

John Benjamins Publishing Company



This is a contribution from *A Comparative Literary History of Modern Slavery: The Atlantic world and beyond Volume II: Slavery, memory and literature*.

Edited by Karen-Margrethe Simonsen, Madeleine Dobie and Mads Anders Baggesgaard.

© 2025. John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way.

The author(s) of this article is/are permitted to use this PDF file to generate printed copies to be used by way of offprints, for their personal use only.

Permission is granted by the publishers to post this file on a closed server which is accessible only to members (students and faculty) of the author's/s' institute. It is not permitted to post this PDF on the internet, or to share it on sites such as Mendeley, ResearchGate, Academia.edu. Please see our rights policy on <https://benjamins.com/#authors/rightspolicy>

For any other use of this material prior written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

Please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website: www.benjamins.com

CHAPTER 4

Commemorating slavery during apartheid The hidden transcripts of the Cape *Klopse* carnival

Anne Marieke van der Wal

This chapter aims to counter the dominant perception that an oral memory culture of slavery did not exist in South Africa, due to repression by colonial authorities and the apartheid state. By focusing on the intangible heritage of the South African slave past – in particular on the folk song and carnival tradition of the so-called Cape Coloured¹ community as performed during the apartheid period – this chapter will discuss the memory strategies and hidden transcripts of commemoration, such as masking rituals and the claiming of social sites, used by the descendants of the enslaved community at the Cape to perform their cultural identity and commemorate their slave past in times of extreme oppression.

Keywords: hidden transcripts, commemorative performance, carnival, masquerade, apartheid, slavery, South Africa

Forgotten voices at the Cape

Resistance in South Africa to dominant narratives of the past has since 1994 taken the shape of challenging the colonial racist interpretation of South Africa's past, debunking the 'myth of an empty land' and rejecting colonial heroes, as was seen for instance in the #RhodesMustFall movement in 2015. Yet, this reclaiming of history by the previously marginalized majority focuses predominantly on the 'dominant counter-narrative' – meaning that the narratives of previously marginalized minority groups are sometimes overlooked or deemed incompatible with this dominant counter-narrative. This is the case, for instance, with the history of slavery in South Africa. As the notable historian of South African slavery Nigel Worden has noted, facilitating the commemoration of slavery in South Africa since the end of apartheid in 1994 has been complex (2009, 24). Whereas the change to democracy in 1994 created more room for the voices of 'forgotten victims' in both the heritage sector as well as in South African

-
1. The term Coloured refers to community in South Africa, predominantly Afrikaans or 'Kaaps Afrikaans' speaking and living in the Northern and Western Cape. They "descended largely from Cape slaves, the indigenous Khoisan population and a range of other people of African and Asian origin who had been assimilated into Cape colonial society by the late nineteenth century" (Adhikari 2006a: 143).

public debate, the ensuing debate on how to commemorate and represent slavery led to competing claims within society over what constituted slavery, over who had suffered and to what extent, and whether the slave past should be disconnected from other histories of repression such as colonialism and apartheid (Worden 2009, 27–29). In a political climate in which the rainbow-nation ideal was promoted and the joint effort of ending (apartheid) repression celebrated, supporting and officially embracing the commemoration of a past that had touched only a small group within South African society could have a disintegrating effect. Furthermore, concerns arose about a continued apartheid discourse on ‘purity of race’ by some Cape Coloured activists who, through the focus on the unique experience of the Coloured community and their Indian Ocean roots,² perpetuated a notion of cultural and biological distinctness of the Coloured or ‘Cape Malay’³ vs. the African South African (Gqola 2001, 53–58, 140–141). As a result, governmental support for a nationwide commemoration of slavery in South Africa has been weak. Yet, as David Wilkins has argued: “If South Africa is to overcome its legacies of apartheid, it needs to address the deeper historical foundations of the country’s present-day inequalities and strained social relations” and thus focus on the slave past and its link to apartheid (Wilkins 2017, 12–13).

There is, however, another reason for the limited role for the slave past in the dominant post-apartheid counter-narrative of South African history. The lack of slave narratives, as well as a perceived absence of a folk memory of slavery, has led to a silence surrounding slavery and the legacy of slavery in South Africa.⁴ From the apartheid era numerous private documents have survived, along with oral history accounts that allow the horrors of the apartheid past to be told and retold through personal narratives, thereby enabling historians and students of history to ‘re-live’ the past as it was lived by those affected by it. The South African slave past can be studied through colonial sources such as the official records of the Council of Policy, in census records, and in records of the Court of Justice, this last source providing the most insights into slave experiences (Johnson 2010, 504). Yet there are obvious obstacles to using predominantly European sources to write about African/Asian enslaved experiences. The work of Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot has been instrumental in encouraging historians to think about the production of history and the power exerted over the production of knowledge. In his work *Silencing the Past* Trouillot states that there are “two sides of historicity” that make up the idea of history. One side is occupied by the actor/agent/subject of history (history as social process) and the other by the narrator of history (the production of history) (Trouillot 1995, 3–4, cited in Ranjan 2017, 39). History, or the story of past events as a form of knowledge,

-
2. Cape slavery was part of the Indian Ocean slave trading network and system, as opposed to the transatlantic slave trade.
 3. Cape Malay is a highly contested term for a specific group within the Coloured community, who identify themselves as being Muslim and predominantly of Asian (Indonesian/Malaysian) enslaved descent.
 4. A lack of slave narratives is lamented by, among others, David Johnson (2010, 504). The lack of a folk memory of slavery in South Africa is argued by, among others, Robert Ross (1983, 119–120) and Nigel Worden (2001, 51).

is a combination of these two sides of historicity, says Trouillot. History is thus an interpretation of the past, as opposed to the Rankean ideal of knowing the true past (*wie es eigentlich gewesen* – what essentially happened) (Gooch 1952, 74). It is in situations where the narrator of history becomes dominant that historians need to be aware of the power dynamics that have shaped and influenced a particular narrative.

