

Provenances of knowledge and preservation of referred sources

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Abstract

As custodians of Cultural heritage, museums are not only responsible for the care and protection of its collection in order to ensure the prevention or the delay of damages but they are also required to conduct in-depth documentation to assist in tracking the life of the objects and events of history. To accommodate these needs, museums must adhere to proper museum standards and practices, which serve to create a safe environment for collections with clear and precise accompanying documentation.

Documenting original information relating to an experience through collecting and recording maps, microfilm, charts, photographs, posters, recordings and textual formats, museum's can provide a means of grappling with aspects of the past that many may prefer to forget. Those who lived through experiences of mass death, incarceration and forced removal suffer from a collective trauma. Ignoring the past means that there is no way in which their pain could be shared or publicly marked. If a nation cannot face up to its past it will be gravely handicapped in the future. The solution is to allow the people to acknowledge publicly the terrible sufferings of a particular era.

Museums thorough documentation of history can help us to face the present and future by enabling us to understand the forces, however shocking which have made our world and our society what it is. To make accessible the original information for the current and future generation is by sharing what people have previously experienced and learned through proper management and preservation.

Biography

Rebecca Naidoo is a Museum Officer within the Durban Municipality at the Durban Local History Museums, where she is responsible for the historic and contemporary collection of the city museum and archives and ensures that the culture heritage of Durban is well conserved, maintained and promoted.

Introduction

Precolonial museum's display and collection, contributed to the alienation of human suffering in terms of everyday racism, segregation and discrimination. Human suffering was an integral part of the collecting of documents, audio and images to precious regalia which went unrepresented because human suffering of colonialism was denied by the authority of the museums.

Today's museums has addressed the issue of colonial human suffering through deconstruction of exiting collection categories and the confrontation with the issue of whom they speak about and to whom they speak. Finally, victims are not only allowed to speak but also the political conversation of who must account for the human suffering in specific historical situations such as the suffering caused by colonialism and imperialism is addressed; consequently museum's collection has become a step towards historical progress. The role of museums are now agents of social change.

The future of museums lies in the leveraging of the knowledge embodied in their collections and in the expertise of the museum worker. As a result of the changing mission, role, and programs, museums has altered to include taking on records management responsibilities, digital asset management, and undertaking documentation efforts such as intangible cultural heritage projects, like oral history projects.

Background

Local History museums' central theme of focus has linked powerful ideas together to understand the imperial past and prepare for the future through the Cato Manor Collection. By addressing issues of human suffering through interpretation of this collection, the Local History Museums' preservation of the 'sensitive' collection has enabled visitor's access to the corpus materials that document the museums activities and has allowed the design of visual history to create contemporary historical awareness. In accessing the information visitors may actively reflect on the past and how it touches on today's society.

