



Burning libraries for the people: questions and challenges for public librarians in post-Apartheid South Africa

Peter Lor
Professor
University of Pretoria
South Africa

Burning libraries?

Bibliothèques qui brûlent

Mettre le feu aux bibliothèques





Struggle, victory, hope

Planning & development

Disillusion & protest

The library profession reacts

Scholarly analysis

Can we learn from this?



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Struggle

Soweto, 16 June 1976

Hector Pieterse in the arms of Mbuyisa Nkita Makhubu, his sister, Antoinette Musi, running alongside.

Photo: Sam Nzima

<http://www.gutenberg-e.org/pohlandt-mccormick/archive/detail/DSCN0000.jpg.html>

Victory

February 11,
1990

Nelson Mandela released
from prison

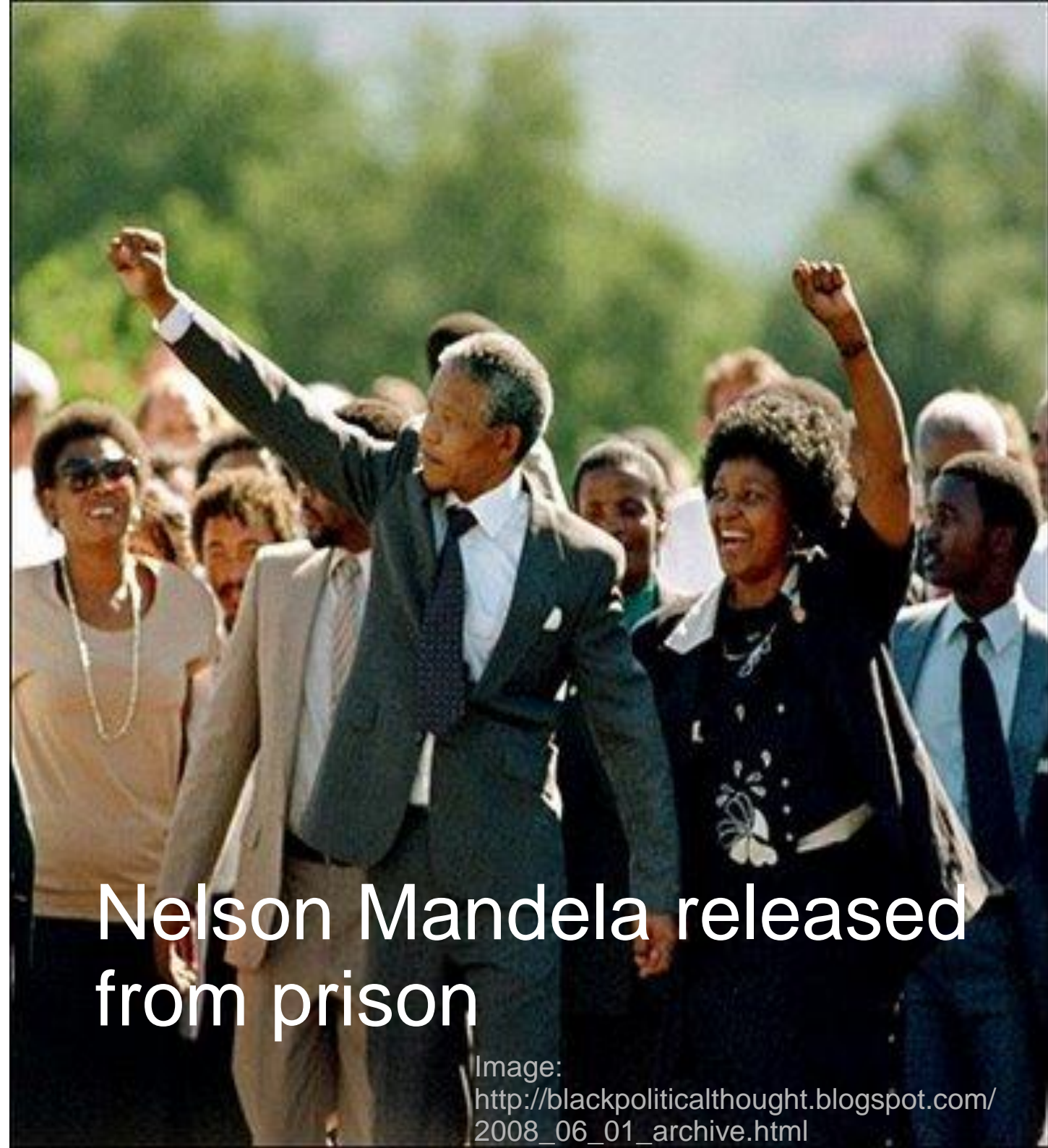


Image:
[http://blackpoliticalthought.blogspot.com/
2008_06_01_archive.html](http://blackpoliticalthought.blogspot.com/2008_06_01_archive.html)

Hope

May 9, 1994

F.W. De Klerk and
Nelson Mandela at
Mandela's
inauguration

Image: BlackPast.org.
<http://www.blackpast.org/?q=1994-nelson-mandela-s-inaugural-address-president-south-africa-0>





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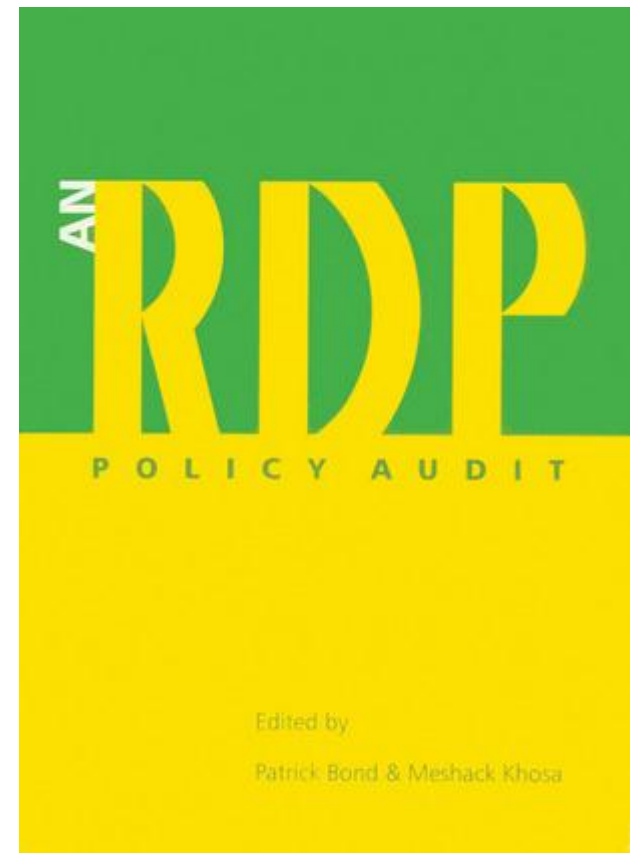
Can we learn from this?