Considering the power of history writing and the role the narrator of history has in understanding the past (Trouillot 1995), as well as viewing the representation of a slave past in the colonial archive as a socially constructed narrative, postcolonial writing and other (literary) re-imaginings of the past offer a much-needed alternative perspective. Postcolonial narratives have sought to enable the enslaved to become ‘historical actors’ in the new counter-narratives as opposed to being simple subjects. Studying the ‘forgotten voices’ of the enslaved in these postcolonial literary productions has led to several insightful studies, notably Pumla Dineo Gqola’s *What is Slavery to Me?* (2014) and Gabeba Baderoon’s *Regarding Muslims* (2014), yet most of these studies focus predominantly on the literary re-imaginings of the slave past. In a thought-provoking article in *History and Theory*, historian Ritwik Ranjan calls upon historians who engage in postcolonial critique on colonial history writing to not only seek counter-discourses in written texts but reject this dominance of the written text altogether. He states:

This *a priori* reconceptualization of history should be [...] the target of postcolonial critiques. If it was essential for colonialists discourses to predicate ‘making history’ on ‘writing history’, an important postcolonial strategy should be to undo such a predication. The claim that only history-writing secures historicity ought to be challenged, and the colonial injunction that says ‘to prove historicity of a people or a nation one must furnish texts of history’ should be relentlessly questioned. (Ranjan 2017, 52)

This chapter seeks to explore the counter-narrative of the descendants of the enslaved at the Cape that challenges the dominant South African historiography, not through history writing or literary texts but through *carnavalesque* performances. Building on my dissertational work *Singing of Slavery, Performing the Past* (2016) – which focused on the existence and persistence of a cultural memory of slavery at the Cape performed through the rich folk song and carnival traditions of the descendants of the enslaved at the Cape – this chapter explores more specifically the ‘hidden transcripts’ in the carnival performances of the Cape Coloured community during apartheid. The concept of hidden transcripts was first coined by anthropologist and political scientist James C. Scott, with which he aimed to argue that in societies that experience oppression, the dealings between an oppressor and the oppressed are always a form of performance. He identifies a “public transcript” (a performance that seems to uphold the status quo) and a “hidden transcript” (a more subversive performance) (1990). These notions will serve as a theoretical framework with which to explore the possible subversive nature of the Cape *Klopse* carnival and its role in commemorating slavery. The performance aspect will remain central in this chapter, which focuses on the masquerade during the carnival as well as on the chosen sites of performance. In the years between 2008 and 2015, I visited and lived in South Africa on numerous occasions, and it was during these regular fieldwork trips that I got to know and

even joined the carnival troupes. Through participatory observations, oral history interviews, and by gaining access to my interviewee's private archives filled with photographs, newspaper clippings, and lyrics preserved on tape and/or paper, I gathered most of the data on which this chapter is based.

The Cape *Klopse* carnival: A Contested stage to commemorate and to protest



Figure 1. *Klopse* troupes in Walestreet, Cape Town. (Photo: Willem van Warmelo, 1960. Meertens Institute)

The Cape *Klopse* (i.e. music clubs) Minstrel Carnival, recently renamed ‘*Tweede Nuwe Jaar Cape Town Street Parade*,’⁵ is a yearly event on 2 January that attracts thousands of spectators and involves hundreds of thousands of participants, ranging from musicians and dancers to costume makers, predominantly from the Cape Coloured community in the Western Cape. Even though it is called a carnival, there is no connection to the European Christian tradition of a pre-Lent celebration; rather, it is related to the turn of the year festivities. As the name ‘*Tweede Nuwe Jaar*’ (second New Year) suggests, it is a day on which the Cape Coloured community celebrates for the second time the start of a New Year. This tradition dates back to the colonial era and the time of slavery, during which the enslaved were granted one free day a year on the second of January to celebrate the New Year (Baxter 2001, 87; Battersby 2013). After the abolishment of slavery, the descendants of the enslaved continued to host the street parade on the same day, through which they could commemorate their release from bondage (Worden; Heyningen & Bickford-Smith 1998, 190). Throughout the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, the carnival served this purpose and not only allowed the Cape Coloured community to commemorate their slave past, but also to reflect critically on the ongoing racism with which they were faced in colonial Cape Town. Historian Vivian Bickford-Smith states that the songs that were composed for and performed during the carnival parades “still expressed satirical hostile-

5. <https://www.capetownmagazine.com/tweede-nuwe-jaar> [accessed 18 January 2019]

ity to a post-emancipation society that retained similarities with social relations in the era of slavery, and that appeared to leave political and legal power in the hands of others” (1995, 188).