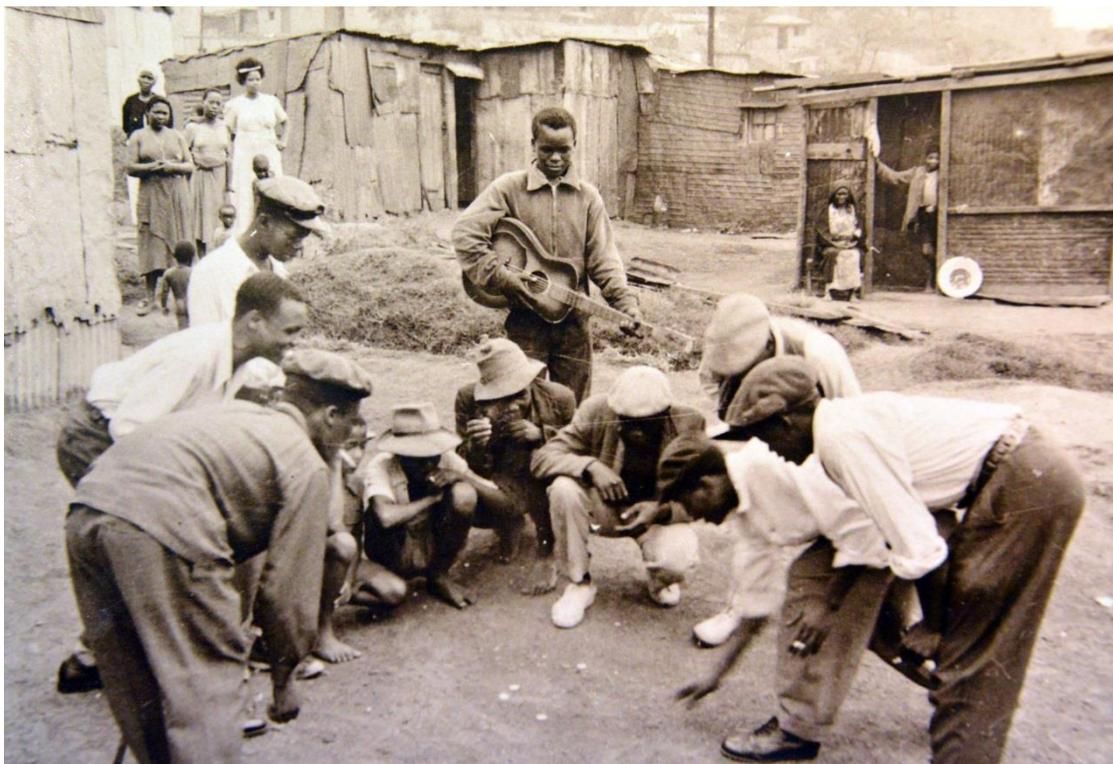
The Local History Museums' has offered new opportunities for productive collaboration. Academics, authors, researchers, curators, artist and musicians turn to archives and museums as a source of research and production. The Cato Manor Collection provides collective memory and personal stories through practices associated with the accumulation of collection, archive and inventory. To this end the collection are the primary archival materials utilized and explored in different ways by users who appropriate and interrogate the sound recordings, documents and images.

The project builds upon prior knowledge and collection of the Cato Manor Story and the proper preservation and conservation from museum workers will ensure the collection will continue to provide knowledge for the next year, decade, or generation. Local History Museums' has become an active partner and a motivating force of knowledge through various format of documentation, images, audio or visuals to enhance the current and future work of the museum. This collection has expand the research opportunities by providing points of intellectual connection and challenge for the work undertaken by the museum.

Cato Manor Story

Cato Manor has a history punctuated with the violence of colonialism, nationalism and the diffusion of ideas of differentiation, discrimination and prejudice as well as the idea of equality and justice alongside affirmation of one's own identities.

Durban's industries and trade developed without much thought being given to the resulting human and social effects it created in the clash between economic and welfare interests which resulted in overcrowded hostels and thousands of shacks. The settlement cracked up physically with epidemics and emotionally with violent disturbance of the 1949 riots. Danger to public health and security grew through the spread of disease, unrest, crime and wasted lives.