Reconstruction & development

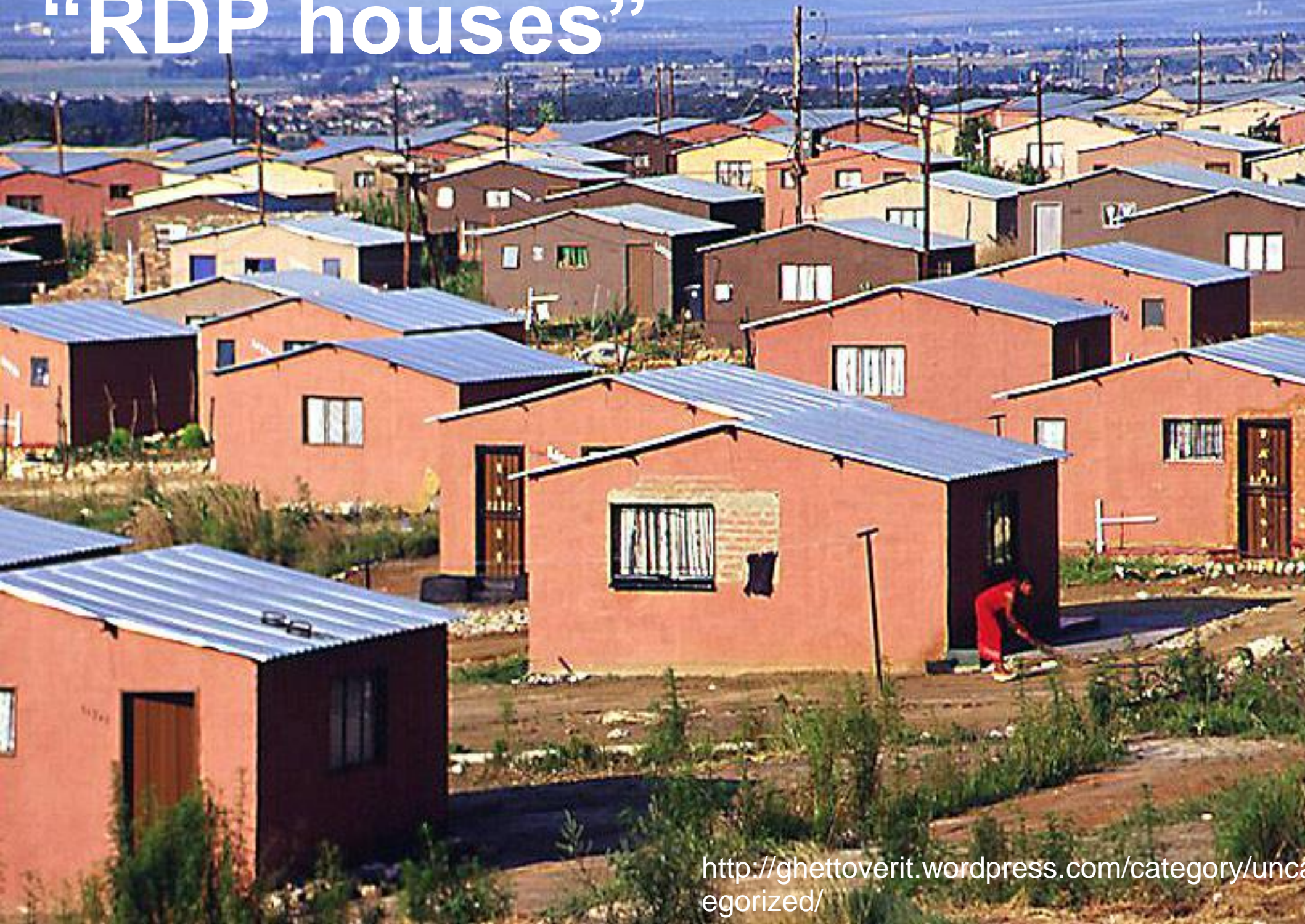
RDP document: Principles

- Peace & security
- Nation-building
- Growth, development, reconstruction, redistribution, reconciliation
- Democratization

Socialist & neoliberal elements



“RDP houses”



<http://ghettoverit.wordpress.com/category/uncategorized/>



What about libraries?

Librarians “inserted themselves” into policy processes (1990s):

NEPI: National educational Policy Initiative

IPET: Implementation Proposals for Education & Training

ACTAG: Arts and Culture Advisory Group

Government announcement, 2005:

ZAR 1.000.000.000
(€ 90.000.000)

Allocated for public library
development over three years.