The apartheid years between 1948 and 1994 obviously posed serious challenges to the continuity of the carnival tradition. Not only were there strict segregationist laws as well as the Riotous Assemblies Act of 1956, which prohibited open-air gatherings of large groups of people, making it more difficult for the Coloured community to organize the carnival and parade in the city centre, which had been designated as a white area; there was also resistance within the Cape Coloured community itself to continuing with the tradition. To defend the idea of ‘separate races’ living within South Africa and their policy of ‘separate development’, the apartheid state pointed to physical but also cultural differences between the communities living in the country. To highlight these supposedly inalienable cultural differences between communities, the state promoted several cultural phenomena such as the music tradition of the Cape Coloureds, in which they saw the essentialist characteristics of this ‘people’. Culture was an often-used ideological propaganda weapon to promote racial identities in apartheid South Africa (Butler 2004, 131). South African racist ethnologists and state officials who followed the ‘*Volkekundige*’⁶ theory believed that the culture of a specific people was linked to inherited physical and mental characteristics of this people (Sharp 1981, 16–36). In response, anti-apartheid activists from the Cape Coloured community rejected the label ‘Coloured’ as well as distanced themselves from supposedly typically Coloured cultural expressions. In these repressive and violent times, “any recognition of Coloured identity was repudiated as a concession to apartheid thinking” (Adhikari 2006b, 472). Participation in the *Klopse* carnival thus became regarded by some within the Cape Coloured community as complicity in apartheid ideals. The anti-apartheid organizations, such as the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), were very active in the Western Cape in encouraging people to distance themselves from the *Klopse* tradition. In an interview with Richard O’Dudley, a former member of the NEUM, this distrust of the carnival as a vehicle for apartheid propaganda is clearly expressed:

Persons like myself never accepted the Coon⁷ [*Klopse*] carnival in the way which we were sort of persuaded to do by the powers that be. We always regarded it in that particular era as something that was being manipulated to produce the stereotypes that were classified as so-called ‘Coloured’ persons, and they generally associated the activities like those in which the coons were involved as being sort of representative of the so-called Coloured culture that they were trying to generate in order to underline this sort of stereotyping.

(O’Dudley, 1995)

-
6. *Volkekunde* can be roughly translated as ‘Ethnological studies’.
 7. ‘Coon’ is a word used in the past to describe the carnival participants. It is a highly contested term that originated in the United States, where it was used as a demeaning and insulting word for African Americans. The word found its way to the Cape with the Coon minstrels who performed at the Cape in the nineteenth century and who were hugely popular within the Coloured community. In recent years several people have tried to replace the word ‘coon’ with the word ‘minstrel’ or just refer to the umbrella organization *Klopse* (Martin 1999, 80).

Furthermore, the supposedly essentialist characteristics of the Cape Coloureds that, according to the apartheid state, became visible through their *Klopse* tradition were very negatively described. The carnival was “stigmatized amongst whites and middle-class Coloureds as boorish, disreputable and even depraved” (Adhikari 2006b, 484). In addition, the carnival was seen as an unoriginal cultural expression in the sense that the carnival music was, and more and more became, hybridized, given that troupes adopted and integrated popular American music styles into their carnival performances, a process that was frowned upon by apartheid officials who advocated purity of race and purity of culture (Martin 1999, 77).

The yearly carnival is tremendously popular amongst the common people [Cape Coloured community], but there are members of the higher ranks of this community, amongst whom a strong sense of class-consciousness exists, who feel that the carnival presents a false image of the achieved level in arts by the Coloured community. Those higher classes within the Coloured community, comparable to the higher classes in other communities, seek their entertainment and leisure in higher cultural expressions.⁸ (du Plessis 1970, 2)

This negative assessment of the carnival as a disreputable and unoriginal cultural tradition correlated with the negative assessment of the Coloured community itself. In the eyes of racist state officials, the Coloured community represented the much-despised reality of miscegenation and creolization. Historian Saul Dubow has noted that, indeed, to the apartheid ideologists the Cape Coloureds represented an almost greater danger to the apartheid state than other non-white communities, because “[t]hey were visible evidence of past racial intermixture and were therefore to be shunned. They were also disparaged for lacking a pure culture of their own (most in fact spoke Afrikaans)” (Dubow 2014, 25). South African scholars Mohamed Adhikari and Zimitri Erasmus have noted that the community’s negative assessment becomes most clearly apparent in the official apartheid state definitions of the Cape Coloureds as ‘non-persons’. They were described as neither white nor black and were considered to have no real claim to the status of a ‘nation’ or ‘people’; similarly, their culture was said to lack any authenticity (Erasmus 2001, 17; Adhikari 2006b, 480).