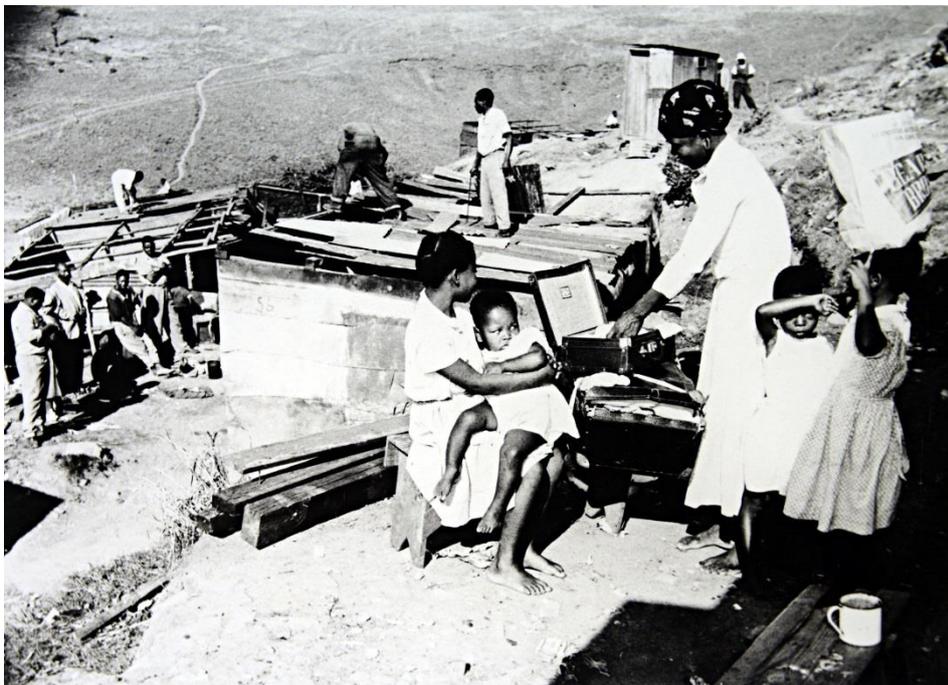


Unemployed men/boys in illegal gambling

With the outbreak of war there was an increased demand for Native workers. Employment possibilities, availability of hospital treatment, education opportunities and urban amenities caused a steady migration of Native families into Cato Manor, the scheduled area available for Indian ownership and occupation under the Asiatic Land Tenure Act. The provision of

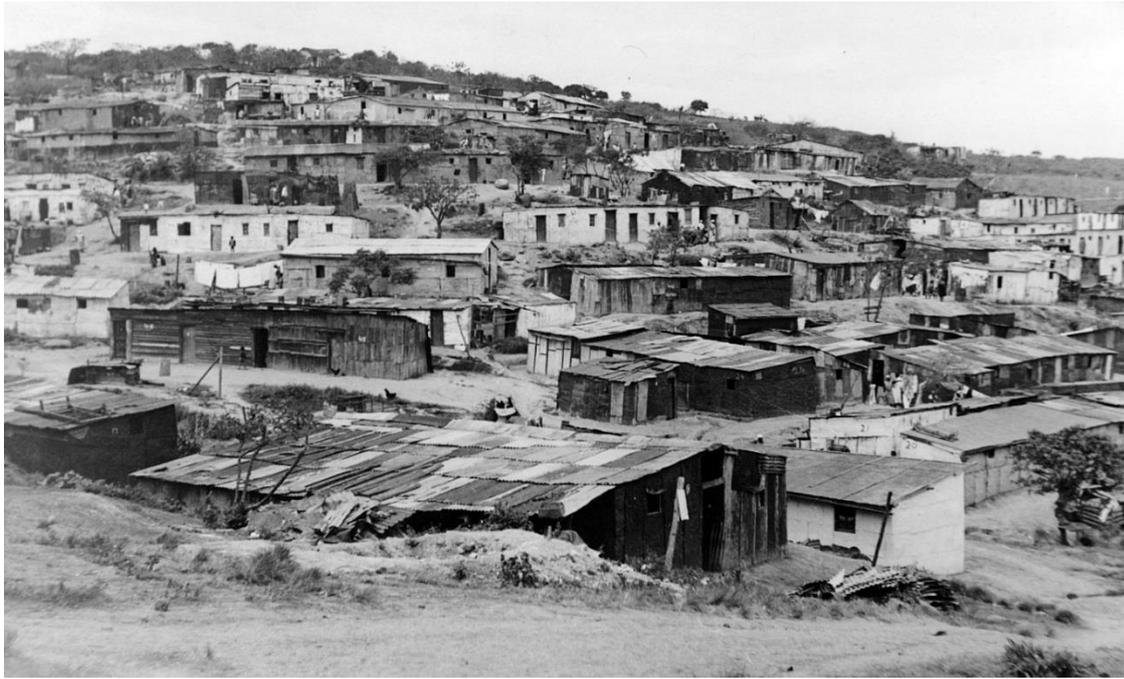
adequate accommodation, water sanitation and shelter for these workers seems to have been largely overlooked by their employers and the City council. According to the Act 25 of 1945 (Urban Area Act) Natives employed in central Durban were not allow to acquire land or build a home in urban areas which meant the emergence of shack outcrops in the Cato Manor area.