KLAARSTROOM BIBLIOTEEK

**HIERDIE BIBLIOTEEK IS OP
17 NOVEMBER 2007**

**AMPTELIK GEOPEN DEUR
MINISTER M.W. JACOBS
PROVINSIALE MINISTER VAN
KULTUURSAKE EN SPORT**

KLAARSTROOM LIBRARY

**THIS LIBRARY WAS OFFICIALLY OPENED ON
17 NOVEMBER 2007**

**BY
MINISTER M.W. JACOBS
PROVINCIAL MINISTER OF
CULTURAL AFFAIRS AND SPORT**

SIGN STUDIO 083 767 1297

Klaarstroom
BIBLIOTEEK
LIBRARY







National Library of South Africa, Pretoria

A new, fully non-racial library association for South Africa



Library and Information Association of South Africa



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Upcoming events

Title		Date
43rd Annual Conference of the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA)	Non-LIASA events	6 October 2012 - 11 October 2012
Berlin to Open Access Conference	Non-LIASA	7 November 2012 - 8

Librarian of the Year 2012: Branch winners

LIASA's 15th Anniversary Messages

Happy 15th Birthday LIASA

LIASA Membership Camp



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Soweto, 2007

The “trickle-down” effect?



“Service delivery protests”



“Collateral damage”?

Ratanga Community Library, Human Rights Day, 2012

<http://www.liasa.org.za/node/763>



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Reactions from South African librarians: the local branch of LIASA

“As LIASA Gauteng South Branch – we are **disheartened** to learn of the burning of one of our libraries in Gauteng South, the Ratanda Library at Lesedi Municipality. Public libraries are a **corner stone of our democratic government** in **knowledge economy**, thus play a **critical role** in the lifelong learning journey of our **nation**. In Gauteng South we strive and lobby towards the establishment and **development** of more libraries especially in the communities and schools. The burning ...only serves to defeat the very same **professional ethos** and **objectives** we are advancing as the professional body...

“It **saddens our hearts** that the library was burnt during the time when we commemorate our human rights and celebrate our library week...”

Individual comment on LIASA mailing list

“Quite ironic. The very institution that provides amazing services to communities is the one that **they** targeted! **What is it with people today?** How do **they** believe that burning down a library or anything else for that matter will resolve things or improve things? It is **reminiscent of the days** when schools were burnt down and then children didn't have anywhere to go to get educated. These actions must be **condemned** as strongly as possible...

“**Shame** on the **arsonists!** They are a **disgrace to law-abiding citizens** of South Africa.

Individual comment on LIASA mailing list

“Another library burnt and this during SA Library Week in Ratanga! This is a **shameful and dastardly** act by the **perpetrators** of this **unwarranted** violence. Despite being known as the "**university of the poor**" libraries continue to be the **soft target** of **those** who so desperately need a library to get them out of the cycle of poverty and illiteracy...”

...

Official statement by LIASA: the Library and Information Association of South Africa

“BURNING OF RATANDA LIBRARY ON HUMAN RIGHTS DAY: **LOSS** TO THE COMMUNITY

“The Library and Information Association of South Africa (LIASA) is **shocked and appalled** at the burning down of the Ratanda Library, Lesedi Municipality, during the protests on Human Rights Day. It is particularly **ironic** and **sad** that this happened during the celebrations of SA Library Week.

...”

“The Ratanda Library serves a community of 70,000 residents and had a **collection** of 11, 807 catalogued library books. These books were completely destroyed, as well as a photocopier/fax machine and 8 brand new computers for library patrons, 3 admin computers, a large screen television and of course furniture. The total **value amounts to** R2 957 615.00.” [c. €280.000]

“The following **services** were rendered to the community:

- Computers used by 1000+ patrons per month;
- Over 900 telefaxes sent per month;
- 2, 594 photocopies made during January;
- Circulation of materials of 3 146 items per year;
- On-site use of 10,133 items per year;
- Outreach programmes for the elderly and the youth...”

-- LIASA Official statement, 23 March, 2012

Some themes

Strong language

Horror, shock

Sadness, “disheartened”

Condemnation, disgust

Incomprehension: why libraries?