This negative attitude towards the Cape Coloured community as well as towards their cultural tradition was also based on popular perceptions of the Coloureds as a ‘servile class’. Indeed, “in popular consciousness, vague connotations of a servile [slave] past have been attached to Coloured identity, for example, through the annual reminder of the Coon Carnival and the use of the pejorative label Gam (Ham) to describe working-class Coloured people” (Adhikari 2005, 29). As the slave past was actively forgotten and traces of the Cape slave past largely removed under apartheid (Worden 2001, 51), those reminders of the slave past through

8. Own translation to English. Original in Afrikaans: “Die jaarlikse karnavals is baie populêr onder die algemene publiek (Kleurlinggemeenskap), maar daar is lede van die hoëre range van die Kleurlinggemeenskap, onder wie daar ’n sterk klasbewustheid heers, wat voel dat die karnavals ’n verkeerde indruk mag skep van die gehalte van die Kleurling se talente op die gebied van musiek en sang. Die meer ontwikkelde stande van die Kleurlinggemeenskap, soos met alle volke, soek hul vermaak en ontspanning op ’n hoer peil.”

the presence of Coloured identity – and, more specifically, their cultural traditions, including the carnival – meant that such cultural expressions were not well regarded by those in power. Paradoxically, whereas this link to times of slavery and the carnival tradition could have been used by anti-apartheid activists as a tool to highlight the continuity of the struggle of the Coloured community against repression, the link to slavery appears to have been largely neglected or even problematized. For anti-apartheid activists who fought the racist segregationist policies of the apartheid state, focusing on those characteristics that made a specific community ‘unique’ or different from others was deemed problematic (Ward & Worden 1998, 208); rather, the anti-apartheid movement wanted to highlight the collaborative nationwide support to overthrow the racist regime. In addition, as stated before, activists objected to the racist stereotypes that they believed were being advocated through cultural events, such as the carnival, with the approval (and possibly help) of the state. In a pamphlet published by the NEUM in 1952, the anti-apartheid activists called upon the Cape Coloured movement to reject their servile image and boycott the carnival. The pamphlet stated:

The ‘coon’ [*Klopse*] songs started from folk song in the days of slavery. At first they were songs of lament, mourning the Batavian and African homeland from which the slaves were taken and which they would never see again. Likewise the dispossessed Khoi-Khoen would play folk music on the *gora* to mourn the loss of their lands, herds and freedom. Only later did the *gora* become a ‘gay’ instrument. These melancholy, nostalgic folk-tunes, dances and songs underwent profound changes as the slaves sank down into acceptance of slavery. [...] The music changed from lament to thanksgiving, submission and acknowledgment of the authority of the slave owner. [...] The songs of submission became songs for the amusement and entertainment of the slave-holding scum who laughed coarsely at the ‘amusing ways’ of their slaves. The slaves became poorer and thinner but sang louder the praises of slavery, of the masters, of slave-ships and of slave-states. *They were celebrating their enslavement for the amusement of the Herrenvolk.* (Boycott 1952)

Yet, such calls for rejecting Coloured identity or boycotting the carnival were not popular (Adhikari 2005, 2006b, 474). It is important to note that the majority of the Coloured community continued to celebrate the carnival throughout the apartheid years. Moreover, it is also false to assume that those who participated in the carnival celebrations thus accepted a negative stereotypical classification of Coloured identity, nor did they accept the apartheid ideal of ‘separate development’. Instead we should look more closely at the subversive nature of carnival and thus its potential to be a site of protest. Carnival is a feast of reversal, of polarity and of mockery. In many parts of the world where carnival is celebrated it has been “an arena for the public display, negotiation and contestation of the varied social tensions and struggles of the society” (Nurse 1999, 681).

Public performances and hidden transcripts: The Cape *Klopse* and the coloured masquerade

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990), Scott argues that all societies seek ways to resist oppression and voice complaints in ways that are undetectable for those in power. He argues that in the communication between the oppressor and the oppressed, one can distinguish between two sets of communicative performances: the first is the public performance or “public transcript”, through which the oppressed enact their assigned role of subjugation; the second is a “hidden transcript”, either privately performed or in public, through which they can safely voice their complaints. This hidden transcript is often political, although not always perceived as such, and in societies that face oppression, “all political action takes forms that are designed to obscure their intentions or to take cover behind an apparent meaning” (Scott 2005, 71–72). Moreover, in a situation of systematic oppression of one particular group in society that has to ‘act’ and ‘perform’ a public transcript continuously in daily interactions, an urgent and much-needed hidden transcript is developed, as is an ever growing pressure to reveal and make public this offstage discourse (Scott 1990, 9). Carnival, with its inherent role of ‘turning the tables’ and upsetting the established order, offers a ‘safe stage’ on which a hidden transcript can be publicly performed. Through the carnival, the Cape Coloured community could challenge those in power and perform an oppositional social reality.

The way to perform a different social reality and mock the oppressive social norms was through the process of masquerade. As Mikhail Bakhtin noted: “The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violations of natural boundaries, to mockery and familiar nicknames. It contains the playful element of life; it is based on a peculiar interrelation of reality and image, characteristic of the most ancient rituals and spectacles” (1984, 39–40). Seemingly ironically, the standard mask that the Coloured carnival reveller puts on is that of the ‘clownish’ carnival minstrel. The ‘mask’ entails a (frequently fake) silk tuxedo with matching hat and umbrella and a painted face modelled on the American ‘coon minstrels’ of the nineteenth century.