Since Indian land owners considered leasing land for shacks a better paid option than growing fruits, clusters of shacks sprang up in isolated and previously uninhabited land in Cato Manor where provisions and other services were not accessible. Between 1940 and 1944 in one area at Cato Manor the number of Native occupied shacks grew from 500 to 3000. Large number of Natives flocked into already congested premises, living in seriously overcrowded shacks and under primitive conditions, tempted diseases and illness that threatened the health and building regulations. Which eventually resulted in the eradication of entire slums.



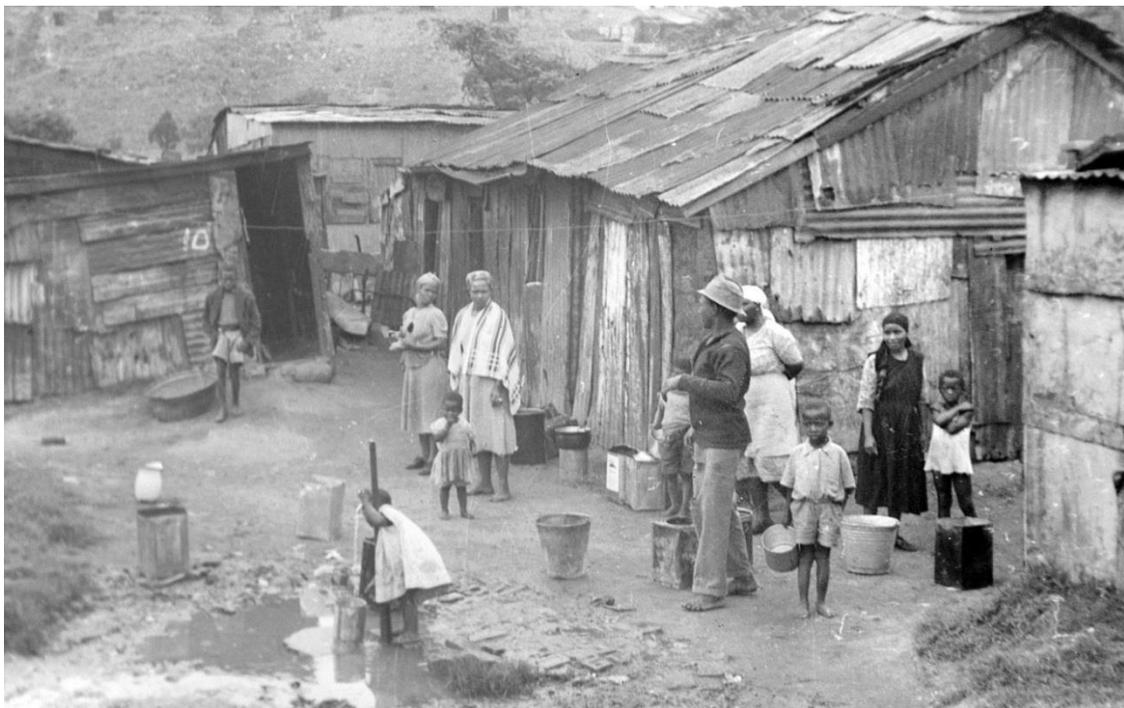
Force Removals

In 1944 over a hundred notices were served on owners of some 1800 shacks requiring them to provide such basic amenities as water or sanitary services. Unfortunately, this demand for improvements was negligible. Since the shacks were built by the squatter tenants themselves, owners would rather evict their tenants than provide the necessary facilities, creating tension between the India landlords and Native shack dwellers. In addition, the courts were reluctant to give the required authority to evict natives as it will mean that the shacks will spring up elsewhere and perhaps in areas even more scattered and less amenable to control. As a result the shack suburbs continued to grow at an alarming rate with most families crowded into small rooms which gave rise to a deteriorating and dangerous housing problem.



