaret.hickey@dac.gov.za
45.	National Archives of South Africa	Khanye	Thabang	Thabang.khanye@dac.gov.za
46.	National Archives of South Africa	Kirkwood	Clive	Clive.kirkwood@dac.gov.za
47.	National Archives of South Africa	Kwatsha	Noluthando	Noluthando.kwatsha@dac.gov.za
48.	National Archives of South Africa	Madiope	Mothiba	Mothiba.madiope@dac.gov.za
49.	National Archives of South Africa	Maraba	Lesetja	Lesetja.maraba@dac.gov.za
50.	National Archives of South Africa	Mulaudzi	Lufuno	Lufuno.mulaudzi@dac.gov.za
51.	National Archives of South Africa	Ndzena	Lwazi	lwazi.ndzena@dac.gov.za
52.	National Archives of South Africa	Nene	Elizabeth	Elizabeth.nene@dac.gov.za
53.	National Archives of South Africa	Pretorius	Jo	Jo.Pretorius@dac.gov.za
54.	National Archives of South Africa	Seko	Jeanette A M	Jeanette.seko@dac.gov.za
55.	National Film Video and Sound Archives	Brewis	Luana	Luana.brewis@dac.gov.za
56.	National Film Video and Sound Archives	Moses	Trevor T	Trevor.moses@dac.gov.za
57.	National Film Video and Sound Archives	Moyana	Dan Mgoni	Dan.moyana@dac.gov.za

Insti	tution	Last Name	First Name	Contact
58.	National Film Video and Sound Archives	Namanyana	Motunye S	Simon.namanyana@dac.gov.za
59.	National Film Video and Sound Archives	Nkhuna	Winnie	Winnie.nkhuna@dac.gov.za
60.	National Film Video and Sound Archives	Shinners	Melisia	Melisia.shinners@dac.ac.za
61.	National Heritage Council (NHC)	Callinicos	Luli	luli@icon.co.za
62.	National Heritage Council (NHC)	Simelane	Sibongile	Sibongile@nhc.org.za
63.	National Research Foundation (NRF)	Bossenger	Tracy	Tracy@nrf.ac.za
64.	National Research Foundation (NRF)	Levieux	Candice	Candice@nrf.ac.za
65.	National Research Foundation (NRF)	Selebi	Esther	esther@nrf.ac.za
66.	National Research Foundation (NRF)	Selematsela	Daisy	daisys@nrf.ac.za
67.	Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue	Katuu	Shadrack	skatuu@nelsonmandela.org
68.	Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue	Arends	Ethel	ethel@nelsonmandela.org
69.	Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue	Qabaka	Boniswa	boniswa@nelsonmandela.org
70.	Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue	Ramoupi	Neo Lekgotla laga	neor@nelsonmandela.org
71.	Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue	Venter	Sahm	sahmv@nelsonmandela.org
72.	Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue	Saleh	Razia	razias@nelsonmandela.org
73.	Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue	Henriques	Heather	heather@nelsonmandela.org
74.	Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue	Warren	Naomi	naomiw@nelsonmandela.org
75.	Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Diaogue	Riba	Zanele	zaneler@nelsonmandela.org
76.	North West Library, Information and Archives Services	Madumo	Kepi	kmadumo@nwpg.gov.za
77.	North West Provincial Archives	Boyce	Lazarus	lboyce@nwpg.gov.za
78.	North West Provincial Archives	Jimla	Edward N	jimla@webmail.co.za

