

**LINKING WITH THE PAST AND CULTURAL REGENERATION: A CASE
STUDY OF SCHOEMANSDAL MUSEUM IN THE SOUTPANSBERG REGION,
LIMPOPO PROVINCE**

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**A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the
Witwatersrand, Johannesburg for the degree of Master of Arts, 2007.**

ABSTRACT

This research report is a critique of the existing Schoemansdal Museum, asking how far it may be characterized as an 'Afrikaner' representation. A survey of a sample of people who see themselves as speaking on behalf of various groups was conducted and a tentative conclusion about public sentiments towards the museum is drawn.

DECLARATION

I declare that this research report is my own, unaided work except where I acknowledged sources. I am submitting it for the degree of Master of Arts by course work in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this University or any other University in South Africa and abroad. People interviewed in this research cooperated without any threat or any other ill mechanism on my part to acquire information from them.

Lufuno Jean Pierre Mulaudzi
26th day of November, 2007.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all let me thank God Almighty for being with me throughout my life struggle. There are a number of people who contributed to the success of this project. I know that it is impossible to mention all their names in this page but I will try to mention the few who have been with me through hard times of this project. My thanks go to the Schoemansdal Museum staff they were always helpful. The former Mayor of Makhado Municipality, Councilor Brighton Thlakula and other members in the Municipality such as Mr. Vic. Viljoen, Mr. Johan Joubert and Mrs. Suzan du Toit. I also thank all the people who were interviewed in chapter five of this research, without their contribution it was always going to be difficult to complete this project.

My special thanks to Prof. E. Hanisch of the University of Venda, Archaeology Department and Prof. A. Meyer of the University of Pretoria, Archaeology Department. These two professionals provided input to this project. My thanks are also extended to Azwinndini Netshivhuyu who was then working at the Makhado Municipality Library; I say thanks for being there for me even when you were busy with something. You never said no to my request, keep it up.

Mphephu royal family for giving me information about the history of the Soutpansberg, I thank you for your support. I thank Jane Mufamadi, for lending me her tape recorder. I want her to know that I appreciated her help. I also extend my thanks to Godfrey Chesang a friend from Kenya, doing his Ph.D. in Forced Migration at Wits University for accommodating me as a friend for a week when I was stranded.

iv.

My special friends Eunice Siebane, Muneiwa Ratshitanga, Portia Lebala, Tarzan Kwadiba, Alexio Motsi, Taki Munyayi, Mbuleni Mulaudzi, David Rannku, Lucky Mufamadi and Shandu Davhana, I say thank you guys for making me believe in myself to finish this project. My relative and friend Jonas Makwakwa, thanks for your laptop, which made my job easy. My brother Steven Mulaudzi, well what can I say? You are great, God bless you.

My son's mother, Takalani Rambuda, my sisters Emma Rabinda, Joyce Mariba, Mary Radebe and my aunt Mrs. Sarah Nethavhani, I have to thank all of you for helping me financially in this project which was carried out without a bursary. I love you all, God bless you forever. To my son Mbofho this is for you son, dad will be able to spend some time with you with the completion of this project. I reserved my gratefulness to my supervisor, Prof. Cynthia Kros, who provided guidance and advice throughout the project. Thank you Prof. Kros for your understanding; although you have been on sabbatical leave, you were available for this project.

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CHAPTER ONE

1. Introduction

1.1. Aim:

There are two aims of the research report. They are: analysing the representation of the history of the Soutpansberg area that is presented in the Schoemansdal Museum and investigating the reasons for its extremely low visitor numbers. Whether or not there is a connection between the two will also be explored.

1.2. Rationale:

The Schoemansdal Museum was erected on the basis of an archaeological investigation of the trekkers' settlement on the site, dating from the mid 19th century. Since the museum is focused on the trekker site, it might be concluded that there are significant gaps in the presentation of the history of the Soutpansberg area as a whole in the museum, an assumption which the research report investigates. Since the museum is apparently related to a phase of the Great Trek it is necessary to ask what kind of representation it is. Does it reflect what has been described in the relevant literature as the Afrikaner school of historiography? Secondly, although documentary evidence tells us that there were other people besides the trekkers in the area, and that there was substantial interaction among them, there is, as has been hinted above, very little indicating the existence of other 'race' groups in the area.¹ Is this why the museum has so little appeal, and if so, is there potentially a different way of showing the history of Schoemansdal in the context of 19th century Southern Africa? Preliminary research suggests that the current museum is disconnected from much of its surrounding history.

¹ 'Race' appears in inverted commas as I am suggesting that it is a construct and that race does not exist as an inherent biological category.

The Northern Province has recently changed its name to Limpopo, and many towns in the province have had their names changed to reflect a broader perspective of its history. Often towns were called after a trekker notable, e.g. Louis Trichardt, and this was changed to Makhado (former Venda chief).² But now, after popular protest, it has been changed back to Louis Trichardt after a brief spell as Makhado. The war over the name change is probably not over yet. Similarly Potgietersrus is presently known as Mokopane. The Municipal Council' name changes may be defeated, as in the first instance, by popular resentment from a section of the populace. Local history is clearly an object of contestation in modern Limpopo.

It might be reasonable to ask if a museum that is devoted to a particular representation of trekker history has a place in the new Limpopo Province. Academic works suggest that there are more inclusive ways of telling the story of the so-called Great Trek, so we might ask how the story of the 'Great Trek' and the trekker settlements it spawned should be told in Limpopo.³

1.3. Literature Review:

The literature relevant to this theme touches on very large bodies of work, and it is not possible to deal with all of them in a project of this scope. The literature review has three parts, i.e. (1) literature about museums and their relationship with communities; (2) literature identifying the Afrikaner historiographical perspective; (3) historical and archaeological literature.

1.3.1. Museum and Community Literature

Tony Bennett (1995) argues that the museum in Britain came about as a way of socializing working class people. Museums were supposed to lift the level of popular taste and forms of recreation. Bennett argues that the museum was supposed to diminish

² There is contestation over Makhado's chiefly status.

³ "Great Trek" appears in inverted commas to denote that I am following the lead of those who have argued that the trek has been mythologised.

the appeal of the tavern, thus increasing the sobriety and industriousness of the populace, and preventing riot and sedition. Bennett argues that the conception of the museum as an institution in which the working classes, provided they dressed nicely and curbed any tendency towards unseemly conduct, were exposed to the improving influence of the middle classes, was crucial to its construction as a new kind of social space. Bennett thus identifies the museum as an educational space in which an attempt was made to inculcate the values of the ruling class. This view of how museums initially served a particular ideology and the needs of the new ruling class is useful to this study.

In a similar vein, Ivan Karp (1992) in his chapter in "*Museums and Communities: the Politics of Public Culture*" in Karp, Lavine et al (eds), argues that the selection of knowledge and the presentation of ideas and images are enacted within a power system. Karp argues that the sources of power are derived from the capacity of cultural institutions to classify and define peoples and societies, and they try to tell visitors how cultural differences should be understood. Karp traces the involvement and impact of communities in museums, such as African American activists, who have argued against the museum's denigration of their history.

Karp argues that when exhibiting cultures, curators did not devote as much space to the equally political questions of how museums relate to the changing configuration of communities that surround them, ranging from the neighbourhood to the nation-state, from groups defined in ethnic and racial terms to social classes. Karp argues that the relationship between museums and their communities initially rested on the false assumption that the contested politics between museums and communities had easy solutions whereas 'communities' are diverse and often in flux. It is thus not possible to reach a final decision about how to represent a particular 'community' or 'culture' in a museum. There should be ongoing dialogue between the museum and its communities.

Karp notes that when people enter museums they do not leave their cultures and identities in the coatroom, nor do they respond passively to museum displays. He argues that people interpret museum exhibitions through their prior experiences and through their

culturally learned beliefs, values, and perceptual skills that they gain through membership in multiple communities. Karp, then, perceives museums as a place for people to define who they are, and as places for challenging those definitions. To Karp the key point is that the institutions of civil society can be thought about separately from the agencies of government specifically charged with social control, such as the police and the courts.

Similarly emphasising change, complexity and contestation, Steven Lavine (1992) in his chapter in Karp, Lavine et al (eds) 'Audience, Ownership, and Authority: Designing Relations Between Museums and Communities', argues that the history of museum representations of communities, and museum activities with or about communities are important elements to consider in current relations between museums and communities. He argues that history is not just something that happened, but is a living part of people's sense of who they are and how they relate to other elements of civil society. In the course of this report I will try to bear this fluid definition of history and its relationship to the 'community' in mind. Here 'community' is written in inverted commas as an acknowledgement of Karp's argument about the fluidity and multiple characters of communities as they come into dialogue or confrontation with the museum.

1.3.2. Literature Identifying the Afrikaner Perspective.

Dunbar Moodie, (1975) was the first in a series of scholars to show how Afrikaner nationalists used history to mobilize political support. They inspired their followers with stories of brave "Afrikaner" ancestors (on the Great Trek etc) and built up their anger against British domination with the history of "Afrikaner" suffering, especially at the Cape leading to the 'Great Trek', and then later, during the Anglo Boer wars. Moodie argues that the enthusiastic demand that Afrikaners "stand on guard" (*handhaaf*) for their culture grew out of deliberations in the Afrikaner *Broederbond* in the 20th century. *Bond* Afrikaners felt that republicanism could not be suppressed, smothered, or slaughtered and aimed to show that it was planted at the battles of Blood River, Vegkop and Paardekraal in ground made fruitful by the blood and tears of the Boer, his wife and child. This

ideology contributed to the strength of Afrikaner nationalism in the 20th century, and ultimately to the victory of the National Party in 1948.

Other scholars, e.g. D. O' Meara in *Volkskapitalisme* (1983), used a Marxist analysis to show how aspirant Afrikaner capitalists wooed working class Afrikaners through the appeal to a common history. L. Thompson (1969) discusses History textbooks and dominant historical narratives, such as the *Slagtersnek* rebellion, to illustrate the concept and the way in which it was developed, of the mythology of Afrikanerdom.

Isabel Hofmeyr's (2000) in *We Spend Our Years As A Tale That Is Told*, is one of the authors who have contributed to identifying Afrikaner perspectives in the historiographical sense. She discusses the 'Northern Transvaal' and the way the mythology of the Great Trek was developed in the area over several decades, with important parallels being developed between episodes in the Natal area (particularly the way in which the battle of Blood River has been presented) and the Northern Transvaal. The way these episodes came to be told had certain common mythic elements: individual heroism, treacherous 'savages' and so on. These served to reinforce the narrative of Afrikaner nationalism. Hofmeyr proceeds to trace the development of an Ndebele narrative that came about to counter the Afrikaner version of what happened in the siege of so-called *Makapansgat* in 1854. In their story the Boers became the treacherous villains.

It is obviously important for the purpose of this research report, to be able to refer to the major points of the Afrikaner nationalist narrative as identified by scholars cited above, and to note the existence of counter-narratives like the one Hofmeyr discusses. The museum under discussion was started as a project by those with Afrikaner nationalist affiliations, and appears to embody some of the Afrikaner school's emphasis on the 'Great Trek'.

1.3.3. Historical and Archaeological Literature

A lot of the literature discussed below deals with pre white settlement history. It is probable that it will serve as background to this report, as a reminder of the long and vibrant history of the area before the mid 19th century. But this report will focus on the period of Schoemansdal in the 19th century.

N.J. van Warmelo (1932) conducted one of the early studies as a government ethnologist. His account of Soutpansberg was based on his anthropological studies of the Venda kingdom, very probably circumscribed by his professional and academic outlook. Still, he did study Venda customs and traditions, and his account of the settlement of the Venda in the Soutpansberg dates back from the days when Dyambeu, the first Venda chief south of the Limpopo crossed the river to the Soutpansberg up until the time of Mphephu. According to van Warmelo, Dyambeu and his people found the area already occupied by a “very primitive” people. Van Warmelo claimed that Dyambeu died in the Soutpansberg after he was trapped in a cave as a result of a fallen rock. He also claimed that Dyambeu’s son Thohoyandou succeeded him. He further argues that Thohoyandou’s young brother Tshivhase who was later toppled by Munzhenzi in the Venda chieftaincy replaced him. What van Warmelo highlights here and elsewhere are the internal conflicts within the Venda chieftaincy, as was clearly shown with the death of Munzhenzi. In the case of his death, the old man preferred his son Ramavhoya instead of the eldest son Ravele Ramabulana to succeed him. There is another version of the story where it is stated that their mother Nyamuanalo influenced Ramavhoya to assume the role of the king, Tempelhoff (1999). According to van Warmelo, Ramavhoya succeeded his father and assumed the reign of the Venda kingdom at Tshirululuni. Van Warmelo claimed that Ravele, in fear of his life went to exile at Moletsi, which is the place of the Tlokwa people. Van Warmelo argues that Ramavhoya killed the Tlokwa chief and the Tlokwa people came with Ravele at Tshirululuni to avenge the death of their chief. He further claimed that the Tlokwa and Ravele also enlisted the help of a white man who was a trader in their fight with Ramavhoya. According to van Warmelo, the white man was told to shoot Ramavhoya but the man fired over his head. Van Warmelo further argues that Ravele was forced by his vengeful Sotho allies to strangle his own brother and as a result of this he became the new chief of the Venda people. This argument is made to suggest

the influence of both the Sotho and white people in shaping the Venda chieftaincy in the early 18th century.