Shacks in Cato Manor

Cato Manor became an area of poverty, despair and a hopeless environment with widespread sexual promiscuity which seemed to be an accepted standard of social behaviour among many urban natives. Children played amid squalor and the unemployed older youths were drawn into gangs as the nearby schools were already overflowing. Yet the shacks appeared remarkably clean and tidy and seem to be out of tune with their environment. Clearly, the vast majority of inhabitants of Cato Manor on whom Durban's industry and commerce depend deserve better of Durban and of South Africa.



Collecting Water

The Native Administration Committee made availability of land for temporary occupation between Cato Manor and Westville for natives to build their own dwellings under control of Section 2 (b) of the Natives (urban area) Act no. 25 of 1945 was met by strong opposition by the Cato Manor Indian owners because expropriation of Indians from Cato Manor into similar land would be difficult to find and the livelihood of the Cato Manor market gardeners would be seriously endangered. In addition, the Westville Town Board felt it was an encroachment on a European residential area.

This disagreement caused tension and build up to the 13th January 1949 racial disturbances, resulting in many homeless families. This was one of the blood baths of Durban where many lives were lost, dwellings damaged and some Indian owners lost control of the use of their land. Shack suburbs continued to grow at an alarming rate with most families crowded into small rooms. Natives began to erect shack structures to let or sell to others.

The hesitation of local authorities resulted in the problem becoming bigger and escalating. The need for housing was vital, and the capital required so vast and the rental and other subsidies so onerous that housing perhaps cannot remain so largely a local responsibility therefore, the natal Distress Relief Fund was established to fund refugee camps, dwellings and basic amenities to victims of the riots.

Museum's Policy

In South Africa, post-colonial museums promote 'national reconciliation, unity and the development of national identity by establishing mutual understanding of diverse societies, (National Museums Policy Framework: page 5). As public inquiry and places of debate, museums through the collections they currently have play a key role in providing knowledge to a society by making available information through educational programmes and various media. It is this conception of museums that sets up a sites of debate and discussion on the past, present and future histories mediated by the documentation of artefacts.

According to the Arts and Culture Department of National Museums Policy Framework the aim is to transform the management and operation of South African museums in terms of its "access, redress, equity, social cohesion and nation-building to enable to (museums) to efficiently preserve our national heritage while contributing effectively to national development." The Policy also reiterate that museums must promote the recognition of, and respect for, diverse social and cultural practices, and encouraging respect for human rights regardless of race, gender, language, class, national origin. Museums must also ensure that all persons and communities have equal opportunities to participate in cultural life and to conserve and develop their cultural heritage.

The Local History Museums' is dedicated to promoting and safeguarding the human rights of all the people in Durban, their cultures, societies and environments as well as their tangible and intangible heritage held in the museums. It is devoted to preserving the collection derived from local communities by illustrating to visitors by means of material culture the different environments.

Role of the museum in a society as agents of social change

Intercultural tensions are often bound with conflicts of memory, competing interpretations of the past, conflicting values and contradictory meaning attached to heritage sites and objects, and may lead to debates based on an either-or approach. Society requires cohesiveness in museums, to sensitively portray multiple voices, including different perspectives of the same event.

South Africa has gone through a social and political transformation process and museums are role players in contributing to social cohesion and socio-economic development. As agents of social change, museums must work towards social harmony by increasing social tolerance. Museums must show appreciation for diversity by acceptance of differences regarding race and culture. Social cohesion should be built on an acceptance of diversity as a key characteristic of the South African identity.

It is essential for a museum to be able to connect with the community in an interactive way. The community can deliver a detail account in time by providing significant historical evidence. The people who lived through an era can greatly help in the process of adding valuable information by correlating the memories of the events. As does the museum professionals have the skill and expertise to understand, document and facilitate appropriate exhibition in suitable context and creating an interactive environment in a museum.