Figure 2. *Klopse* carnival revellers. Cape Town, 2009 (Photo by author)

This mask obviously represents the festiveness and joyousness of the carnival itself and as such celebrates the carnival tradition, but at the same time the mask also seems to uphold the apartheid state's negative descriptions of the Coloureds and carnival as being boorish and disreputable. Yet, this reading of the mask misses the contradictory nature of the carnival. By adopting the mask, the Coloured carnival reveller is not trying to confirm a racist stereotypical portrayal of a light-hearted, silly character, but rather is creating a satirical mirror image for the white spectators by making a caricature of the caricature. The carnival mask is an exaggeration of the daily mask that the Coloured populations were forced to wear during more ordinary dealings between them and those in power. As Scott has noted, "the greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily it is exercised, the more the public transcripts of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast" (1990, 2). In other words "the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask" (Scott 1990: 3). That this thick, unreadable mask confused the white Afrikaner becomes clear in the following quotation:

The Coloureds have learned one thing: to play dumb. They can accomplish great things this way. I don't really know them myself. I don't think it is possible. They talk to me [Afrikaner interviewee] but there is always a wall between us — a point beyond which I have no understanding. I can know about them, but I can't know them.

(Crapanzano 1986, 34)

This intention of masking to unmask — in particular to unmask the racist ignorance of white spectators and their bigoted view of Coloured identity — becomes clear in the following excerpts from interviews with two carnival participants who were actively involved in the organization of the carnival during the apartheid years. Recalling the power of the hidden transcript, they state:

We said it to them in singing. [...] We made funny songs. So they wouldn't catch on. And the people were laughing, and they [the whites] wanted to know what are these people laughing about. Why are they laughing. But that was our way to get little bit back at them. But [pause ...] there was no talks of fighting and all this and all that, you see, so that's why this thing the whole thing didn't turn into...you know in other countries there would have been a lot of bloodshed and a lot of war.

(Davids 2008)

So the whites, they did not know what we were singing about. We were speaking the white language, we were speaking our master's language. We learnt that language from our masters. But that is where the scum [comic] songs come in, where you change the lyrics.

(Maged 2008)

Kenneth Bilby has noted that in the Caribbean, *carnivalesque* masking rituals are seen as more than a 'temporary rite of rebellion' but as "an expression of an alternative worldview maintained through an ongoing dialogue with the ancestors" (2010, 217, cited in Nicholls 2012, 237). Apart from masking to unmask the tense racial relations during apartheid, the minstrel mask at the Cape also served the purpose of commemorating the slave past. The minstrel character was introduced to Cape Town in the mid-nineteenth century with the coming of the American blackface 'coon minstrels' shows to the country (Martin 1999, 87). Similarly to what happened

in the United States, such blackface minstrel shows became very popular with the white middle class, as they reaffirmed their racist stereotyping of African Americans – and in the case of South Africa, of black culture and identity. But the minstrel shows could also count on popularity within the Cape Coloured as well as black middle-class communities in South Africa (Erlmann 1988, 335). Historian Veit Erlmann argues that this is due to “the structures and texts of minstrel songs [which] often reflect key concepts of genuine slave culture” (1988, 335). The stereotypical portrayals of slave – master relations by the minstrel shows formed a recognizable, yet caricatured, portrayal of their own slave past. Even more popular, however, was the African American minstrel group ‘Orpheus M. McAdoo and the Virginia Jubilee Singers’, who toured the country between 1890 and 1898 (Erlmann 1988, 331). These African American minstrels more critically engaged with the racist stereotypes of the black minstrel, as opposed to the white minstrel groups, and as such also challenged the dominant reading of slave – master relations in the past. Indeed, “it seemed that the humour and satire of mocking the slave – master or servant – master relation was one that was well understood by both the Americans and the Cape Coloureds” (Martin 2002, 693). The minstrel mask thus came to be associated with the satirical reassertion of the Cape enslaved caricature and as such represented a subversive and commemorative element in Coloured carnival culture. This connection to the slave past and the belief in a continuation of the practice of satirizing race relations through masking performances are clearly expressed in the following excerpts from an interview with a carnival reveller:

When the slaves were freed in the early century, they walked the streets of Cape Town, but before that, before they were freed, they used to paint their faces with colours so that they were not recognized by their bosses, and making fun of them in the streets as they were walking. That’s where the ‘Coons’ [Minstrels] came in. (Ely 2013)

Claiming a presence: Social sites of the hidden transcript

Equally important in understanding the subversive as well as commemorative nature of the *Klopse* carnival is looking at the site of the performances. Whereas often the site of performance of a hidden transcript is the private sphere, away from state intrusion and repression, James Scott argues that “to think of anti-hegemonic discourse as occupying merely the social space left empty by domination would be to miss the struggle by which sites are won, cleared, built and defended” (1990, 123). In the case of the Cape *Klopse* carnival this statement is particularly true, as the Coloured community was faced with official restrictions in their movements based on a series of laws, such as the Group Areas Act implemented by the apartheid government in 1950/57 and the Amendments to the Riotous Assemblies Act passed in 1974 to restrict all ‘riotous’ gatherings both in public and private. These laws were implemented to limit the free movement of non-whites throughout the country and in previously multicultural cities such as Cape Town, and to create clear racial boundaries through which segregated development could be imposed. The Cape Coloured community in Cape Town were faced with these forced removals beginning in 1966 when District Six was officially declared a white area (McEachern

1998, 502). Allocating prime real estate areas, such as District Six and also suburbs such as Wynberg and Simonstown, which were areas home to many Cape Coloured inhabitants, to white-only areas – in the process forcibly removing the non-white residents to racially segregated areas on the barren Cape Flats behind Table Mountain – changed the face and dynamics of the city centre dramatically. Community networks were torn apart, as the inhabitants of previously multicultural neighbourhoods were dispersed over now racially segregated townships. In addition, as the forced relocations often occurred without much input from those affected, several families were separated and placed on other sides of the newly developed suburban townships (McEachern 1998, 502).