Van Warmelo also claimed that Ravele was still alive when the first European settlers came to Schoemansdal. It appears from van Warmelo's account that a strong relationship existed between the newcomers and the Venda people. This was indicated when Makhado, who later became a Venda chief, worked for white people. It is important to note that van Warmelo argued that the whites of Schoemansdal also played a part in the defeat of Davhana by Makhado. This account indicates that the Venda chieftaincy was always contested, which raises problems of succession for the present. It also points to the involvement of outsiders in the conflicts, which is not represented in the museum's history. Van Warmelo indicated that Makhado was on good terms with the whites at Schoemansdal until he was influenced by his Councillors to drive the whites out of Schoemansdal in 1867. Based on what van Warmelo wrote one could argue that there were cross-cultural relationships in Schoemansdal. The whites in Schoemansdal and the Tlokwa both seem to have been involved in the 'traditional' affairs of the Venda, with the latter learning the culture of using guns from the Voortrekkers. This is really important background for visualizing a more inclusive history in the museum.

Van Warmelo's study of this area provides details on the rise of the Venda kingdom, and on their customs and their traditions. His reference to Schoemansdal's Venda name '*Thuvhalalwe*' suggests that the area was once occupied by Venda people before they ceded it to the voortrekkers. The point I am trying to make here is that it may be possible to show Schoemansdal, not only from the inside, but also from the outside through Venda eyes.

Archaeology and Prehistory

Fish, (2000) argues that the origins and political history of the Venda have captivated scholars for over 100 years, and thoughts on Venda origins have been dominated by two schools: (1) an early school giving priority to migration; (2) the current school

emphasizing local development. According to Fish, the famous *Ngoma-Lungundu* account by Mudau (1940a) contains the longest of the genealogies, and according to this list the first Singo leader settled in the Soutpansberg six generations before trekkers abandoned Schoemansdal. This would imply that the earliest Singo settlement of the Soutpansberg would be in the latter half of the 17th century. Fish claimed that there is evidence of the Pre-Venda Late Iron Age activity south of the Soutpansberg. He argues that the Sotho speaking people in the area contributed to the beginnings of a Venda culture.

Huffman (2001), on the other hand, argues that the Singo moved in towards the end of the 17th century from Zimbabwe and conquered most of a pre existent Venda culture. In this version the Singo appropriated Venda and asserted their version of history. This brief survey of the pre history of the area suggests that 'Venda' ethnicity is extremely complicated and has a heterogeneous base. (Also see Loubser 1991; Fish 2000)

The Liberal Challenge

Several decades ago Wilson and Thompson (1969), well known liberal historians, were involved in challenging Afrikaner historiography, arguing that South African history should include black history, showing that it was dynamic. Wilson and Thompson showed that the Venda occupied the Soutpansberg in an area running east, west and south of the Limpopo. The two authors focused on the history of the Venda people as van Warmelo did. Their interests were based on tracing the earliest settlement of the Venda people in the Soutpansberg region. According to them, documentary evidence, which indisputably relates to the Venda, only begins with the arrival of the Voortrekkers in the Northern Transvaal in 1836. However, they argued that an account of the gold trade by Vasco da Gama's Arab pilot in 1530 points in the direction of Venda country. They further claimed that the Dutch account of trade in copper and tin between 1723 and 1732 mentions chiefs who might have been Venda. These authors are of the opinion that the Venda might have settled in the Soutpansberg a long time ago. This work and literature

cited above, show that it is debatable as to who the 'Venda' people are. It seems that they were a great mixture of people who speak a similar language.

Wilson and Thompson also claimed that the Venda brought with them to Soutpansberg an endogamous group of Lemba, who were conspicuous as craftsmen and workers of iron, copper, and gold, potters and weavers. They stressed the craft of the Venda as stone builders, indicated by their capital Dzata, which was built by the Venda chiefs from south of the Limpopo (see also Loubser 1991). Some of the mountain villages in the Soutpansberg had stonewalls and passages built by the Venda veterans. There are several explanations from the two authors: Venda chiefs arrived much earlier than originally supposed, or craftsmen like the Lemba long preceded the chiefs, or that the artefacts came from further north. As already indicated, these authors focused more on the origins of the Venda in the Soutpansberg than their interaction with the Boers, Shangaan and Sotho in the region. But they pointed to the complex and dynamic history of Venda.

The discourse of the Venda as 'nation' is a very complex one which needs to be critically analysed, which cannot be done at length in this report, but which should be borne in mind. We do not know, for example, what the Singo north of the Limpopo were called before they migrated south, and the same goes for the Ngoni south of the Limpopo. According to historians (van Warmelo; Tempelhoff) the Ngoni were speakers of Tshivenda, and the Singo language was a dialect of Shona. It is argued that the Singo conquered the Ngoni and their language as well. I have to stress that the focus of this report is not, however, on the origin of the Venda language. It is mentioned here to emphasise the complexity and heterogeneity of the 'Venda'. The report does not address itself to the origins of such a grouping, but to the representation of the period of trekker history in the area.

More than a decade after Wilson and Thompson's work was published; Roger Wagner in Marks and Atmore (1980) developed the concept of the hunting frontier in the Soutpansberg in order to examine 'interracial' relations among the societies of Soutpansberg and the balance of power. He was concerned to challenge Afrikaner

mythology that is, of 'Afrikaners' as heroic pioneers never in danger of either becoming the subjects of African chiefdoms, or of fleeing black people. He claimed that the basis of 'Afrikaner' interest in penetrating into this part of the interior had economic motives rather than love of freedom and self-government (the usual reasons for the 'Great Trek' given in Afrikaner historiography). Wagner rejected the myth of Afrikaners as heroes who left their homes to open the frontier. He argues that for almost twenty years Schoemansdal dominated trade in one great export item (ivory) of the Transvaal, prior to the discovery of gold. According to Wagner, hunting in the Soutpansberg attracted people from all over the world and was in this sense unrepresentative of Boer settlement generally. He argues that hunters, traders, and adventures in the Soutpansberg included people from the United Kingdom, and Irish, Dutch, Belgian, Portuguese and German nationals. He also indicated the presence of people of Asian extraction and Cape coloureds.

Wagner stressed that when elephant became scarce in the Soutpansberg, Boers took to their pursuit of ivory on foot, and ranged far beyond the Limpopo fly-zone into the lowfeld of Rhodesia (presently Zimbabwe) and Mozambique. According to Wagner, the scarcity of ivory in the vicinity of Soutpansberg multiplied the points of interaction between white colonists and African polities such as the Lobedu, the Venda, and the Gaza Ngoni. Wagner also acknowledged that the Boer community in the Soutpansberg could not be regarded as the first to exploit the hunting grounds, either in the Northern Transvaal or in Southern TransLimpopo, although they were the first to make use of European technology (the gun) to do it.

Wagner pointed out that Venda oral traditions suggested that elephant hunting had improved social life even before the Boers came with their guns to the Soutpansberg, implying that the power of the Venda kingdom was vested in their control of the hunting grounds of the Soutpansberg, and that Venda people were able to survive and expand their state through hunting. As the 19th century wore on, access to the hunting grounds became a source of conflict. According to Wagner, Tsonga commercial hunters who were armed with guns from Lourenco Marques traders and the Sotho people were also

involved in the trade. Wagner claimed that towards the end of Schoemansdal in the 1860's, the Venda people under Makhado took control of the whole hunting grounds. According to Wagner the Venda had acquired guns from the Boers during their time working as marksmen for the latter. He maintains that Venda people refused to return the guns to the Boers. Wagner further claims that any occasional daring soul who ventured into the bush was charged a protection levy by the Venda kingdom even to let him cut timber, let alone shoot game. This illustrates something about the nature of the Venda state as it emerged from the hunting frontier of the 19th century, suggesting as it does, the extent of the control exercised by the Venda. Wagner's analysis raises important questions for us about the ways in which the history of the hunting frontier could be represented with the rise of a hegemonic Venda state which survived until the end of the 19th century.

Peter Delius (1983) is an Africanist historian who was also reacting to Afrikaner history and its heroic mythology. He also based his study on the hunting and raiding economy in the Soutpansberg region, which led to a trade in child 'apprentices'.⁴ He claimed that in the early 1860's, for a complex set of reasons, the ability of the Northern Boer communities to secure ivory cheaply declined and this made the demand for labour in the regions to the south grow. According to Delius, changes in the hunting environment brought about a new system euphemistically called 'black ivory', which was really the trade of African children as 'apprentices' who were transported in baskets, carpets and wooden boxes to hide them from the eyes of the public. This trade effectively constituted a slave trade.

Delius draws on various primary written sources e.g. the account on how slave trade operated in the Soutpansberg from the diary of a German explorer and scientist, Karl Mauch in 1871. He wrote that:

As hunting for ivory was not so profitable these suggestions that children should be traded to the south were welcome and those who participated in the trade received compensation, which rose higher and higher in value. The profits to be

⁴ Delius argues that the so-called apprentices were really slaves.

made attracted speculators who secured a supply of children and with these started his journey to the southwest, Delius (p 37)

Delius is also pointing to the significant power of African chiefdoms by the late 19th century, as well as to the extent of the trekker's involvement in slave trade. He shows that there was mounting African resistance in the 'Northern Transvaal'. The evacuation of Schoemansdal in 1867 led to the demise of child trade in the Soutpansberg and other areas.

Johann Tempelhoff (1999), a historian commissioned by the Louis Trichardt Transitional Local Council (presently Makhado Municipality), to write the history of Soutpansberg from the early human settlement until today, argued that the Soutpansberg Mountains acted as a strategic gateway for travellers to the north or south. Tempelhoff is of the opinion that the Soutpansberg, most probably, was a site where people tended to congregate before negotiating their course to other regions. The Soutpansberg region is believed to have formed part of the mainstream of the Acheulian settlement, which extends in a hook formation from the lake areas of Central East Africa, down to the Cape and then in a northwesterly direction up to Angola. In many ways, Tempelhoff repeats the accounts given by other scholars. He provides evidence of early occupation of the Soutpansberg by people of the late Stone Age, who he argues had close links with the San (or Bushmen). Tempelhoff argues, like those before him that hunting in the Soutpansberg did not start with arrival of the voortrekkers.

Tempelhoff does give accounts of Soutpansberg in a more detailed way than appears in other texts. He records the transition in the settlement of Soutpansberg, which began with the Stone Age people through to the Khoisan, Khoi Khoi, VhaNgona (the early Proto-Venda residents) to the Singo (VhaSenzi), and later on the Voortrekkers. He claims that the Khoisan lived peacefully alongside the VhaNgona people until the arrival of the Singo. He further claims that the new residents of the area brought with them a magical drum, '*Ngomalungundu*'. According to Tempelhoff, the Khoisan moved away for fear of the sacred drum because they had heard what happen to Vhakalanga of Tshibi in Buluwayo.

Tempelhoff argues that most of the people started moving away from Soutpansberg in the 1700's. He asserts that before the Khoisan left the Soutpansberg, new settlers Khoi Khoi people (Hottentots) came to the area. According to Tempelhoff these people reared livestock and were also pastoralists. They had sheep, goats and cattle, which are still found in the region today. He also points out that agriculture was practised in the Soutpansberg. It is estimated in Tempelhoff (1999) that the early agriculturalists were residents in the area between the mountain and the Limpopo River as from about 200AD to 900AD. According to him, these people were related to the San people who lived in the Soutpansberg. Tempelhoff acknowledges that it is difficult to say how long the hunter-gathers and pastoralists predominated in the Soutpansberg region. He says that it is possible that they started losing control of the region by about early 18th century.

Tempelhoff also illustrates the last phase of the transition in the settlement of the Soutpansberg. He indicates that in the 1820s Soutpansberg saw the arrival of the Buys community led by Coenraad de Buys, who was a Dutch-speaking outcast from the Cape's eastern frontier, who had married a Xhosa woman. Although Tempelhoff is of the opinion that the Portuguese hunters and traders may have penetrated the area before the Buys community. In 1836 Soutpansberg experienced the arrival of another group of white settlers led by Louis Trichardt and Langhans Van Rensburg, but these settlers only stayed for eighteen months before they trekked to Delegoa Bay. Tempelhoff describes the last group to move to Soutpansberg in 1848 as the Hendrick Potgieter group, which founded the Soutpansbergdorp, which later changed its name to Schoemansdal after the death of Hendrick Potgieter.

I have noted that the authors discussed above, relied on written, archaeological sources and oral sources, to investigate the complexity of the area, and to attempt to track the interactions and rivalry among different societies in the Soutpansberg. There is a lack of clarity on many issues relating to the history of Soutpansberg. The written records of the history of Soutpansberg concentrated more on the history of the trekkers but very little was mentioned about Makhado, who drove them from the area. At present, the life of

Makhado is not even documented in the Schoemansdal Museum except for a picture exhibition of the man believed to be him. It is as if he is not an integral part of the history of the area. Many aspects of the Venda state in the 19th century are omitted from the museum. This brings us to the central problems, which will be investigated by the research report. Does the museum's representation conform to the romanticised Afrikaner history identified by Moodie, Thompson, Hofmeyr and others? Do surrounding communities reject it because they do not see their lives reflected there? Is it possible to make suggestions for how the museum could begin to strike up a dialogue with its neighbours, in the way that Karp and others visualize?