The Cato Manor Collection has grown through research, gifts and purchases and now comprises objects ranging from the merely odd, through to the everyday items, to the extremely valuable regalia. In addition, to telling their stories about their communities, these objects say a great deal about the people who collected them and related their stories and those who received them and included them in the collection. As public spaces, museums can create opportunities that allow community members to express themselves through programmes and by creating intergenerational contact and understanding and a sense of belonging. They can play a formative role in developing democratic skills and confidence. Moreover, it is important that the museums place themselves in such a platform which is devoid of barriers resulting from cast, creed, race, age, literacy, etc. and the best way to achieve this is to collaborate with academic institutions and communities.

Preservation

Often collectors, researchers or museum staff draw on the material in the museum archives to create published works but the collection themselves remain unpublished. As is the case of the Cato Manor Collection which comprises of multi-format, unpublished, created works of voice recordings and visuals which are complimented by several thousand images and documents that form a creative aspects of traditional culture of the area in the precolonial era. Over time these knowledge have become more than just field notes and images so much so the Local History Museums' has made every attempt to maintain the original, creative intent of the collection. Yet, there is a fear of losing our heritage in this fast-paced time and preserving it by documenting and digitizing it immediately so that it is as authentic as possible.

Museum concepts of preservation, heritage and continuity as well as ways of storing and conserving are practiced world-wide and by all people (Kreps: 2003). Likewise, in South Africa the need for protection and conservation of heritage of the museum collection is imperative. Museum archivist's focus is on preserving and providing research access to the corpus of materials that document the museum's activities over time.

As stewards of the Durban's intellectual property, the Local History Museums' identify and preserve the important knowledge, information, and documentation created through its activities over time. In keeping with contemporary museum's where knowledge and information is stored electronically, the Local History Museums' has increased its responsibilities of preservation to include electronic records management, digital asset management (images, audio, video), and digital storage for the use of further generations and makes them available to researchers interested in Durban's culture.

Breaking away from the 'Silence'

The Local History Museums' break away from the effect of 'silencing' by creating a voice for the voiceless and encouraging those in the periphery of power to step forward is its ability to acknowledge, to understand the variety of people of Cato Manor as citizens to be recognized and given a voice within the hallowed walls of the museums, archives and exhibition halls. The voices of these people through the visual and sound recording and the display of objects and textual interpretation is no longer muted. It is their voices that dominates in these empty museum spaces. The voices of the people are representation along ethnic and racial lines that affirms differentiated and disconnect sets of cultural identities. The collection bear testimony to historical connections and ties that bind without silencing the violence and inequities of the present and the past.

The Local History Museums' has proved it can play a role in this scenario of breaking the silences of past and reconsiders our futures. We have learnt and have understood the current conjunctions in our societies and communities. The policy framework has provided much of the space to engage with the past and the present in order to anticipate the future. The Local History Museums' has an orientation to form, express and record powerful, original ideas about the future through documenting and preserving artefacts, recordings and visual aids.

Conclusion

The Cato Manor project shapes a society in which all people were able to live together and develop their creative skills while still struggling with hunger, suppression or violence. The Role of the collection in The Local History Museums' is to provide an understanding how people identified themselves and their traditional life right through to their modernization and progress. The task is to show the powers people perceived and it is this power that The Local History Museums' would like to spark into motion within the community to bring change and celebration of the inevitable progress. Are we wrong to assume that after decolonization we live in transformative time that the future has brought new development that the past has

failed to do? So we should not be drowning in the repression and terror of anger and vengeance.

In addition, The Local History Museums' promotion of the cultural heritage has broaden the interaction between the museum and community. The collection are part of the national legacy, furthering research on cultural groups and preserving and sometimes helping to restore cultural heritage. The Cato Manor Heritage is one of the most representative collections, reflecting its changes from past to present as we move with the changing times.

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