Inst	itution	Last Name	First Name	Contact
79.	North West Provincial Archives	Mabe	Murvin A	mamabe@nwpg.gov.za
80.	North West Provincial Archives	Madito	Boitumelo I	Imadito@nwpg.gov.za
81.	North West Provincial Archives	Mothusi	Tlotlego	mothusit@nwpg.gov.za
82.	North West Provincial Archives	Thipe	Manne Seth	
83.	North West Provincial Archives	Tities	Victor	vtities@nwpg.gov.za
84.	Origins Centre	Lebele	Mpho Gift	mpholebele@gmail.com
85.	Paper Conservator	Vajifdar	Monique	mvdhc@worldonline.co.za
86.	Researcher	McLeod	Robert Michael	robnsha@worldonline.co.za
87.	Reutloile Community Organisation	Makhetha	Masechaba	reutloileorg@yahoo.com
88.	Rosa Luxemburg Foundation	Stephan	Gerd-Rudiger	Stephan@rlf-sa.org.za
89.	SANCO & Mary's Community Centre	Bapela	Naniki	maryc@mail.co.za
90.	South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)	Assmann	Ilse	Assmanni@sabc.co.za
91.	South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)	Goba	Wandile	gobaw@sabc.co.za
92.	South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)	Jack	Madia	madiamj@sabc.co.za
93.	South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)	Mahlangu	Alfred Buti	mahlanguab@sabc.co.za
94.	South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)	Malindiga	Shadrack M	malindigasm@sabc.co.za
95.	South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)	Monyai	Nare	monyainb@sabc.co.za
96.	South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)	Nombele	Nolubabalo	nombelen@sabc.co.za
97.	South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)	Seetsi	Makhosazana Sybil	seetsims@sabc.co.za

Insti	itution	Last Name	First Name	Contact
98.	South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC)	Tshabalala	Ntsoaki Linah	tshabalala@sabc.co.za
99.	South African History Archive (SAHA)	Allan	Kate	foip@saha.org.za
100.	South African History Archive (SAHA)	Jacobs	Sam	sfj@saha.org.za
101.	South African National Parks	Makhura	Moss	mossm@sanparks.org
102.	Standard Bank	Conradie	Barbara	barbara.conradie@standardbank.co.za
103.	Standard Bank	Letitia	Myburgh	letitia.myburgh@standardbank.co.za
104.	The Presidency	Mpeiwa	Thanyani	thanyani@po.gov.za
105.	UCT Centre for Popular Memory	Meyer	Renate	Renate.meyer@uct.ac.za
106.	UCT Manuscripts and Archives	Hart	Lesley	Lesley.hart@uct.ac.za
107.	UCT Manuscripts and Archives	Ntabankulu	Isaac	isaac.ntabankulu@uct.ac.za
108.	University of KwaZulu Natal	Wright	John	wright@ukzn.ac.za
109.	UNISA	Coetzee	Marie	coetzma@unisa.ac.za
110.	University of Fort Hare Library	Soul	Yolisa	ysoul@ufh.ac.za
111.	University of Limpopo	Josias	Esther	estherj@ul.ac.za
112.	University of Pretoria Archives	Strydom	Bronwyn	Bronwy.strydom@up.ac.za
113.	UWC Robben Island Mayibuye Archives	Yako	Simphiwe	syako@uwc.ac.za
114.	UWC Robben Island Mayibuye Archives	Zulu	Esther	ezulu@uwc.ac.za
115.	Wits Dep Vice Chancellor, Research	Prof Bozzoli	Belinda	bozzolib@vco.wits.ac.za
116.	Wits History Department	Kros	Cynthia	Cynthia.kros@wits.ac.za
117.	Wits School of Art	Pyper	Brett	Brett.pyper@wits.ac.za
118.	Wits University	Phachane	Lesego	Lesego.phachane@wits.ac.za
119.	Wits University	Barstow	Oliver	Oliver.barstow@gmail.com
120.	Wits University	Longwe	Lenore	Lenore.longwe@wits.ac.za
121.	Wits University Art Galleries	Charlton	Julia	Julia.Charlton@wits.ac.za
122.	Wits University Art Galleries	Rankin-Smith	Fiona	Fiona.Rankin-Smith@wits.ac.za