As such, these forced removals also had a profound impact on the carnival tradition, the organization of the carnival, and its hosting (Baxter 2001, 104). Bickford-Smith has argued that the New Year festivities had always been a “celebration of inner-city community” (1994, 302, cited in Baxter 2001, 102), but this community fell apart with the forced removals. Moreover, parading in the city centre was made more difficult and in certain years even forbidden altogether (Baxter 2001, 201–203). A former carnival reveller, Ginger Harrison, remembers how in those years the organization of the carnival was frustrated by the apartheid state. He recalls how “you must have a permit to parade in the streets on *Tweede Nuwe Jaar*. The captain had to get that permit. You couldn’t walk down Adderly Street in those years; you couldn’t walk on the main roads” (Harrison 2008). Eventually, the carnival was banished to the townships outside the city centre and to assigned stadiums, where the carnival could be ‘safely’ performed in isolation away from white spectators. In an interview with a carnival participant who experienced these repressive years, the disillusion with losing the street parade and thus losing the public performance of the hidden transcript is apparent:

That was a damp Carnival ... then there was no expression of the culture ... the road march is the essence, because ... whatever Carnival, whatever competition was going on ... that is shit, that’s nothing, that’s balls, because you can listen to groups singing every day, or you can put on a tape, but the actual road march ... this is something else.

(Interview Matthews, 16 cited in Baxter 2001, 102)

It took until the late 1980s before the carnival *Klopse* troupes were allowed to parade in the city centre again (Martin 1999, 157). For the Coloured community, performing their carnival in public on the streets of Cape Town meant a mental victory over the apartheid’s state racist and dehumanizing laws. Furthermore, claiming a presence in a designated white area, and performing their hidden transcript in such a public space in front of a predominantly white audience, allowed the Coloured community to use their carnival parade as a subversive act of defiance. The carnival’s intention of creating a reversed social reality was acted out not only through the use of masquerade but also through the mere presence of ‘Coloured’ bodies in a by white-dominated area. Denis-Constant Martin has noted that “many carnivals allow for temporary occupation – an ephemeral takeover – of particular places by groups of people who either are not normally allowed there, or are not generally considered as belonging there” (2001, 27). For the carnival revellers and the white and Cape Coloured spectators, the presence of the carnival parade in the city centre was indeed interpreted as a victory for the Coloured lower classes,

who had been out of grace and kept out of sight most of the time. During this parade their existence could no longer be denied or glossed over. A newspaper article in the *Cape Times* from 1969 describes quite eloquently this need to be visible and claim a presence in the city:

Ninety per cent of the *Coons* [carnival minstrels] come from the lowest income group. For 50 weeks of each year they merely exist. On their meagre earning they cannot afford frequent pleasures, and with little or no education the sum total of their life is humdrum. Then comes *Coon* [*Klopse*] time and those who have walked in the shadows for 50 weeks come out into the sun, into the centre of the street, into the centre of the town, into the centre of excitement and music to become the centre of attraction for two whole weeks. *For those two glories weeks they live [...]*. (Heyns 1969, cited in Martin 2007, 17; my emphasis)

The reclaiming of the city streets was also significant for the commemorative aspect of the carnival with regards to the slave past. The carnival strategies of masquerading and claiming certain sites as a hidden transcript of public protest against the apartheid state were equally used to criticize the state's silence on the slave past and raise more public awareness of this history of slavery at the Cape. Indeed, when one takes a closer look at the specific route the carnival procession takes, especially since the return of the carnival procession to the city centre after the previous ban and forced removals, it becomes clear that apart from claiming a presence in a designated white area, the carnival procession also claims a presence in the former slave quarters of the city. The route that is followed through the city starts from the Grand Parade, the main public square in the city centre, which is next to the Castle of Good Hope, the first colonial fort built by the Dutch VOC between 1666 and 1679, with its clear echoes of the colonial and slave era. Next the procession follows a route that passes by other important sites of memory that hold significance for the commemoration of slavery at the Cape, such as the former Slave Lodge on Adderly Street, which housed enslaved people until 1811 (Worden 1998, 103). The Slave Lodge was turned into a museum in 1966, exhibiting mainly artifacts from European colonists. However, after apartheid ended, it became a museum where slavery is remembered. Further on, the route passes by the Slave Tree, which can be viewed at a short distance, continuing up on Walestreet into the Bo-Kaap, a neighbourhood on the slopes of Signall Hill, which used to be an area where freed slaves and enslaved were housed (Worden 1998, 118). The importance of these *lieux de mémoire* on this commemorative route becomes apparent from song lyrics that are often performed during the carnival.

<i>Klopse in die hele Kaap</i>	Klopse in the whole Cape
<i>Op en af in Waalstraat</i>	Up and down Wale Street
<i>tot daar bo in die boonste Bo-kaap</i>	Up to the highest point of the Bo-Kaap
<i>Olalalalalalaah</i>	Oh lalalalalaaah
<i>Ja daar is Klopse ooral in die strate,</i>	Yes, there are Klopse everywhere in the streets
<i>Klopse tot op die parade</i>	Klopse up to the Parade
<i>en almal staan en kyk hoe die klopse lyk.</i>	And everyone stands to watch the Klopse.