1.4. Methodology:

The research report has analysed the museum in the light of the literature available about Schoemansdal. As the literature review shows the history is long and has involved complex dynamics, including various kinds of interaction. The research report will not attempt to take on the history of the whole area or the history from the Stone Age. The literature will serve as a background and a reminder of the fact that there is a rich history of interaction.

Firstly, I examine the museum's presentation of the trekker site, relating it to sources, and the archaeological excavation, and will ascertain how much it does or does not reflect the Afrikaner perspective described in the literature review. Then I report on oral interviews conducted with a fairly random sample of people to find out how they respond to the museum, and how they would like to see it reflecting what they take to be their history. Due to the scope of this project, the sampling is random but has attempted some representativity. Questions were posed to find out whether or not respondents believed that the history on show at the museum does conform to the old apartheid ideology. Although the sample of interviews was not comprehensive or scientifically representative, it was intended to provide some suggestions for the way in which potential visitors to the museum think about the history of the area, and what their expectations of the museum are. I did bear in mind the question of whether or not there is

a difference in the responses from white Afrikaners and African language speakers who might identify themselves with various kinds of groupings or leaders. I was also conscious of thinking about whether there were political lines of differentiation aligned with contemporary chiefly politics. The answers to these questions must of course be suggestive rather than conclusive since the interview sample was small and not scientifically selected, as has been noted above.

To get a range of views, I interviewed some white Afrikaans speakers in Louis Trichardt; ⁵the Mphephu - Ramabulana royal people; members of the Makhado Municipality; Museum staff members, people in the Sinthumule area; Shangaan speakers; members of the Buys community (in Buysdorp); and historians and archaeologists, who have done excavations in the area. It proved not to be practical to extend the scope of my interviews as widely as I had originally intended within the scope of a research report.

Different questions were asked sometimes according to the particular informant e.g. I asked white Afrikaners the following questions: Does the museum give a good picture of trekkers' life? Do you think that any other people in the area should be given space in the museum? I asked Mphephu - Ramabulana royal people the following questions: Have you ever been to the museum, If not why not? If you have, what did you find interesting in the museum? What would you like to see in the museum? Archaeologists, historians and museum staff were asked the following questions: What was your intention when you set up the museum? Do you think people like the museum? Why and why not? What changes would you make?

In talking to people in the 'communities' the focus was on elderly people of the area, although I collected a few interviews with younger people to find out if they knew anything about the history of the area and if they were interested in the history presented in the museum at the moment. I asked old (50+) people the following questions: (1) Do you know anything about local history? (2) Do you have any comments on the museum?

⁵ The Mphephu – Ramabulana people are the descendents of the Makhado Ramabulana people who expelled the voortrekkers from Schoemansdal in 1856.

(3) Do you go to the museum? (4) Do you feel welcome when you visit the museum? (5) Do you feel connected to the history presented in the museum? (6) If the answer to the latter question is (NO) why? I also asked questions such as: why don't people go to the museum?

Finally, I analysed the answers from the people about the museum and reached tentative conclusions about the nature of the museum's representation as it is seen by various informants, and its current failure to attract greater visitor numbers.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1. Establishment of the Museum from Archaeological Site to the Museum

Archaeological work at Schoemansdal started before the founding of the museum in the early 1980s. According to Prof. Andries Meyer of the University of Pretoria (2003) excavation work at Schoemansdal started in the early 1980s with a group of students led by him. He acknowledged that their stay in the area was not long enough as it lasted only a week. He stressed that during their one week stay, they were able to find evidence that indicates the type of pioneer settlement in Schoemansdal. According to Prof. Meyer, after a week of excavation work, he and his team allowed Prof. Chris Kriel, who later on became the first curator of Schoemansdal museum to continue with the excavation work there.

According to Mr Netshivhodza (2003) who was part of the museum staff assisting with excavation, the team led by Prof. Chris Kriel found most of the artifacts excavated from the Schoemansdal town. These artifacts are exhibited in the museum Information Center. Artifacts excavated are in numerical order: (1) china bowls and plates, which the trekkers used; (2) handle of a chamberpot; (3) a medicine bowl assumed to be an important item in the home pharmacy; (4) the glass shards from a vast variety of objects such as liquor bottles; (5) numerous parts of harmonicas found indicating the residents' love of music; (6) shilling 1838; tickey 1840; tickey 1843; (7) cigarette pipes made of soapstone and ceramic; (8) rifle parts, which include a gun barrel, ramrod, bullet and flit; (9) detonators, buckshot and canon balls indicating the type of ammunition used; (10) lead, which was traded as ingots; (11) horseshoe, an indication of horse sickness in the region, (which limited the use of horses at Schoemansdal), and because the animals were extremely valuable they were shod; (12) buttons of metal and other materials that were used on clothing; (13) accessories including brooches and tiepins; buckles such as those used on

belts as well as harnesses; (14) enormous variety of beads indicating barter with the local population of the area; (15) iron hinges, which secured doors to the frames; (16) a copper handle that probably came off the drawer or door of a piece of furniture; (17) the ivory dominoes indicating that large quantities of ivory were exported and is the only indication of its local use; (18) lock secured valuables; (19) a watch mechanism; (20) a military insignia of unknown origin; (21) a considerable number of thimbles indicating that sewing was a popular pastime with the trekkers; (22) a stopper with trademark; (23) a pair of spectacles; (24) handles, which probably were part of a pair of scissors or tweezers, were found; (25) a knife handle and a knife that could have been used for different purposes by the trekkers.

According to Prof. Meyer, there were a number of archaeologists and amateur archaeologists who did some excavation work in Schoemansdal in the 1980s. One of those archaeologists who did excavation work in Schoemansdal was Lieutenant Sydney Miller. In his document for the National Monument Council, entitled *Die Grond Vertel* (The Ground Tells, 1993), he explains that he became involved in the Schoemansdal project in 1984 as part of an idea to map out a military terrain, which later on became an open-air museum. According to him the project was originally part of a Transvaal provincial museum exercise.

Sydney Miller was trained as a civil engineer, and was engaged in Schoemansdal as an amateur archaeologist with the University of Pretoria's Archaeology Department under the guidance of Prof Eloff. Miller acknowledges in his document that he was involved with excavation work in Schoemansdal for six years with a lot of other people, but he never mentions their names in the document. In the first chapter of his document he discusses the sources he worked with while he was excavating in Schoemansdal. He points out, however, that there are not a lot of written or visual sources for Schoemansdal, and that those sources that are available are biased and sometimes prone to exaggeration. Miller also acknowledges the fact that there is little oral evidence because the events are now far removed from the present. What Miller is trying to show with the above

argument is that it was not easy for archaeologists and historians to gather evidence about Schoemansdal.

During his stay in Schoemansdal, Miller relied on 'analogous' materials (e.g. sketches and descriptions of trekker towns or features of trekker towns like schools and churches that are better documented than those of Schoemansdal.) He holds the notion that archaeology could often fill in the gaps, and either confirm or suggest that theories collected from other sources were either unlikely or believable. Miller was in search of as complete a record as possible. He appears to have thought of the process as being like putting a puzzle together.

In the initial part of *Die Grond Vertel*, Miller comes up with a very interesting aspect of his findings in Schoemansdal. Here he points out that pre settler people had been cultivating bananas for a long time in Schoemansdal. But what is highlighted in the museum documentation is the pioneer's garden, and there is no mention of the pre settler people's involvement in agriculture. The findings by Miller dismiss the notion of pre settler people being wild, relying on wild fruits and animals for survival. Thus, the archaeological excavations in Schoemansdal were able to help bring out some hidden aspects of the Soutpansberg in the past which were not highlighted in the written sources or had been forgotten in the oral evidence gathered in the research. The question is how far are these 'forgotten' aspects reflected in the museum?

The history suggested by the archaeological evidence contradicts what is documented in the written sources about the pioneers and 'natives'. In most of the written sources the pre settler inhabitants were portrayed as people who were always fighting amongst themselves, especially over chiefly succession, suggesting an unstable and primitive society.

Miller also lists the diversity of game and flora (especially big trees) that used to be in the area. Here he remarks that there had been game and flora long prior to occupation of the area, before the pioneers arrived. He observes that flora and fauna long preceded

human habitation of Soutpansberg area whereas civilization ensured that in less than 150 years the ecology would never be the same again (Miller 1993; p24). Miller confirms that there is evidence of human habitation going back 100 000 years and a wealth of rock art. He points out in his document that the indigenous people of Soutpansberg region had worked out how to live in harmony with their environment and to conserve it. Here he is implying that the white settlers destroyed the natural environment. Here is a case in point where Miller's reading of the archaeological evidence makes him question the usually assumed benevolent impact of white settlement.

2.2. Involvement of the black people in Schoemansdal.

More ambivalence is revealed in Miller's account of the economy of Schoemansdal. He uses the subheading: 'The Black Factor' (*Die Swart Faktor*) to explain how the Venda people were involved in the life of the pioneers in the Soutpansberg. He indicates that whites had to rely on blacks for labour and tax but he failed to mention that the excavation team found an enormous variety of beads in Schoemansdal, which indicates the interaction of the trekkers and the local people. But he does suggest a history of interaction and of trading precedents set by black people. Miller draws much of his findings from the work of ¹van Warmelo who was one of the residents of Schoemansdal, to give the early history of the Venda. He cites the story of the sacred drum (*Ngomalungundu*) and their movements to the Soutpansberg. Miller discovered that the VhaVenda established themselves and assimilated various groups. Details about this are highlighted in the first chapter of this research paper. Miller stresses that they were able to built the large state- Dzata. He refers to the Venda succession struggles and notes the possibility that what we have in the written sources is the Singo version. He notes that the VhaVenda traded with the East Coast, and that the well known trader Albasini more than likely used the trade routes that had been well established by the black people before.

Miller subscribes to the idea that the first contact the Venda had in the Soutpansberg was with Coenraad de Buys and his sons early in the 1850s, and then they had contact with

¹ Van Warmelo was the minister in Schoemansdal during the time of the voortrekkers and it is alleged that he was a forefather of NJ Van Warmelo the ethnologist.

Trichardt who became involved in the Venda succession struggle supporting one of the rivals. Miller then goes along with a picture of the Soutpansberg in which whites allied with some Venda factions, and were not above initiating aggression. The archaeological excavation brought evidence about the Soutpansberg's history that challenged the conventional Afrikaner historiography, and was much closer to a Wagner-like account of the hunting frontier (see above in first chapter).

2.3 The Structure of the Soutpansberg Town

However, Miller is also influenced by the folk history of the Afrikaner school, associated with Preller, who collected Afrikaner oral histories in the early 20th century. Miller talks about the idea of starting the trekker towns in the Soutpansberg in the 18th century. According to him, the pioneers got their first ideas about the formation of the town from the people who already lived there. He acknowledges that there was an exchange of ideas between the pioneers and the native residents. He cites the hard reed houses (*hartebeeshuisies*) that were built first in the first phase of Schoemansdal as an example. But then, Miller argues that settlers wanted to distinguish themselves from the 'barbarians' so began to build other kinds of structures. Here one can see a tension between what emerges from the archaeological excavations and Miller's expectations of what the trekkers were like so that he wants to discount, to some extent, the contribution of Venda inspired architecture. In the museum there is no mention of Venda influence in the architectural planning of the pioneer town. In an interview with Miller (2006) he said he was the one who came with the idea of incorporating Venda history in the museum when he was the curator. He claimed that he was expelled by the authorities when they realised that he is coming with ideas different to what "Afrikaners" believe in.

An extremely detailed investigation was undertaken to determine the kind and colour of paint used by the Schoemansdal trekkers, as a way of providing the kind of colourful detail about 'our forefathers' that the Preller tradition would have approved. It was also supposed, perhaps, to make clear the distinction between the kinds of buildings trekkers

would have erected and those of the black people (that is supposedly not painted and 'primitive' structures).

In the document *Die Grond Vertel*, Miller himself talks about the pattern of the 'trekker town', in which he notes that, all 'trekker towns' were built on similar principles. He notes that they had wide streets for maneuvering wagons, were oriented towards the cardinal points of the compass, and were established near streams or rivers on fertile land. He also notes that the plots were measured and of a standard size and shape. Miller discovered that the pioneer houses were built in rows with church and market squares as the focal points, and with the towns administered by the local state. Miller stresses that many people in Schoemansdal actually lived on farms or were away hunting for long periods, and the houses in the towns were their townhouses that led to the population of the towns fluctuating. (Miller, 1993)

Here Miller is presenting Schoemansdal as a variation on the 'typical' trekker town. The portrayal presented above is meant to show that the trekkers lived a very organized life in the Soutpansberg before they were forced to evacuate the town by Makhado, which led to them leaving their possessions behind. But elements of his account do suggest a more complex picture than that which is presented in the standard Afrikaner historiographical narrative.