Speakers and Chairs Registration |

Inst	itution	Last Name	First Name	Contact
1.	I-Forest	Abbot	Brad	brad@i-forest.info
2.	Origins Museum	Blundell	Geoff	
3.	Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue	Dangor	Achmat	achmatd@nelsonmandela.org
4.	National Archives and Records Service	Dominy	Graham	graham.dominy@dac.gov.za
5.	University of the Witwatersrand	Hamilton	Carolyn	hamiltonc@gsh.wits.ac.za
6.	Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Dialogue	Harris	Verne	verne@nelsonmandela.org
7.	South African Human Rights Commission	Hatang	Sello	shatang@sahrc.org.za
8.	University of the Western Cape	Hayes	Patricia	pmhayes@mweb.co.za
9.	Hector Pieterson Museum	Hlongwane	Ali	alih@joburg.org.za
10.	Minister of Arts and Culture	Jordan	Pallo	
11.	University of the Witwatersrand	Mangcu	Xolela	xmangcu@telkomsa.net
12.	Oral History Association of South Africa	Mokgoatsana	Sekgothe	sekgothem@ul.ac.za
13.	University of Namibia	Namhila	Ellen	c/o glehmann [glehmann@unam.na]
14.	Heritage Practitioner	Prosalendis	Sandra	sandraprosalendis@gmail.com
15.	University of the Western Cape	Rassool	Ciraj	crassool@uwc.ac.za
16.	Constitutional Court Judge	Sachs	Albie	sachs@concourt.org.za
17.	University of KwaZulu-Natal	Sithole	Jabulani	sithole@ukzn.ac.za
18.	Nelson Mandela Museum	Solani	Noel	mandelamuseum10@intekom.co.za
19.	Foundation for Human Rights	Sooka	Yasmin	YSooka@fhr.org.za
20.	Western Cape Provincial Archives Service	Tshirado	Nkhumbudzeni	ntshirado@pgwc.gov.za
21.	University of London	Tyacke	Sarah	styacke@blueyonder.co.uk

Appendix 4: Regional Archival Platform Proposal Summary, April 2007

Background

Across 2005-7 the Constitution of Public Intellectual Life Research Project (University of the Witwatersrand) hosted a focus on the relationship between archive and public deliberation. This took the form of a series of papers analyzing that relationship¹ as well as a public lecture series.² The findings and discussions which resulted from these initiatives chimed with other indications of an urgent need for a region-wide intervention in the area of archives. The Project then undertook a process of scoping a possible initiative in the area of archives designed to stimulate and support the sector. The current proposal, yet in draft form, is the product of that scoping exercise and a widespread process of discussion with various archival stakeholders.

The Key Issues

The processes described above highlighted four important issues and linked needs:

1. A Changing Concept of Archive: The very concept of archive that we are currently working with is not a fixed one, but one that is undergoing intensive theoretical, epistemological and political rethinking. Most of us are aware of some of the aspects of that rethinking, typically the aspects that are closest to our own area of work. Most of us are also aware that other forms of rethinking are going on elsewhere. Collectively we need a mechanism that assists us in knowing as much as possible about the kind of rethinking that is going on outside our own immediate areas of work, without us having each to find that out for ourselves. And we need forums in which to discuss these developments and their implications.

We operate in a new world in which the public, and the knowledge system, are hungry for new kinds of archives capable of supporting new and very different avenues of enquiry. We face a significant challenge in setting the agenda for the emergence of those archives. We need to facilitate and support that process.

^{1.} See C.Hamilton, "Archival Sepulchres and Memory Theatres," essay for the Nelson Mandela Foundation, 2005; C. Hamilton and X. Mangcu, "Freedom, Public Deliberation and the Archive," paper presented to the South African Historical A ssociation, June, 2006; C.Hamilton, "Archive and Diasporic Knowledge," paper for the Workshop on African and African Diasporic Knowledges, UCT, October, 2006; X.Mangcu, "Public Deliberation and Political Culture: Freeing Up the South African Archive," opening address to the SAHA Workshop, "Memory, Heritage and the Public Interest," November 2006, Johannesburg.

^{2.} See www.public-conversations.org.za

- 2. The Challenges of Digitisation: There are enormous challenges and opportunities presented by digitization and electronic media. There is a pressing need for ongoing debate, collaboration and mutual information sharing, and mutual archival accessibility.
- 3. Uneven Capacities in the Archival Repositories: Thirdly, the capacity of repositories to provide professional archival services is uneven, while preservation is in a significant number of instances inadequate. It is clear that in part this is because there are insufficient resources and forward planning to support necessary archival activities. It is also clear that the archival profession no longer attracts passionately committed individuals who invest deeply in the archival project. These problems need to be addressed.
- 4. Archive as Important in Public Deliberation: Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, there is a need for organized, supported, effective public engagement and intervention in the public interest wherever questions of archive are involved. We should note here the role played by archive in public deliberations around development, reconciliation, identity politics and democratic accountability.

The Idea in Brief

The Archival Platform is conceptualized as a shared space of interaction between three (overlapping) kinds of archival stakeholders:

- archival repositories (state archives, private archives, museums, galleries, virtual/digitised collections etc);
- memory activists (for example, the Nelson Mandela Foundation's Centre of Memory, the South African History Archive, the Gay and Lesbian Archive);
- and archival users (historians, genealogists, curators, artists, writers, amateur researchers etc.).