Some themes (2)

Irony: why “target” libraries --

On Human Rights Day?

In National Library Week?

Cost (financial)

Loss to community

What libraries contribute (nation, community)

Marketing

Some less obvious themes

We

Professionalism, objectives (for communities)

They

Who did it?

Community members?

Arsonists?

Small minority?

Meaning of “community”

Search for explanations

Librarians' rationalisation:

“in the wrong place at the wrong time” --

Other targets:

municipal offices

clinics

homes of mayors & councillors

“a small minority” --

Not representative of the community



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Socio-economic investigation:

Karl von HOLDT, Malase LANGA, Sepetla MOLAPO, et al.

The smoke that calls: insurgent citizenship, collective violence and the struggle for a place in the new South Africa.

Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, July 2011.



Eight case studies of community protest and xenophobic violence



Socio-economic investigation:

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The smoke that calls?

and xenophobic violence

CSVR
The Centre for the Study of
Violence and Reconciliation

SWoP
Society, Work and Development Institute

Aim

Attempted to:

“understand collective violence and its underlying social dynamics”.

“probe and understand the repertoires and meanings of collective violence with a wide-ranging analysis of local associational life, local politics and class formation.”



Methodology:

In-depth qualitative research

Eight case studies of community protest and xenophobic violence in 2008

“A combination of key informant and snowballing selection was used to identify interviewees, and researchers also employed participant observation, attending meetings, rallies and parties, as well as hanging out in taverns and homes.”



Conclusions

Rapid processes of class formation—

New elite emerging

Large underclass of unemployed and precariously employed

Dislocations of the transition from apartheid to democracy—

Generating fierce struggles over inclusion and exclusion

within the elite

between elites and subalterns

within the subaltern classes themselves.



Conclusions (2)

Contestation over the meaning and content of citizenship

Development of “differentiated citizenship which distributes treatment, rights and privileges differentially among formally equal citizens according to differences of education, property, race, gender and occupation”

Subaltern groups respond by “mobilising an ‘insurgent citizenship’”

Adopting violent practices developed during struggle against apartheid in 1980s



Conclusions (3)

Problematic: “a darker side”:

patriarchal prejudices

xenophobic exclusion

the use of violence in political and social disputes and to buttress local power

undermining the basis of citizenship

“Community protests, collective violence and the associational practices that underlie them are ambiguous and contradictory in their implications for citizenship and democracy.”



Why libraries?

Researchers were puzzled too

Findings: contradictory & ambivalent views in communities:

“An accident”, wrong

“Not a proper library”, justified: “You go to the library and there is no newspaper, nothing. There’s no Internet... That was not a library. What we burnt down was just a room. We burnt the place down so they would build us a proper library... that thing was there when we were born.”

Theft as motive? (Computers)



Why libraries? (2)

Burning down a library or a clinic has different meanings for different actors in the community:

For some: a public amenity with important practical uses, even if it is inadequate.

“For others, its manifest inadequacy shows that little has changed since apartheid, and government is failing the community. Its practical usefulness is immaterial. There is a continuity between the apartheid past and the democratic present in the symbolic meaning of library or clinic as a structure that represents authority... Burning it down is a symbolic disruption of that authority, an assertion of the anger and grievances of the community.”





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This is bigger than libraries

but, if libraries are to be relevant, they are

- part of their community
- part of the political process (what about “neutrality”?)

Can and should libraries:

- Make a difference to communities?
- Differentiate themselves from municipal bureaucracy?
- Be “subversive agencies”?

Can we learn from this?

This is bigger than libraries

but, can **librarians**:

- become politically aware
- shed their bureaucratic mindset
- deconstruct managerialist & marketing rhetoric
- Align themselves with the people?

No quick fixes...



THANK YOU

Peter Lor

peterlor@gmail.com

<http://peterlor.com>