2.4 The Great Trek to the Soutpansberg.

Chapter three of *Die Grond Vertel* gives what Sydney Miller calls a 'Historical Overview'. Here he reviews the causes of the Great Trek to the Soutpansberg by the pioneers. He also points out that the trekkers were supplied with information about the Soutpansberg from hunters, missionaries and travelers who had been to the interior before they set off themselves. Interestingly he acknowledges the fact that the pioneers were a diverse group of people with different ideas, highlighting the reason for Andries Potgieter's group's motive for moving to the Northern Transvaal. According to Miller (following others) the main reason was probably to seek an alliance with the Portuguese

in East Africa. Ivory trade could have been one of the main reasons that lured Potgieter and his group to the Soutpansberg. Miller recalls that at first Potgieter and his people attempted to settle at Ohrigstad and this failed because of disease. As a result of their failure to settle in that area, 40 families went to the Soutpansberg to establish the town of Zoutpansberg (later Schoemansdal). Miller concludes this section by reflecting that the 'indigenous people' such as the Tswana, the Shangaans, the Matebele and the Venda and nature in the form of the dry Botswana, tsetsefly and malaria, as well as the limited number of pioneers set the boundaries of the 'game board' for the present.

Miller says that the 'symbolic' ending of the Great Trek came in 1848 when Potgieter's group settled the Soutpansberg, which was the last part of South Africa that would be added to the trekker republics. In this section Miller relies on historical accounts with little archaeological evidence to back his argument. Obviously here he desires to locate Soutpansberg within the Great Trek narrative, and particularly that part of it which stresses the pioneers' battle with a hostile environment composed of both natural and human elements. In this way, he is taking a standard Afrikaner historiographical position.

2.5 Findings of the excavation work in Schoemansdal.

Miller points out that in Schoemansdal the wagons formed a laager and a '*skan*' (type of fortification) was built next to the river. Here he cites Munnik who said that the laager was drawn up 'against kaffirs and lions'. He also stressed that the '*scans* were never used because at that stage relationships with the Venda were good. Then a second more elaborate '*skans*' was built and Miller goes into a lot of detail in the document *Die Grond Vertel* which gives us an interesting insight into the way in which Miller believes the patterns of the 20th century were set by what happened in the 19th century.

Miller goes into detail to elaborate the different functions of the '*scans*'. He stresses that it had a floor of baked bricks, and observes that thousands of rixdollars from hunting and trade passed through Schoemansdal in its heyday. He argues that it is probable that valuable items (including animal skins) were stored in the '*skans*', as well as explosives

and bullets were probably made there. These archaeological revelations suggest crucial aspects of Schoemansdal's economic base, and reinforce the idea that the town was part of a hunting and trading network (see chapter one), not just an isolated 'trekker' town.

Miller also emphasized that the *skans* was a fortification with two bastions and holes in the walls for guns to point through and a platform for a canon. (Miller 1993; p.234). Miller points out that it appears that in the last two years of Schoemansdal's existence people lived inside the *skans*. This probably suggests the residents' fear of attacks from their Venda neighbours, which corroborates the information in the written sources with regard to the attacks on the pioneers by the Venda state.

The influence of 'Afrikaner history' on Miller's interpretation is apparent when he says that the '*skans*' was a symbolic laager, and he also notes that the 'interdependency of the pioneers as family units within a trekker existence' was coming to an end. Sentimentally, he argues that the era, which lay ahead 'was that of modern weapons and mobile warfare' where men fought apart from women, mostly against other white people. The laager time was past and an important 'Boer' institution became obsolete. This interpretation tells a story of the pioneers fighting for survival under siege from the rampage led by Makhado from Tshirululuni.

The document *Die Grond Vertel* also pays a lot of attention to other buildings and institutions such as the Magistrate's Court building in Schoemansdal. Miller notes that a lot of official correspondence passed between Schoemansdal and Potchefstroom, probably to stress that there was unity between trekker groups and a sophisticated system of administration. His idea of what the court may have looked like also comes from knowledge of other contemporary courts in the country. He discusses whether or not there was a jail in Schoemansdal dismissing it as unlikely. This notion is supported by the written sources and oral sources in the sense that there was no mention of prisoners being kept in Schoemansdal. But according to Miller the court was very important to the constitutional development of the Transvaal (Miller 1993; p239). He points out that it was where important decisions were made about the community and its architecture

would have reflected the economic strength of the particular town in which it was located. Miller is attempting to show though that the institutional buildings in Schoemansdal that the town conformed to European 'norms'. The findings of Miller are probably intended to show that the whites at Schoemansdal were governed according the rule of law. It implies that the pioneers were organized people while the 'natives' were barbaric and a law unto themselves.

Miller also talks about the school in Schoemansdal. Here he notes that the building was only put up in the last six years of the existence of Schoemansdal and he realized that it was on the church property. He however admitted that it was difficult to determine the exact location of the school. Again, we note the way in which Miller tries to build up a picture of the 'typical' trekker town. He muses about the trekkers' lack of education, arguing that they did not really have a need of education beyond basic literacy and numeracy. He also argues that while they were on the move it was difficult to set up schools and that teachers were not readily available. Miller emphasizes the trekkers' lack of formal education. His argument on this facet of trekker life seems to be very defensive as he makes several 'excuses' for the deficiencies in formal education.

Miller also talks about the shops in Schoemansdal; the sources of this information are a drawing by one of the shopkeepers in Schoemansdal, Mare, and information which was found in the letters of Mrs Josina van Warmelo (the minister's spouse). Miller has been able to determine that there were important traders in Schoemansdal such as Mare, Cassimir, Simooeens and others (Miller 1993; p.264). This tells us about the strength of Schoemansdal's economy, as was also highlighted in some of the written sources about Schoemansdal. It was pointed out in Miller's document that Schoemansdal was obviously an important trading place for Pietermaritzburg and Grahamstown. According to Miller these people thought it worth their while to transport trade goods to Schoemansdal.

What Miller fails to highlight in his document is the involvement of Venda, Shaangan, Tswana and others in the booming trade of Schoemansdal as was indicated in the written sources (see chapter one).

Miller talks about the strong Christian belief of the pioneers in the 19th century in general and the lengths they went to have religious services e.g. through the *nagmaal*, which fits with the conventional picture of the God-fearing trekkers. According to him, before the church was built in Schoemansdal the pioneers held regular church services in *Kommandant Generaal Potgieter's* house. Miller talks about working with Grobler's map of Schoemansdal to find out the location of the church that was built and the '*pastorie*' (where the minister lived). Miller established that the decision to build a church was taken in 1853 from the minutes of the *Volksraad*. He also draws on the description of the church from Montanha (but he indicates that he has found Montanha a bit unreliable). He also cites other sources, Naude and Engelbrecht, who give a description of the church.

According to Miller the most reliable information about the church comes from the minister himself, which is van Warmelo, who wrote letters to his family back in the Netherlands. Miller points out that van Warmelo also sent his family a drawing by someone else to show what the church and *pastorie* were like. Miller argued that van Warmelo must have thought the drawing was accurate if he sent it to his family in the Netherlands. According to Miller the type of a church we are talking about here was a *Nederduits Hervormde* Church. He therefore has to acknowledge that there were other Christian groups in Schoemansdal e.g. the *Gereformeerdes*. He points out that the other Christians also wanted to build a church, *pastorie* and school but nothing came of this as Schoemansdal was evacuated in 1867. There was no mention of the ministers who were involved with other Christians as the only known minister of Schoemansdal was van Warmelo. Divisions among Christians are glossed over, as are any suggestions that the trekkers may have behaved in unchristian ways. This document fails to shed light on the possibility of black people having been exposed to Christianity by the time the religion reached the Soutpansberg.

Miller also notes that there are rich mineral resources in the Soutpansberg, which the pioneers knew about, he says, but chose not to exploit. He cites copper, iron etc. as the examples of what he is talking about. For the record, it is true that the Soutpansberg is

rich in minerals as it is evident with copper mining in Musina and coal mining at Tshikondeni and Mudimeli. Miller confirmed that 'indigenous people' worked on metals and made iron into hoes for example and that the pioneers collected these items as tax, and they were traded in Schoemansdal. It does not seem to be true that the pioneers chose to ignore the existence of minerals since there is this evidence that they collected metals and iron hoes as tax from the neighbouring people, which also suggest a complex relationship between people in the area.

Miller also discovered that the people who lived in the area before Trichardt's arrival in the Soutpansberg used the saltpan. He stresses the fact that the Buys community was in the salt trade and delivered salt to the pioneers at Schoemansdal. He also assumes that the Lishivha people in the Sandrivierpoort were involved in the salt trade. This might suggest that, at first, the communities of the Soutpansberg lived in harmony with each other. There were no restrictions placed on people from neighbouring groupings visiting Schoemansdal, either as traders or as workers. It may be that the salt trade played a crucial part in forging non-hostile relationships amongst the people of the Soutpansberg. Both sides could have benefited through trade. There is no detailed information in Miller's document as to what kind of benefit the black traders got from the salt trade, as his focus is essentially on the trekkers.

Miller does point out that there is evidence of interaction between black people and the pioneers in the form of Schoemansdal porcelain among the ruins of black settlements on top of the Soutpansberg Mountain, which could serve as evidence of the benefit that was derived from the salt trade. The salt trade still exists in *Dzwaini* in the Soutpansberg but now it is traded for money although sometimes people trade salt for bottles of coldrinks, and it is controlled by whites. The trade no longer exists in Schoemansdal itself as it stopped after the evacuation in 1867. Schoemansdal is now only an open-air museum, and the museum does not demonstrate the existence of the salt trade in the area in the past and its role in economic development.

Miller often remarks that the report in the document *Die Grond Vertel* is the product of teamwork. He describes it as the result of years of exchange of thoughts between a number of researchers and stakeholders. He also points out that the work in the document that gives an interpretation of the site is a team effort. It is important to note that most of the researchers who worked in Schoemansdal work as a group. This was also emphasized by Prof. Meyer of the University of Pretoria, Archaeology Department who said there were a number of archaeologists who were involved with work in Schoemansdal in the 1980s (see above). Perhaps this accounts for some of the discontinuities and tensions mentioned above.

The document *Die Grond Vertel* makes several points about the nature of the pioneers' life style with Miller noting that 'simplicity and functionality' were the chief characteristics of the pioneer life style. He also stresses that this is not to say that pioneers were not aware of the value of literature, art and architecture, but they had little time or space for these things. Miller points out that he and other team members imagine that the interior of the church, for example, was simple. He says that it is impossible to recreate the 'real interior' of the church with its colourful personalities, the singing and the message of the sermons. The point Miller seems to be making here is that the pioneers' level of civilization would have been revealed in their social interactions and religious rituals, not necessarily in highly crafted artifacts.

There is also a lot of detail on the archaeological excavations and research conducted into Schoemansdal's various irrigation systems. This was found in the memoirs of Andries Potgieter's son. It is believed that two consecutive irrigation systems were constructed. According to Miller this shows that the pioneers had the knowledge to create a system for irrigation notwithstanding many other mistakes that may be attributed to them (Miller 1993; p.90). The irrigation system shows that the pioneers were skilled in agriculture and that they were people who relied on the products from their garden.

But the archaeologists also discovered the remains of tobacco pipes, some were found out made of soapstone. It is thought that tobacco was used for smoking but it was also used to

curry favour with the pioneers' neighbours. It is possible that the pioneers might have given them tobacco pipes in exchange for salt from them. Miller is delighted to find that the pipes conform to Preller's descriptions of trekker pipes. There is also a lot of evidence on the outside ovens, where pioneers prepared their daily food and they used these ovens for making bread. This is highlighted in the museum today where outside ovens are visible. The museum, as will be highlighted in detail in Chapter Three, demonstrates the art of making bread. The point here is to recreate the 'simple, homely' life of the pioneers, which is at the heart of the mythology of the trekker, especially as it was built up by Preller.

Prof. Hanisch of the University of Venda (2002) has indicated that part of the archaeological excavations was intended to find out the type of animals that existed in Schoemansdal during the time of the pioneers. He says that he was never part of the excavation team in Schoemansdal, and mentioned people like Chris van Vuuren of the University of South Africa and Sydney Miller amongst others as those who were more involved. Evidence concerning livestock provided by Prof. Hanisch became important in the formation of the Schoemansdal museum. The livestock forms part of the museum exhibition today, and reinforces the image of the pioneers as innocent pastoralists. The ivory trade seems to be absent. So it seems that the authors of the museum (and Miller to some extent) want to create a rustic, charming past for the joy of today's city dweller.

It is quite interesting to note, as we will see in more detail below, that *Die Grond Vertel* is not just a straightforward 'Afrikaner' history. There are points where it departs from the accepted narrative. The document is critical of the trekkers in some ways, and it does not paint them in a totally flattering light. They are shown to have been destructive of the natural environment. They are also mentioned as being at the centre of hunting-trading network. But it does not present their interaction with black people fully, especially in this case, the neighbouring Venda. This is highlighted by Trichardt's involvement in the Venda state's domestic matters, and the trade that took place at Schoemansdal which involved the Venda and other people.