(Samodien, collected by author in 2009)



Figure 3. *Klopse* carnival procession passes the slave lodge on Adderley Street, Cape Town, 2009 (Photo by author)

Songs also allowed the Coloured community to claim sites of remembrance that had physically disappeared. For example, the song *Bo in Hanover straat* (Up in Hanover Street) commemorates the old routes taken through the former District Six, an area closely connected to slavery (Western 1981, 150, cited in McEachern 1998, 514) as it housed the newly freed enslaved right after emancipation; up until its demolition, it continued to be a neighbourhood predominantly inhabited by the descendants of the enslaved (Minty 2006, 425). Prior to the forced removals, as the carnival was very much a community affair, carnival troupes paraded mainly through their own neighbourhoods, such as District Six and Bo-Kaap, and as such, livened up streets such as Hanover, Tennant, Caledon, and Rose Street. The song *Bo in Hanover straat*, which is a comic song (*Moppie*) written by Abdullag Maged, commemorates these old routes taken through the former District Six:

<i>Bo in Hanover straat,</i>	Up in Hanover Street
<i>die mense staan en wag</i>	the people stand and wait
<i>tot Nuwe Jaar in die Kaap</i>	for the New Year at the Cape.

(Maged, collected by author in 2008)

Reclaiming lost spaces, or claiming a public commemoration and recognition of this loss, can take place not only by means of physically occupying the space, such as through a carnival parade, but also, as historian Sean Field has noted, by means of mentally claiming a space — for instance, through song performances (2001, 118–120).

Conclusion

Studying the existence of public commemorations of the South African slave past, one should not look for static and tangible commemorative displays *per se*, in the form of statues, plaques, or museums, but rather focus on performative, unofficial, and non-governmental events, as “memory performed is at the heart of collective memory” (Winter 2010, 11). Popular perfor-

mances voice a counter-narrative of the past as it is re-formulated by the descendants of the enslaved themselves, and thus performances present a narrative of the past more closely linked to presently felt consequences of that past, rather than does a more 'professional' and/or 'official' narrative that tries to do justice to the perceived historicity of the past.

The Cape *Klopse* carnival functioned and continues to function as an unofficial, popular commemoration of the slave past; and by adopting particular masks, parading along specific roads and neighbourhoods, and singing certain songs, the carnival tradition as a form of living history taught and still teaches the Cape Coloured community what aspects of their past are worthy of remembering. That this commemoration was performed through hidden transcripts can be understood in the socio-political context of apartheid South Africa, which did not permit an open and widely supported recalling of the slave past.

Contrary to the widely held belief that ritualized protests and staged expressions of criticism are only symbolic acts of resistance and function purely as cathartic outlets, James Scott asserts that "it is impossible to separate veiled symbolic resistance to the ideas of dominations from the practical struggles to thwart or mitigate exploitation" (2005, 68). The commemoration of slavery through hidden transcripts was more than simply a safe outlet for frustrations, and the mask was more than simply a disguise. The masquerade functioned as a performative dialogue with the past, through which a sometimes imagined and sometimes real continuation of popular protest against past struggles and present-day sufferings could be suggested and promoted. Moreover, the festiveness of the carnival should not be read as an attempt to obliterate collective memories of a painful past; it displays the celebration of the "ephemeral takeover" of the city and collective rewriting of the public perception of the legacy of slavery at the Cape. In post-apartheid South Africa, the carnival continues to create space and momentum for the commemoration of slavery and has found the freedom to perform a societal critique through masquerade and song.

References

- Adhikari, Mohamed. 2005. *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
-  Adhikari, Mohamed. 2006a. "'God Made the White Man, God Made the Black Man ...' Popular Racial Stereotyping of Coloured People in Apartheid South Africa", *South African Historical Journal* 55: 142–164.
-  Adhikari, Mohamed. 2006b. "Hope, Fear, Shame, Frustration: Continuity and Change in the Expression of Coloured Identity in White Supremacist South Africa, 1910–1994", *Journal of southern African Studies*, 32/3: 467–487.
-  Baderoon, Gabebe. 2014. *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1984. *Rabelais and his World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Battersby, J. 2013. "Coon Carnival." In *Encyclopedia of Race and Racism*, 2nd edition. Edited by Patrick L. Mason. Detroit: Macmillian References USA.
-  Baxter, L. (2001). Continuity and Change in Cape Town's Coon Carnival: The 1960s and 1970s. *African Studies*, 60(1), 87–105.