Participating stakeholders would undertake to engage actively in the proposed conversation, meeting annually for a conference on pressing contemporary issues, participating in sectoral workshops where appropriate, and contributing to and making use of a monthly electronic newsletter and linked on-line forum.

The interaction is conceptualized as:

- the basis for the development of a new and distinctively postcolonial/post apartheid concept of archive itself;
- a conduit for the entry of this new concept of archive both into archival practices and into public understanding of archive and of the connections between archive and politics.

The interaction is aimed at improving communication across the sector, thereby avoiding duplication of effort, encouraging innovations, synergies, networking and collaborations; raising issues within the grouping for sustained critical engagement and, where appropriate, decisive action; and facilitating collective interventions in the public interest. Public engagement would be a central activity of the platform. One of the things that would distinguish the proposed platform from, for example ESARBICA, would be a primary concern with public engagement around questions of archive.

At its most basic then, the motivation for the regional Archival Platform consists of three parts:

- 1. The need for a supported, information-rich, ongoing mutual discussion on the many ways of rethinking the concept archive;
- 2 The need for information rich, mutual discussions of technological issues, geared towards developing synergies, collaborations and policies; and
- 3. The need for intensive well-supported forms of public engagement including political campaigns and pressure groups.

What happens in each of these domains affects the possibilities and outcomes in the other domains. Ongoing conversation across those three needs is thus vital. There is currently no professional body taking these issues forward. In 2007, in contexts of democracy rather than imperialism, contested knowledges rather than simple positivism, and the new media rather than a documentary base, a professional society is not perhaps the right body to take these issues forward.

The proposal is to raise money for a slim administrative structure to support the proposed Platform: an office, or possibly a virtual office, run by someone able to anchor the Platform, act as a central point of communication, receive suggestions, operate as a barometer of developments across the sector, organize an annual conference and smaller workshops, identify topics we need to address, calling attention to emerging crises and mobilizing interventions. Most importantly the office would take responsibility for the production and dissemination of a monthly electronic newsletter which keeps us all up to date on latest developments: shared project news on an electronic noticeboard, information and debate about technological innovations, alerts to current debates, funding opportunities, summaries of and references to significant theoretical developments, and a linked electronic discussion forum in which we can all participate. It would take as its primary guiding principles the need to support public engagement, theoretical initiatives and technological strategies.



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Conference Organising Committee:

Oliver Barstow, Graham Dominy, Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Xolela Mangcu and Razia Saleh

Report Editors:

Verne Harris, Oliver Barstow and Razia Saleh

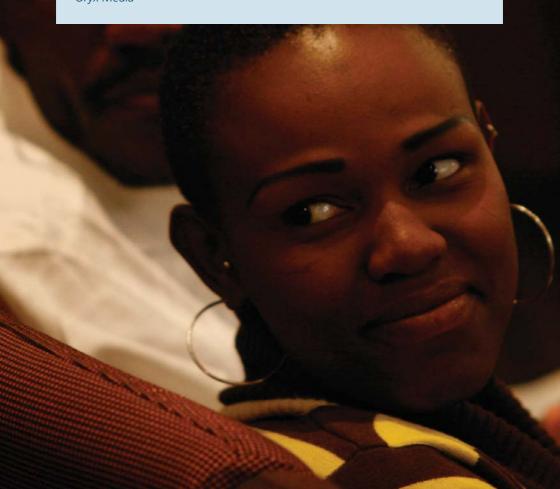
Report Writer:

Carolyn Hamilton

Layout and Design:

The Library

Photography: *Oryx Media*











National Archives and Records Service of South Africa,

Head Office, The National Archivist, Private Bag X236, Pretoria 0001 Tel no. 012 323 5300 | Fax no. 012 323 5287

The Constitution of Public Intellectual Life Research Project,

The Graduate School for the Humanities, Wits University, Private Bag 3, Johannesburg 2050, South Africa Tel no. 011 717 4674 | Fax no. 011 717 4039

Nelson Mandela Foundation,

Mandela House, 107 Central Street, Houghton, Johannesburg 2041, South Africa. Tel no. 011 728 1000 | Fax no. 011 728 1111