It is interesting to note that the document touches on the conflicts between the trekkers themselves at Ohrigstad. Here Miller cited the conflict between Potgieter and Andries Pretorius. These white on white conflicts could have been the reason for the formation of Schoemansdal. But the museum does not talk about factors that led to the establishment of Schoemansdal as a town. At this point, it may be noted that some of the more critical points made in Miller's document are not reflected in the Museum.

It was pointed out in *Die Grond Vertel* that the pioneers lived a besieged life in the last two years of the existence of Schoemansdal. This was the time of Makhado Ramabulana whose army used the guns from the pioneers to attack them. Miller notes that aggression often came from the trekkers' side. Conflicts caused the initial friendship between the pioneers and their Venda neighbours to deteriorate, and this eventually led to the evacuation of Schoemansdal by the pioneers.

But, in other ways, Miller does write in the Preller tradition. As has been noted above, for example, Miller seems quite pleased to confirm details about the pipes resembling those described in sources collected by Preller. The document still does put the essential history of the Venda in a section called the 'Black Factor' rather than as part of the general history of the area. The reason for this could be that there was doubt in Miller's mind as to how to portray blacks as an integral part of the history of the Soutpansberg.

The document shows that Miller still has a tendency to defend the trekkers. He achieves this for example by pointing out how strong their Christian beliefs were (see above), ignoring the evidence that suggests that at least some of the pioneers drank heavily. Fragments of glass from whisky bottles were found by another archaeologist who excavated in Schoemansdal (the excavation cabinet display in the museum shows this). Miller was also defensive, as we have seen above, when he was dealing with the education factor, going into detail to give reasons for the pioneers' educational standard being low.

In conclusion: Miller's report tries to present 'objective' archaeological evidence combined with other kinds of evidence to portray Schoemansdal 'as it really was'. Miller explains that his title, '*Die Grond Vertel*' was intended to give the message that the truth would be found in the earth – the evidence would speak for itself. He describes this as a response to the hostility of the Museums' sponsors to alternative versions of the trekker history. The reader has to see Miller attempting to defend himself from their increasing disapproval of his deductions. But he acknowledges later that in many cases the evidence is partial. More investigation is required to establish the relationship of the representations in the Museum to Miller's document.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1. Analysis of Schoemansdal Museum - Afrikaner Perspective

In this chapter I will describe the layout, exhibits and the guided tours available at the Schoemansdal open-air museum. I will attempt to probe some of the intentions behind its establishment by looking at the historical origins of the museum project, and by referring back to the account of the archaeological work and other research undertaken. I will then assess the relationship between Afrikaner nationalism (including Afrikaner historiography) and the museum project.

3.1.1. Origins of the Museum Project

The Schoemansdal museum was started with the main objectives of commemorating the voortrekkers' life and times in Schoemansdal in the 19th century. The idea of starting a museum came during the time of the old Transvaal Provincial Administration (TPA). In 1979 there were indications of external support for a museum project related to the old Voortrekker town of Schoemansdal. It was during that same period that Clr. P.C.J Spoelstra of the Louis Trichardt town council indicated to the Management Committee that the TPA was aware of the fact that Schoemansdal was the only site of a Voortrekker town in Transvaal, which needed restoration. The museum was founded after the local Afrikaner community took the initiative to collect funds amongst themselves after external support did not come to their aid. Eventually, on 24 October 1985 a special fundraising campaign was started to collect money for the development of the Schoemansdal site (Tempelhoff, 1999). Schoemansdal had been declared a National Monument in 1973.

The function to donate money of the museum project was held at the Ferdie Beyers Hall, the Directorate of Library Services, Clr Daan Nel, made donations on behalf of the Soutpansbergse Afrikaanse Sakekamer and the Republiekfeeskomitee. A visit to

Schoemansdal in 1986 led to the collection of R2010, 00 amongst the Sakekamer members as a donation to the Schoemansdal museum. As the project started to become a reality, external support started to increase. The Department of Defence's Intelligence Department, Ethnology Division started conducting research in December 1984. One hectare was allocated to them for their research purposes. By 1986 archaeologists, Lt.Sydney Miller and Mr. Maritz Naude were busy in the area with excavation work to find out about the life style of the voortrekkers. Prof. Eloff of the University of Pretoria and Prof. Chris Kriel supervised these two men for the project in Schoemansdal. Soon academic support from outside came in the form of the University of Pretoria. In April 1986 a group of students from the University Department of Archaeology were active on excavations at Schoemansdal. According to Prof. Meyer (2003) their work was not complete enough for them to tell their findings. The museum started exclusively as an Afrikaner museum with little presentation on the Venda, Buys and the Shangaan histories and cultures. This was due to the fact that the museum was started by the Afrikaner community to reconnect with their lost history. This is indicated by their annual gathering at Schoemansdal to celebrate the Boer victory over Dingane at the battle of Blood River and to give their respect to the pioneers buried in Schoemansdal such as the Voortrekker leader Andries Hendriek Potgieter.

Schoemansdal is a reconstruction based on archaeological hypothesis and other forms of scientific deduction, which was focused on recapturing the architecture and atmosphere of a trekker town. (and see previous chapter)

3.1.2. Schoemansdal as Monument

Schoemansdal is an exceptional case in that it is not a monument in the conventional sense as is the Voortrekker monument in Pretoria, which is big, imposing and like a temple. The Voortrekkers are depicted in epic terms as courageous and the Zulu as ferocious savages on the monument's marble historical frieze. The son of the Voortrekker leader Piet Uys, Dirkie Uys who shot two Zulus allegedly in defense of his father who had been struck from his horse during an attack by the Zulus, is shown. The centre piece

of the monument is Piet Retief's 'tomb'. Retief and his men, as is well known, were killed when they went allegedly to sign a treaty with Dingane at his kraal, and the Voortrekker Monument presents Retief as a patriotic martyr.

Delmont and others have shown in their work on the Voortrekker Monument that it was a product of a campaign to construct, foster and mobilize Afrikaner identity that began in the 1930's. Etherington is quoted in Delmont arguing that the myth of the Trekker as 'a child of the South African wilderness answers the challenge of black African nationalism with a white nationalism which claims to be equally African (Delmont 1993). According to Etherington, the monument was erected to legitimize the 'Afrikaner' claim to land. Many scholars have noted that presentations of 'Afrikaner' history make the point that the trekkers' journeys and subsequent battles, and their foundation of independent states were sanctioned by God.

It is quite ironic that the designer of the Voortrekker Monument, Moerdijk modeled the monument around heritage landscape in Africa like the pyramids of Egypt and the Zimbabwe ruins yet its roots is embedded in Europe and Asia. It was clear when he compares the Voortrekker Monument to buildings from India, China, Asia manor and Europe, this implies that the Afrikaaner culture also take its place amongst so-called great civilizations. Delmont argues that by invoking of buildings from the past it was a suggestion that like them the physical structure of the monument will survive for centuries and the culture and values it embodies will be remembered and recorded.

Delmont further argues that for Moerdijk to compare the monument with other buildings from past civilizations there is the intimation that like them, the Voortrekkers have a long established history. Here the myth of nationhood is subtly communicated by this reference to the past building.

As the previous chapter has argued, the report on which the museum is based reveals how the archaeologists chose to interpret what they found and they read what they found

predominantly in the light of the dominant paradigm of Afrikaner history.¹ They were particularly influenced by the Preller tradition of trying to uncover the everyday life of the trekkers. This concept had been employed to build a strong united Afrikaner nation (Hofmeyr). But for many outsiders the museum appears to lack authenticity. Miller's report, as I have argued above, focused on recovering the trekker town and although Miller felt uncomfortable about it, this relegated other people who did not live in the town to the margins even though they were central to the economy and survival in general of Schoemansdal. Miller is quite clear in his report (drawing on what some of the historians have written) that the trekkers interacted with people around them to ensure their relatively shortlived survival at Schoemansdal. But this probably does not come across in the final version of the museum except that the reconstruction of the fortification suggests the threat from the Venda, which only really pertained in the last couple of years of the settlement, and the trekkers' aggression is not explained.

3.1.3 Visit to the Site (Tour and Exhibitions)

On a visit to the museum one has to go through the private security guard stationed at the main gate just on the side of the road to Buysdorp and Vivo. Here visitors are requested to sign the visitors' book and to mark the time of their arrival at the museum. After signing the visitors' book then it takes 2 to 3 km to another museum entrance where there are a small security office and a huge cream white wall with 'Schoemansdal Museum' inscribed on the brown board in white big letters (Fig. 1.). Then the security guard will lead the visitor to the Information Center (Fig. 2.), that is 5 minutes walk from this entrance. On the inside the security guard will send the visitor to the small enquiries office that is operated by Mr. Marcus Netshivhodza who is an employee of the museum.

Mr Netshivhodza will lead the visitor on a tour around the museum; which starts at the Venda *rondavel* house (Fig. 3.). The house is built of mud and poles and is thatched. Inside the house there are Venda artifacts such as reed mats hanging on the roof, pottery

¹ Gustav Preller's writings in the 1920s influenced the way trekker history was told. For example (1) *Piet Retief: Lewensgeskiedenis van die groot Voortrekker* (2) *Andries Pretorius* (3) *Sketse en Opstelle*

and other things. Mr Netshivhodza (2003), explained that the reason for having this Venda house was motivated by the idea of showing that the Venda were partly involved in the daily life of Schoemansdal. The next stop will be at the pioneer houses of different shapes that dominate this set up (Fig. 4 – 6.). Here the tour will start at the hard reed house which was the first house built by the pioneers. Then the visit will extend to other houses, the pole house, which is alleged to be the second model of the pioneer housing. Visitors will also be led to the A-framed house, which was the last type of housing built in Schoemansdal by the pioneers. Inside these A-framed houses there is furniture that, according to Mr. Netshivhodza, depicts the type of furniture used by the pioneers in Schoemansdal in the 19th century. On one of the stands with the A-framed house there is a garage with the ox-wagon (Fig. 7.), constructed of hard reed. The journey will also lead to the hunting house that was used by hunters who came from other areas outside Schoemansdal.

The museum guide will also lead visitors to a place where pioneers ground their wheat and after this journey visitors will go and view the pioneers' livestock kraals and the garden. According to Mr. Netshivhodza, the pioneers had cattle and goats. He told me that the museum still keeps the tradition of this livestock. In the garden (Fig. 8.), Mr Netshivhodza said that they planted all the trees in the garden to depict what the pioneer garden looked like. Inside this garden there are peach trees and spice bushes. According to Mr. Netshivhodza peach was used for making wine/jam and medicine. He said spice where used for cooking and medicine. The museum also has a pumpkin and maize garden which also forms part of the pioneers' garden. Mr. Netshivhodza told me that the museum is not growing wheat as the pioneers' did for making bread. However he indicated that they still demonstrate bread making and the woman employed by the museum do this. It is ironic to see that the same people who were not allowed inside the museum are helping to bring the trekkers' life back to the eyes of people.

From the garden the tour goes to the outside oven (Fig. 9.), for baking bread and cooking and next to this oven the visitor will see a small pioneer's kitchen with pots and artifacts similar to those of black people. Here I am referring to the wooden maize and peanuts

grinding artifact (Mutuli). According to Mr. Netshivhodza, the museum reconstructs the dwellings from time to time especially the thatched roofing. These dwellings look like the original artifacts to the eyes of the visitor even though they are not.

The tour departs from the reconstruction of the old pioneer town to the archaeological town. In this latter town there is nothing visible except the street line that indicates how organized this town was compared to the first one that was built on the site. This site can be viewed from a long stage set up close to the information center. A visit to this place is supposed to be supervised at all times by museum staff members. The last stop before returning to the Information Center is at the pioneers' graves. A cement wall surrounds these graves and entry has to be supervised. There is a monument badge outside these graves to show that Schoemansdal is regarded as a monument (Fig.10.). Inside the graveyard there are two conspicuous graves with tombstones. These belong to the voortrekker leader Andries Hendriek Potgieter and Josina van Warmelo who was the wife of the pastor. It is not clear if these tombstones were erected on these graves to honour these two as well as other respected people of Schoemansdal who died in that time. According to Mr Ralidzhivha from Sinthumule area (2002), which is adjacent to Schoemansdal, every 16th of December Afrikaners gather at these graves and they have assaulted Africans who came near Schoemansdal on this day. We are not sure whether these allegations are true or not but they suggest perceptions of how local Afrikaners react when "outsiders" come to the site. The graves are very important to the way in which the memory of the war was maintained, and note how influential the anniversary of Blood River has been on the way in which trekker history is maintained in the North, Hofmeyr (1993).

The tour leads back to the Information Centre where the visitor will view the exhibition under the supervision of the museum staff. This is one area of the museum that sees it moving out of the so-called Afrikaner museum to a more integrative museum of the community of Soutpansberg. Some of the exhibitions in the museum's Information Center seem to be a new addition. Here I am referring to the Venda, Shangaan and Tsonga exhibition. I argue that this represents an attempt by the museum to realign itself

with the new South Africa, by moving away from a very one-sided history presentation to a more integrative history. However the picture exhibition is still flooded with pictures of the Voortrekkers and there is little about the other communities of the Soutpansberg.