- Bickford-Smith, Vivian. 1995. *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town. Group identity and social practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
-  Bilby, Kenneth M. 2010. "Surviving Secularization: Masking the Spirit in the Jankunu (John Canoe) Festivals of the Caribbean." *New West Indian Guide* 84 (3–4): 179–223.
- Boycott. 1952. "Behind the festival of hate. The Cape Coloured coons." *The Torch* (March 25, 1952).
- Butler, Anthony. 2004. *Contemporary South Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Crapanzano, Vincent. 1986. *Waiting: The Whites of South Africa*. New York: Random House.
- Dubow, Saul. 2014. *Apartheid, 1948–1994*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ely, Ismail. 2013. Interview conducted by author on October 2nd 2013, in Wynberg, Cape Town.
- Erasmus, Zimitri. 2001. *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
-  Erlmann, Veit. 1988. "A Feeling of Prejudice: Opheus M. McAdoo and the Virginia Jubilee Singers in South Africa, 1890–1898." *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 14/3 (1988): 331–350.
- Field, Sean. 2001. "I dream of our old house. You see there are things that can never go away": Memory, Restitution and Democracy." In *Lost communities, living memories: Remembering Forced Removals in Cape Town*. Edited by Sean Field, 117–124. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers.
- Gooch, G. P. 1952. *History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Longman.
- Gqola, Pumla Dineo. 2001. *What is Slavery to Me? Postcolonial Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Harrison, Ginger. 2008. Interview conducted by author on November 27th 2008, Cape Town.
- Jackie Heyns, Jackie. 1969. "Do the Coons have to die?" *Drum Magazine*. Cape Town, January.
-  Johnson, David. 2010. "Representing Cape Slavery: Literature, Law and History." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 46 (5): 504–516.
-  Jones, Martha S. 2013. "History and Commemoration: The Emancipation Proclamation at 150." *Journal of the Civil War Era* (3/4): 452–457.
- Maged, Abdullah. 2008. Interview conducted by author on December 3th 2008, Cape Town.
- Martin, Denis-Constant. 1999. *Coon Carnival, New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers.
- Martin, Denis-Constant. 2001. "Politics behind the mask: Studying contemporary carnivals in political perspective, theoretical and methodological suggestions" *Questions de Recherche* (2): 1–34.
-  Martin, Denis-Constant. 2002. "Le Cape ou les partages inégaux de la créolité sud-africaine." *Cahiers d'Études africaines* 168 (XLII–4): 687–710.
- Martin, Denis-Constant. 2007. *Chronicles of the Kaapse Klopse*. Paris: Sciences Po.
-  Mceachern, Charmaine. 1998. "Mapping the Memories: Politics, Place and Identity in the District Six Museum, Cape Town." *Social Identities* 4 (3): 499–521.
-  Minty, Zayd. 2006. "Post-apartheid Public Art in Cape Town: Symbolic Reparations and Public Space." *Urban Studies* 43 (2): 421–440.
- Nicholls, Robert Wyndham. 2012. *The Jumbies' Playing Ground. Old World Influences on Afro-Creole Masquerades in the Eastern Caribbean*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
-  Nurse, Keith. 1999. "Globalization and Trinidad Carnival: Diaspora, Hybridity and Identity in Global Culture." *Cultural Studies* 13 (4): 661–690.
- O'Dudley, Richard. 1995. Interview conducted by Lisa Baxter for UCT Memory Project on the 12th of September 1995, Elfindale in Cape Town (transcript available at UCT library).
- Plessis, I. D. du. 1970. "Die Kleurling", Kulturele Bedrywigshede van die Kleurlinggemeenskap." *Presentations by the Commissioner of the Department of Coloured Affairs*, No. 3, Cape Town.
-  Ranjan, Ritwik. 2017. "Postcoloniality and the Two Sites of Historicity." *History and Theory* 56 (1): 38–53.
- Ross, Robert. 1983. *Cape of Torments: Slavery and Resistance in South Africa*. London: Routledge.

- Samodien, Adam. 2009. *Interview conducted by author on January 8th 2009*, Woodstock, Cape Town.
- Scott, James C. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Scott, James C. 2005. "The infrapolitics of subordinate groups." In *The Global Resistance Reader*, Edited by Amoore, Louise, 65–73. London/New York: Routledge.
-  Sharp, John. 1981. "The Roots and Development of Volkekunde in South Africa." *Journal of Southern African Studies* (8): 16–36.
- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 1995. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Wal, A. M. van der. 2016. *Singing of Slavery, Performing the Past. Cape Coloured Folk Songs as Cultural Memory of the South African Slave Past*, PhD: Utrecht University.
- Ward, Kerry and Nigel Worden. 1998. "Commemorating, Suppressing and Invoking Cape Slavery." In *Negotiating the Past, the Making of Memory in South Africa*, Edited by Sarah Nutall, Sarah and Carli Coetzee, 201–220. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Western, John. 1981. *Outcast Cape Town*, London: George Allen and Unwin.
-  Wilkins, David. 2017. "History, Truth Telling and the Legacies of Slavery in South Africa." *South African Historical Journal* 69 (1): 12–31.
- Winter, Jay. 2010. "The Performance of the Past: Memory, History, Identity." In *Performing the Past. Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, Edited by Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter, 11–31. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Worden, Nigel, Elizabeth Heyningen, and Vivian Bickford-Smith. 1998. *Cape Town, The Making of a City: An Illustrated History*. Cape Town: David Philip Publisher.
- Worden, Nigel. 2001. "The Forgotten Region: Commemorations of Slavery in Mauritius and South Africa." In *Facing up to the Past: Perspectives on the Commemoration of Slavery from Africa, the Americas and Europe*, Edited by Gert Oostindie (ed.), 48–55. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers.
-  Worden, Nigel. 2009. "The Changing Politics of Slave Heritage in the Western Cape, South Africa." *Journal of African History* (50): 23–40.