There is, for example, a picture of a voortrekker man and woman wearing the clothes that resemble what the pioneers were wearing in the 19th century. There are also pictures of the Voortrekkers' leaders. There is an ox-wagon displayed inside and furniture that is assumed to depict that used by the trekkers. The Information Centre has information inscribed on the wall to tell people what prompted the idea of forming the museum. This information reads as follows:

The idea of an open air-museum originated shortly after the Schoemansdal Museum was established in 1985. Several aspects of the area's history have since been examined. No visible evidence of the original settlement remains with the exception of the earthen redoubt. There is uncertainty about the actual size and appearance of the town. By constructing a pioneer settlement, the museum recreated the typical architecture of the period from 1848 to 1852. The indigenous cultures related to Schoemansdal are also portrayed.

This information supports the argument of this report, particularly in the previous chapter, pointing out that the focus of the research was to recover an ideal trekker town (little is really known about this one). The rest of the history of the area is described- not as history- but as indigenous culture related to (that is not integral to) Schoemansdal. The incorporation of the 'indigenous cultures' was to try and make the museum a multi cultural institution, which it is not. According to Mr. Netshivhodza (2003), the museum added the exhibition of the pictures depicting the 'indigenous people' after realizing that many visitors would not relate to the Voortrekkers' culture in the museum. He further argued that 'indigenous people' still feel that their culture is not well represented in the museum.

3.1.3.1. Venda Exhibition

The visitor is led to the Venda exhibition of pictures depicting the ‘culture’ of this people. But here there is not much on display of real Venda artifacts except a glass cabinet with a Venda drum, which is used during music festivals. In the same cabinet there is a wooden object that is known as a *Tshikubo* and it is used for the preparation of clay floors and there is *Tshele*, a rattle with a calabash filled with seeds to emphasize that rhythm is used in music. There is also *Mvuvhelwana*, a pot used for serving beer in the Venda family (Fig. 11.). Except for this cabinet exhibition, the rest of the Venda exhibition consists of pictures. Here we have a picture of a wooden bowl used during meals, known as *Ndilo* in Venda and there is a picture exhibition of *Sambelo*, a bath that a man used to wash himself. Still in the Venda exhibition there is a picture of *Khali ya madi*, a pot for storing water and a picture of a calabash container for medicine. There is a picture of the neck bench, which is used as a ‘pillow’ when sleeping, and a picture of a gourd and ladle for scooping *marula* beer, *Khavho*.

The museum also displays a picture of *Khamela*, (milk bucket) which it is alleged belongs to the Mphephu. There is also on display a picture of *Mufuvha* game, which the museum alleges that the Venda got from Zimbabwe where they come from. The museum also displays a picture of a small drum, which is alleged to be the sacred drum *Ngomalungundu*, This is a very serious allegation, as it is not known whether the original drum still exists. It would be interesting to establish from the museum where they found the drum but at the moment they cannot give evidence of the origin of the drum. This indicates a lack of seriousness on the museum’s part for establishing the *provenance* or authenticity of the artifact, and contrasts with the effort that has been made around the reconstruction of the voortrekkers’ lives. Another picture is that of Venda girls performing the snake dance, *Domba* and there is a picture of Makhado the Venda chief and his wife, a daughter of the Ndebele chief (Fig. 12.). This picture gives us a clue that cross-cultural marriages took place a long time ago in Soutpansberg, and suggests that the ethnic break-down of the exhibitions is one that has been imposed retrospectively. Lastly there is a picture of a Lemba man and a brief history.

Thus, we see that, whereas the reconstruction of the trekker town is based on a detailed investigative report, which makes its sources and hypotheses explicit, the *provenance* of the Venda artifacts is quite often absent. The result is that the visitor is left with a picture of the trekker town as a social body, centered on institutions such as the church and court, whereas the ‘Venda’ are represented by a series of objects seemingly of curiosity value.

3.1.3.2. The Tsonga Exhibition

In this exhibition the museum also has a few pictures depicting the ‘culture’ of the Tsonga people. Here there is a picture of a Tsonga woman wearing a typical Tsonga dress. Alongside this picture is a recent picture of a Tsonga woman making pottery. The exhibition is ahistorical and deals with ‘types’ rather than individuals. It is difficult to tell if the Tsonga learned this trade from the Venda who also learned the trade from the Lemba. The museum also tries to show that Tsonga had their own musical instruments; a picture of a Tsonga musician playing a *Xipendana*, a traditional stringed instrument depicts this. But, this type of instrument is also used by the Venda - they call it *Tshitiringo*. The exhibition reinforces strict ethnic categorization. There is also a picture of a Tsonga traditional healer with his set of divination bones and a picture of the depiction of a fencing material being made. The remarks made with reference to the Venda exhibition above are pertinent to this one too. Note, particularly, in the description above, the careless conflation of the past and present, which could leave the visitor with the sense that African cultures are timeless and never change or develop.

3.1.3.3. The Buys Exhibition

This exhibition is based on recent pictures of Buysdorp, and the museum shows a picture of Michael Buys, who is one of the Buys leaders. There are pictures of a shop, post office and a picture of some of the houses in Buysdorp. It seems here that the museum did not get enough artifacts of the Buys people to distinguish them from Afrikaners. This is a challenging area since the Buys people are the descendants of Dutch-speaking Coenraad

de Buys who was regarded as the first ‘white’ pioneer to settle in Schoemansdal, and a Xhosa woman. The history of Buysdorp is one of miscegenation, which may have been hard for the curators to deal with. Here it is obvious that the museum’s assumptions about ‘cultures’ as separate and distinct entities are not sustainable.

3.1.3.4. Other Exhibitions in the Information Center

The last exhibition stop for the visitor is the exhibition of pictures of artifacts of the late Stone Age. In this exhibition there are pictures of artifacts of Mapungubwe and there is also a display of the pottery of Mapungubwe and other artifacts recovered from Mapungubwe. There is a picture of the Vivo saltpan, which was taken a long time ago in the 19th century, and a picture of people smelting iron in Tshimbupfe, (this picture was also taken in the 19th century). The museum also exhibits artifacts excavated in the Schoemansdal town in glass cabinets. In these artifacts there is a bead, which according to Mr. Netshivhodza resembles the one archaeologists found at Tshiendeulu. This issue of the artifacts found during excavation will be dealt with in another chapter in detail (artifacts excavated in town). Once again, artifacts are exhibited in isolation, without suggesting how they were located within an extensive trade network. The daily tour of the museum ends at the Information Center and visitors go back to where they come from.

3.1.4. Conclusion

The museum was clearly established to ‘reconnect’ local Afrikaners with their highly mythologised ‘history’ The idealized trekker town takes centre stage, with colourful artifacts from other ‘cultures’ added in haphazardly. How does the visitor feel at the end of the day long tour of the museum? Does it bring the trekker town back to life? What impressions of people besides the trekkers are left in the visitor’s mind? We proceed to the next chapter to suggest some answers to these questions.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1. Schoemansdal Museum visitors

As I have shown thus far, the museum deliberately targeted white Afrikaner visitors through its presentation of history and as a site for Blood River commemorations from which 'non-Afrikaners' seem to have been forcefully excluded. Although many white Afrikaners patronised the museum, few black visitors came, even after apartheid was relaxed. In 1989 things changed when Afrikaners, Venda, Shangaan and the Buys community attended the December 16 event now known as the 'Day of Reconciliation'. The event has nothing to do with Venda and Shangaan groups, but in a spirit of reconciliation both parties shook hands to mark the new beginning in the history of Schoemansdal. The Venda women were dressed in their traditional dress. It was the first time in the history of Schoemansdal that it had hosted a 'cross-cultural' gathering, as in the years gone by the event was exclusively an Afrikaner affair with any daring soul being met with Afrikaner anger. In the years before the Afrikaners visited the museum frequently but now it is open to all visitors of different cultural and historical affiliations. Has the spirit of reconciliation endured?

Some of the visitors come to the museum for research purposes amongst them there were the students from the Archaeology Department of the University of Pretoria who visited the museum to do some excavation work in April 1986 with Prof. A Meyer. This group came for only one week and according to Prof Meyer (2003). The museum has seen many other scholars visiting in the years gone by. Recently the museum welcomed a visit by a group of students from Switzerland who toured the museum as part of their research work. The post 1994 period has seen the museum changing its focus from a group of visitors who were predominantly Afrikaans speaking people to all people who are interested in a visit to the museum.

There are various types of visitors to the museum at the moment (2002/3), students who go there for research purposes and academics. These groups include both local and international scholars. There is also a group that visits the museum to hold conferences and then there are visitors who go there for leisure. The last two groups view the exhibition in the museum Information Center and take the tour around the museum village. Local primary and high school pupils visit the museum as part of their educational programme.

It is important to note that most of the local schools also visit the museum to hold their end of the year school functions. These functions are hosted at the museum park where there are *braai* stands. It appears that most schools pupils are more interested in visiting the museum for leisure rather than for educational purposes (chapter five of this research confirms this). The museum allows visitors during the week as there was no security helping in Schoemansdal and no tours are permitted on weekends.

Bookings for the tour of the museum are made at the museum office in Louis Trichardt in person or telephonically during office hours. The museum does not allow visitors who do not book in advance. In 2000 when I was doing my internship the number of visitors was low. The visitors' rate was one family or two per day, but now that the schools are aware of the existence of the museum the numbers have improved. The most disappointing aspect of the visitors to the museum is that a high proportion of visitors are from the Soutpansberg. I have noted that people from other provinces or outside the Soutpansberg are not regular visitors to the museum. This is attributed to the presentation offered by the museum and lack of proper marketing. Schoemansdal I would argue is potentially a very good place where people could engage with the past.

The museum has not received many international tourists; the reason for this may be attributed to the fact that the museum is not known to the world. Visits by international tourists to the Soutpansberg saw a number of them going to Dzata, Mapungubwe, Lake Fundudzi and other areas that have been well marketed to the outside world. I would cite a visit this year to the museum by a group of Swiss scholars.

I will argue that the reason for the change in museum visitor numbers presently compared to the pre- 1994 years has got to do with a change in the direction, which the museum is taking now, compared with what it was focusing on before 1994. I acknowledge that the museum is trying by all means to move away from its focus on an Afrikaner perspective on the history of the Soutpansberg. This is paving the way for a more representative historical presentation of the people of the Soutpansberg. I hypothesise that if this were implemented properly it might attract a high number of visitors to the museum. These people will be more interested in what the museum has to offer as a cultural and historical institution, rather than simply as a place of entertainment (place for braaing).

My research shows that the majority of visitors who are black feel that it is good for them to visit the museum for entertainment rather than going to acquire knowledge of history and culture that is foreign to them. In most cases this group of visitors will just arrive at the museum and prepare themselves for the party outside the museum Information Center without even bothering to gaze at some of the exhibition. (I base this observation on information from some of the people interviewed – see below).

The museum has a problem with tour guiding and this also contributes to the low number of visitors to the museum. Visitors have to feel welcome when they visit a place but this is not the case with Schoemansdal. Here visitors are stranded when there is no one to meet them. The museum does not have well trained tour guides. One story that came to my mind was when I was an intern at this museum in 2000: a white couple from Polokwane (Pietersburg) visited the museum. I was in the Information Center and I had to answer their questions even though I was not well informed about the history of the museum. I also had to act, as a tour guide as there was no one amongst the museum staff who was there to offer their help. Another important aspect that I have picked up at the museum is the language problem because the woman who is in charge of the museum tours speak Afrikaans and this makes it difficult for the local communities who are not Afrikaans speaking to gather what she is saying.

According to Mr. Netshivhodza (2003), visitors are now coming in numbers to the museum but he stresses that Afrikaners remain the most regular visitors to the museum. He said they also came in December 2002 to celebrate the Great Trek. It should be noted that the visit by the Venda, Shangaan and the Buys people to Schoemansdal to celebrate the Day of Reconciliation alongside the Afrikaners was just a one-day occasion. According Mr. Netshivhodza, Africans do not gather regularly at the graves on the 16 of December.

To conclude, Schoemansdal has improved in visitor numbers since the days when the museum was predominantly an Afrikaner museum. The visitors' book at the gate serves as a reflection of the change in the number of visitors to the museum. There were no books for the visitors to sign during those days and there were no strict rules governing visitors to the museum. Now it is a much more controlled environment. At the moment the museum does not have time scheduled for visitors as long as the office is approached people can visit any time during the day. The next chapter explores visitor opinion in more detail, in an attempt to obtain a qualitative picture of visitor reaction to the museum.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1. Public Responses to the Museum

This chapter surveys the opinions of various people. Firstly, I asked a set of questions of people who work in the Museum and the local municipality. Then I was directed to interview the Mphephu Ramabulana royal house representative. I also interviewed a more random sample of people who might represent casual visitors to the museum. In this way I hoped to get the expression of different degrees of expertise: (1) people who would regard the Museum in the light of its historical accuracy; (2) those who would regard it as part of their historical legacy (and obviously there is an overlap between these two categories); (3) people without specific historical knowledge or identification with the history of the area – in other words those who might be casual visitors to the Museum. Many of those I interviewed see themselves as speaking on behalf of different groups (Afrikaners, Venda etc.), but whether they really do or not is debatable. Their ideas are obviously coloured by age, experience and political interests as well as individual idiosyncrasies. Nevertheless, there was a high degree of agreement among all informants, which suggests common negative perceptions about the museum.

There was a set of questions for different people of the communities of the Soutpansberg and for the historians and archaeologists in this regard. The sets of questions were not similar but were intended to get a clear picture of what people feel about the Schoemansdal Museum. It has to be noted that the accounts from these individuals are their own opinions and do not by any means, portray what the whole 'Soutpansbeg community' would say about the matter.

In pursuing this research I first interviewed Mr Johan Joubert who is the Chief Executive Officer of Makhado Municipality Tourism (2002). Several questions were posed to him,

the first was: What was the intention when the museum was set up? The response of Mr Joubert was as follows:

The main idea was to commemorate the Voortrekkers' life style and another reason was to show how life was at Schoemansdal in the 19th century.

When asked if the museum gives a good picture of the trekkers' life, his response was as follows:

The museum is a true depiction of the trekkers' life in Schoemansdal even though it is not a complete picture of the real life style of the Voortrekkers in Schoemansdal.

When I asked Mr Joubert if he thinks that any other people in the area should be given space in the museum, his response was as follows:

Schoemansdal Museum should not depict only the trekkers' life. It should depict the whole life of the Soutpansberg people. For instance the history of the Buys people should be preserved for future generations to come. The relationships that existed between the Singo, Lemba and the Vhangona in the Soutpansberg, need to be told to the people by the museum. It is also important for the museum to show the historic development of the present day Venda. It will also be proper for the museum to illustrate the relationship that existed between the Venda, Voortrekkers, Shangaan, Ndebele and the Sotho people in the Soutpansberg. I believe that the history of the Khoi-Khoi, San people and the history of rock art forms part of the Soutpansberg history and as such should be included in the history depicted by the museum. Yes I think that the museum should try and accommodate the previously marginalized communities of the Soutpansberg in its presentation of history of the area.

When I asked Mr Joubert for his opinion of the contributing factors to the low number of visitors to Schoemansdal Museum, his response was as follows:

There are several reasons contributing to that. Some of those reasons are: (1) The museum is not well known to people of the Soutpansberg and (2) The singular presentation of the history of the 19th century. Another contributing factor is that the museum is closed over the weekend and tourists are stranded when they visit during this time. The fact that at the moment there are no organized school educational tours to the museum is an indication that the museum is not ready to

attract visitors. I see these as some of the reasons for the low number of visitors turning up to the museum at the moment. I also feel that the museum is supposed to be a reflection of a living history but I have noted that Schoemansdal Museum is telling half of that living history. I have also noted that some of the museum personnel lack information on the Venda and other 'indigenous communities' history and their focus is mainly on the Voortrekkers to justify Afrikaner hegemony in the area.

When I asked him what changes he would implement in the museum if given opportunity to do so, his response was as follows:

I will call for the expansion of the history presently presented in the museum, to include all people of the Soutpansberg. I will also suggest that Soutpansberg be the new name of Schoemansdal Museum because Soutpansberg is the original name of the place. It is also not a name that can cause division among the people of the Soutpansberg as it is not the name of a Voortrekker like Schoemansdal. Soutpansberg as the name of the mountain can be a uniting name of the museum. Schoemansdal is a senseless name of small people in the area and finally I would like Schoemansdal Museum to represent all people of the Soutpansberg history and culture.

Mr Joubert's account of the museum suggests that he wanted change in the museum with immediate effect. His account suggests that he thinks the presentation of history in the museum is biased, and that it was just part of the Afrikaner propaganda in those days. It is interesting to note that Mr. Joubert as an Afrikaner himself is not trying to be defensive of an institution which was founded as an Afrikaner institution. On the contrary, he appears to welcome the inclusion of other people, and criticizes the Afrikaner exclusiveness.

In my meeting with the mayor of Makhado municipality, Clr Brighton Thlakula, (2002), his account was as follows:

The municipality is going to implement changes in the area and the museum would not survive the imminent changes coming in Makhado. The municipality feels that changes to the history presentation in the museum are going to happen soon to accommodate other marginalized communities of the Soutpansberg. The current municipality has committed itself to bring changes to the museum that will also see a change in the name of the museum before the municipality term ends in

2005. To show that we are serious about changes Louis Trichardt has been successfully changed to Makhado to honour one of Africa's greatest chiefs. Our municipality is also going to place a statue of Makhado in front of the municipality building.

The sentiments expressed by Clr. Thlakula suggest that the municipality is committed to seeing changes to the museum as an attempt to revisit the past and to try and heal the wounds caused by the unjust system of government of the time of the museum's founding. In doing so, the integration of history and culture of the 'marginalized' communities in the museum will bring unity among the people of the Soutpansberg. Clr. Thlakula, like Mr Joubert cited above, thinks in terms of a more inclusive representation which means adding well-known African figures.

Gilbert Mabasa, (2002), an amateur archaeologist at the museum, who worked with a number of archaeologists in the Soutpansberg has this to say about the museum:

People are more interested in leisure than to be educated when visiting the museum. They are not interested in the museum exhibition because to them it does not connect with their own history. They can't associate themselves with people like Andries Potgieter, Stephenus Schoeman and other Voortrekker leaders. I also feel that the museum should include more of the Venda history than what it has done so far.

His compatriot at the museum, Mr. Victor Netshiavha, (2002), who works at the museum administration echoed Mabasa sentiments by saying:

People are more interested in leisure than to come to the museum for educational purpose. This is caused by the fact that the interpretation of the museum is politically incorrect and transformation is needed as matter of urgency. I have noted that there are other sections of our community who are resisting change in the museum.

The museum curator has a different account to the one given by other people interviewed in this research. In my encounter with Mrs. Chrissela Koen, (2002), who is the curator of Schoemansdal Museum, she had the following to say:

The idea to start the museum was to collect as much information as we could get not anyone exceptional.

When I asked if people are more interested in the museum, this is what she has to say with regard to the question:

I had the feeling that people are now more interested in the museum than it was in the past. We have a lot of school tours coming to the museum now and this is a sign that we are heading to the right direction.

When I asked her of the changes to be implemented by the museum in the near future, her response was as follows:

Yes we would like to integrate the Venda and other communities in the museum history presentation but people have shown little interest in our mission. It is only now that our staff members come back from this people with positive response in the sense that people are now showing their interest in the museum.

Mrs. Koen's accounts suggest that she did not know much about the motive behind the founding of the museum – she said she thought it was just about collecting information. Her account suggests that she is very defensive. As has been shown above in previous chapters, there is no denying that the idea to start a museum was motivated by the will in the Soutpansberg Afrikaner community to preserve memories of the pioneers in Schoemansdal. The account of Mrs. Koen gives the impression that she did not want to give all that she knows about the facts of the events that led to the founding of the museum. She blames the lack of the museum's success on people's lack of interest in it.

The accounts of her deputy, Mrs. Sinden (2002), contradict what Mrs. Koen gave this researcher. Mrs. Sinden's account responding to the same question that I posed to Mrs. Koen, was as follows:

The intention to set up the museum was to rebuild Schoemansdal as it was in the past during the time of Hendriek Potgieter, Stephanus Schoeman and others. This never happened because of lack of funds and another idea was to commemorate the pioneers' life in Schoemansdal in the 19th century.

Responding to the question if she thinks people like the museum and if not why and why not, her response was as follows:

I think people are now showing some kind of interest in the museum that never existed before. In our attempt to reach out to people we found that most people in Makhado (Dzanani), Nzhelele and other areas around Venda want more of the Venda history and culture to be presented in the museum. People are also talking of recreational facilities like swimming pool and the shops in the museum premises. They want to come and view the exhibitions and relax. This shows that people are now more aware of the museum than it was in the past. As for other natives like the Shangaan, Ndebele, Sotho and the Buys community, the lady we sent out can't reach this people because of transport problems.

Responding to the question, if she thinks that any other people in the area should be given space in the museum, her response was as follows:

I think people whose history and culture can be integrated in the museum are the Pedi, because Sekwati and Sekhukhune who once ruled the Pedi people came to the Soutpansberg. I also hold the idea that the Ndebele should also be included if their descendants are still around Soutpansberg. The Venda should form the integral part of this integration because of their sustainable stay in the area until today. Yes I will say the museum should integrate the culture and history of the previously marginalized communities of the Soutpansberg in the museum presentation. Having said that I don't think its good for the Shangaan to be brought to the museum as we have a museum in Letsitele that deals with the Shangaan people.

Mrs. Sinden's response to the question that deals with the low number of visitors to the museum was as follows:

The visitors' number is mostly situated on educational tours and people who came to the museum for some kind of celebration or picnic. In the past we used to have a low number of visitors but at the moment the number of visitors is increasing because of what I said earlier in my answer to your question. We have our communities in Sinthumule and Madombidzha who are close to the museum and they know its existence. These people come to visit the museum on a number of occasions and this justifies the interests people are showing in this museum. We receive visitors from as far as Musina and schools coming as far as Thohoyandou and other areas in Venda.

When I asked about the connection people had with the museum, her response was as follows:

In my own assessment, I will say Afrikaner people are the ones with greater connection with the museum. I also think that there are some African people who have little connection with the museum like the grand and great-grand children of the Mphephu Ramabulana. I know once upon a time some royal people came to visit us from the Mphephu clan.

The last question to Mrs. Sinden was about the changes the museum intends to implement in the near future. Her response was as follows:

We want to be more representative that is why we sent some members of our staff to find out what are the needs of our communities with regard to the history and cultural presentation offered in the museum. To show our commitment to changes on the 22 of August, we have an occasion where Prof. Louis Changuion of the University of the North walking on foot from Beira in Maputo from the same route taken by one of the priests who used to visit Schoemansdal in the 19th century.¹ I am not sure whether the priest was Portuguese or not. During this occasion we realized that African communities need more representation in the museum. This demonstration by Prof. Changuion is a sign that the museum is trying to take a new direction in addressing the past. In the management, I am not sure what are the plans but at the moment we are in the process of quotation to have the Venda dress presentation in the museum but furthermore I have no idea.

The museum then seems to be committed or realizes the need to change. While staff acknowledges that the current displays ‘connect’ with Afrikaner visitors, they recognize the marginalisation of other groups. Mrs. Sinden says three things of particular interest to this research: the Schoemansdal Museum was an attempt to ‘recreate’ (rather than reconstruct or represent) the trekker past; that education through the exhibitions and relaxation using the recreational amenities can coexist (does not have to be either or); the Museum should represent more people than just ‘the Venda’ – she names the Pedi and the Ndebele, and talks about African communities in the plural.

¹ This university is now called the University of Limpopo after a merger.

The next person I interviewed in the museum was Mr. Marcus Netshivhodza, (2002), who started working at the museum in the 1980s. I asked Mr. Netshivhodza if he thought indigenous people, cultures and history should be represented in the museum. His response was as follows:

Yes I think it will be good but these people should be consulted first.

When I asked him about the low number of visitors to the museum, his response was as follows:

This can be attributed to the fact that in the past Africans were not allowed near the museum and frequent visitors were Afrikaner people who were like the owners of the place. Now people are coming to the museum but for some it is because of the little connection they have with the history of the place. Sometimes most of the Venda people who visit the museum ask why the presentation is biased towards the natives. These are the questions that I have to find myself responding to, even though I am not a cultural officer. As a driver and working in the maintenance section of the museum I won't have many answers to this question. My response will be based on my long time service in the museum.

The last question to him was the changes he will like to implement if given a chance to do so. His response was as follows:

I think the museum should change its name and have more reconciliatory name than Schoemansdal. I believe that Schoemansdal reminds African communities of the oppression; they had to suffer from the Afrikaner. I also hold the notion that the museum should try and accommodate the culture and history of the Venda, Shangaan, Pedi, Ndebele and the Buys people. All these people have their roots embedded in this area from a long time ago and it can heal the wounds created by apartheid if Schoemansdal can become the museum of all the people.

Mr. Netshivhodza's responses are based on an ideology of reconciliation in the Soutpansberg area. Note he also mentions the bad symbolic connotations of the name 'Schoemansdal'. He believes that the museum can contribute to the process of reconciliation by accommodating the history and cultures of 'all the people'. Interestingly, he advises that people be consulted in the restructuring of the museum.

I also had the opportunity to interview Mr. Vic. Viljoen, (2002), the Director of Tourism and Strategic Development for Makhado Municipality. My first question to him, like others before him, was about the intention behind the museum's establishment. His response was as follows:

I think the museum was founded to commemorate the life of the Voortrekkers as you can see that there are pictures of the Voortrekkers' leaders displayed in the museum.

I also asked him if he thought other people in the area should be given space in the museum. His response was a bit different to others before him in terms of its framing. His answer was as follows:

I don't think it is a question of these people not being given space in the museum before. The museum has no problem presenting Venda history and culture before. If you have been to the museum you should have noticed that there is a Venda traditional house. The house have been there from a long time ago, even before 1994, so it is not a question of giving space but a question of integration of the culture and history of the natives on a full scale not just a mere integration. Yes I strongly believed that integration is a must in Schoemansdal to make it more representative of the culture and history of the people of Soutpansberg without any discrimination. The integration will also help museum to conduct tours leading to the Venda Chief kraal, Songozwi, which I believed it is a sacred place where not everyone is allowed to go. I am of the opinion that this can be possible with the help of the Venda leaders who can give permission for the museum tours to be successful.

I asked Mr. Viljoen if he thought people in the Soutpansberg like the museum. Why and why not? His answer was as follows:

I don't think there is a lot of publicity about the museum and lack of funds is another contributing factor to people not knowing the museum. The museum doesn't have enough funds to spend on publicity and other things that can attract visitors.

I then asked him about the changes he would implement to the museum if given a chance to do so. His response was as follows:

I think it is proper to add the Venda cultural village to the museum after thorough consultation with the Venda leaders. I believe this will help other people to experience life in the Venda village, which they never had the chance to experience before.

The account of Mr. Viljoen suggests that he is well informed about the history of the Soutpansberg. He argues for *integration* (my emphasis) of the history of the area along the lines of the arguments of some of the academic historians. Although he was very busy with his work schedule, he was able to squeeze me in without any appointment with him, which suggests that he thought it was important to communicate his views. It is clear that Mr. Viljoen is not pleased with the way things are running in the museum. It was also interesting to note that his account gave this researcher information that was not mentioned by many people, interviewed. I am referring particularly to the Venda traditional house in the museum, which according to him was built a long time ago even though he never specified the exact date. This could suggest that the museum started transformation on a low scale before the new dispensation, or that its original view was to present African culture as curious and as colourful background to the 'real' history (see discussion in previous chapter).

The next person I interviewed was an Afrikaner woman, Mrs. Susan Du Toit, (2002), who works for Makhado Municipality. I asked her if she thought the museum gives a good picture of the trekkers' life. Her response was as follows:

I haven't visited the museum myself, so I can only respond on what I have heard. It will be a subjective answer because since grade one in school we were taught about the Voortrekkers' history and the previous government would create museums in the same way as our history lesson were. Then I will not answer you objectively because I have grown up with that frame of reference. I do not have the other one, so am not able to answer you correctly, that is to say yes or no.

When I asked her if she thought that other people in the area should be given space in the museum, her response was as follows:

Look we have one region now and we cannot have isolated happenings in a region. Yes I think the museum should integrate the culture and history of the natives and unite them with the existing Afrikaner presentation.

My next question to Mrs. Du Toit was if she was aware of the visiting statistics of the museum. Her response was as follows:

I don't have a clue about visitors to the museum on the daily basis, but I do know that once in a year local Afrikaner interests groups organize some gathering.

Finally I asked her if she thought people like the museum. Why and why not? Her answer was as follows:

I don't think many people visit the museum and this can be attributed to the fact that the museum is offering an Afrikaner presentation of the history of the Soutpansberg. I also think it is not popular because it serves a certain section of the community of the Soutpansberg.

The account of Mrs. Du Toit reminds us that Afrikaner children were taught about the history of the trekkers a long time ago. What is interesting is that she is aware that it is a one-sided history, which is reflected in the museum. She also argues for integration. It is puzzling that she has never visited the museum even though she had access to it. It is important to ask whether she was rebelling against the one sided history presented in the museum as she indicated in the interview that she only has one frame of reference about the history of the area, but she still believes it would be possible to 'unite' other histories with the existing Afrikaner presentation.

I then went to Mphephu Royal house to talk to representatives of the Royal house about their feelings for the museum. The Royal house appointed Mr David Mavhungu Mphephu, (2002), as the person I should interview on behalf of the Royal house. Mr Mavhungu Mphephu is the brother of the chief and he is called Vho- Khotsimunene (Younger brother to the chiefs). In our interview I asked Mr Mphephu if he has visited the museum If not why not? This is what he has to say about the whole thing:

I have never been to the museum because Boers were fighting like the place belongs to them alone. The area did not look like it belongs to our ancestors. These Boers chase away our people if they come near Schoemansdal. As the Ramabulana, it was painful to be deprived of connection to our soil. We would have wished our children to link with the history of their ancestors and to know exactly where they come from.

When I asked him what the Royal house would like to see in the museum. His answer was as follows:

The Royal house would like the museum to give a presentation of the VhaVenda history and culture. We want the museum to display pictures of Thovhela (chief) Ramavhoya, Thovhela Ramabulana, Thovhela Makhado and Thovhela Mphephu as the Afrikaner has their own people in the museum exhibition. We are not saying the museum should have a Venda history presentation only. No! What we want is for the museum to integrate the history and culture of all the people of the Soutpansberg whether, you are the Khoi- Khoi, Ngoni etc, the presentation should go along with that of the Afrikaner which now has a place in the museum. We as the Singo people we feel we can have our history preserved in the institution that was formerly owned by the Afrikaner people. We want the museum to serve as a uniting institution within the Soutpansberg.

Mr. Mphephu continued with this interview on the subject of what the Royal house would like see in the museum by saying:

The issue of the Vhangona and the Khoi-Khoi is a very difficult issue to deal with. I am saying this because the Khoi-Khoi have no descendants that we know in the Soutpansberg meanwhile the Vhangona of today are hiding their identity as they have been overpowered by the Singo. Having said that the Royal house feel that if there is any thing remaining as evidence left by these people then Schoemansdal Museum should put an exhibition about that. This would teach our children that their ancestors share this place with other people whom they conquer in the 19th century. The younger generation would know how these people do things in their time. In short we as the voice of the Singo people we are saying that the museum should integrate all the people of the Soutpansberg, even though we never heard of people claiming to be the descendants of the Khoi-Khoi and the San people, what ever evidence they left behind about their history in the Soutpansberg should be presented in the museum. Lastly we would like to have South African Heritage Resource Agency together with the Geographical council reviewing the name Schoemansdal as we are not satisfied with the naming in our own soil.

It is clear from the accounts coming from the Royal house that their intention is to get recognition for their history and ownership of the site and have other quiet voices like the Khoi-Khoi, San and the Vhangona to be heard through one voice that is Schoemansdal Museum. He is expressing bitterness on behalf of the people who are in his jurisdiction about being 'deprived of the (historical) connection' they had with the area. He feels that they are still not welcome at Schoemansdal. The issue here, he says, is not the Venda hegemony they are trying to fight for, but unity through culture and history. It is important to note that there is a feeling that there are strong bonds these people have with the soil of the Soutpansberg. The Mphephu have strong bonds with the area in that the *Mahosi* (chiefs) are buried at Songozwi on top of the Soutpansberg Mountain.

This research also took me to Buysdorp some 40km away from Louis Trichardt. Here I wanted to interview leaders of the Buys people and I was referred to Mr. Alexander Snail, (2002), whom I was told is one of the Buys community leaders, as they do not have a chief. My first question to him was if he knew anything about Schoemansdal Museum. His response was as follows:

I have heard about the museum but I have never visited the place. I have read that sometimes Coenraad de Buys and his sons had some dealings with the trekkers in Schoemansdal. Another contributing factor to my less knowledge of the museum is that I spent a lot of time out of Buysdorp. I went to Natal for seven years and I studied at Wits a few years. I was never here for a long period but I heard that Africans were not allowed near the museum in the past. I think the main reason behind these restrictions was apartheid policies of that time. Certain people have to go to certain place while others can't. While I was younger my parents never sent me to the museum because they know that it was not a good idea. They were able to see that they were not welcome and going there uninvited would have been inviting more trouble than anything else.

When I asked him about the intention of those who set up the museum, his response was as follows:

In my opinion I think the idea of the Afrikaner people was to commemorate their own people history. We as Africans we should try to do something of our own, the

museum is a place that put exhibitions of artifacts or culture and for us to say it should be more representative of the Venda, Buys people and other indigenous people, it will be very unfair to those who started the museum. I think we should try to look for our own artifacts and put them in our own museum. It can be in the same Schoemansdal Museum premises or in another building.

When I asked him if he thought people like the museum, his response was as follows:

I have never heard people discussing Schoemansdal as a museum, what is within it but I have heard people talking about Schoemansdal as a resort. Otherwise I haven't heard people discussing Schoemansdal as a place we can learn our history and culture. Like I said people are talking about this place as place of leisure. One Christmas, one person told me that he is going to Schoemansdal to have fun.

After his account of people creating their own museum, Mr. Snail changed when I asked him the final question. The question was: what changes he would make given a chance to do so. His answer was as follows:

We do not need a new museum; we must expand on the existing one, but the Buys people keep their artifacts at the Community Center here in Buysdorp. We have pictures of Coenraad de Buys and we would like to have his statue there one day as he is our front-runner.

This account suggests that, contrary to other informants quoted here, the Buysdorp community wants to preserve its isolation from the rest of the Soutpansberg and to retain its own icons. It is possessive of the Buys legacy.

The stories of this people also differ from the stories of Afrikaner people about Schoemansdal. This was also evident to me when I met two young Afrikaner schoolboys in company of a girl at Makhado (2002). I got an opportunity to talk to them and they told me that, they know Schoemansdal from the history lesson at their school. They all confessed to me that they visited the museum with their school. One of the boys with the surname of Schoeman, who is about 13 years old said:

My father told me that Stephanus Schoeman is my great, great grand father and he always tells me stories about Schoemansdal. Stories of the war with the Venda people

This young boy's testimony suggests that some of the Afrikaner parents tell their children about their history and culture and make connections with it. It was amazing to find young children like them willing to share their knowledge with me about events that happened years before their birth. Their knowledge about Schoemansdal, more especially the Schoeman boy, was encouraging because these children were also eager to learn about the culture and history of the black people of the Soutpansberg.

In my visit to see Mr. Raulinga at Madombidzha, I was told he was out of the place and the relevant person to talk to about the history of Schoemansdal should be the old man Mr. Philmon Vele Ralidzhivha, (2002). I asked him if he had heard about the museum before. His response was as follows:

I had never visited the museum before because we were not allowed close to Schoemansdal even before it became the museum. The only time Africans were there was as workers. It was also difficult for us to go in the vicinity of Schoemansdal on the 16th of December. During this time the Boers were celebrating their victory over Dingane. Most of us were aware that the Boers were also revenging little life they lost in a battle with Dingane. As a result any African soul that dares to go near Schoemansdal during this time was going to be met with the fury of the Afrikaner anger.

When I asked him if he felt that Africans feel welcome when they visit the museum now his answer was as follows:

We never feel at home in Schoemansdal before and I still believe it is still the same today. I believe the cause of this is that a visit to the museum now brings to us bad memories of the past. I am referring to the ill treatment we received from the Boers in those days at the same place. People are still experiencing fear when they visit the place.

I asked Mr. Ralidzhivha about changes he would like to see in the museum. This was his response:

I would like the museum to be accessible to all the communities of the Soutpansberg. The presentation of history of the people of the Soutpansberg needs to be revisited to accommodate the culture and history of black people. I also feel the museum needs to change the name Schoemansdal as it brings bad memories to Africans in the Soutpansberg.

This account suggests that people were hurt by the government system of that time to such an extent that for them to forget something has to be done about presentation of history in the museum. After meeting Mr. Ralidzhivha, I met Maguada Phadziri. (2002) who was willing to be interviewed. Maguada is a businessman from Gogobole in Madombidzha. I wanted to know if he knows the museum. His response was as follows:

I know the museum as it is just next to my home, I can see people who are coming and who are leaving the museum but I never had the opportunity before to visit the museum which was next door to me.

When I asked him if he had visited the museum before, his response was as follows:

I was born with fear like other people in our communities to visit the museum and this was caused by the restrictions placed on us Africans. We know that we were owners of the place of the museum, but the Boers make it impossible on our side to visit.

I asked Maguada if he thought people like the museum. His response was as follows:

I do not think Africans like this museum; they visit the museum for entertainment rather than to view the exhibition, which represent the Afrikaner history. Africans go to this museum to drink beers and cool drinks while making themselves braai. I think this can be attributed to the fact that they do not feel connected to the history presentation in the museum. As Africans we feel excluded in the whole museum set-up.

Finally, I asked about changes he would like to see in the museum. His response was as follows:

I believe that there is a need for change in Schoemansdal Museum and this can be possible if the museum can accommodate the history and culture of the Venda

people and other prominent players in the history of Schoemansdal in its presentation of the events of the past.

The sentiments of Maguada were echoed by Lufuno Raulinga, (2002), a grade 12 pupil from Madombidzha, when I asked if he knew anything about the museum, this was what he said:

Yes, I know the museum as a place of entertainment; I usually go there to party with some friends. I am not interested in the presentation of history in the museum. To me there is no point looking at the Voortrekkers' pictures on display inside the Information Center as heroes. I think to us as Africans they are not our heroes; those pictures are a symbol of depression. These people are heroes to the Afrikaner community in Louis Trichard and Musina. As Africans, I believe we will always associate this people with pain they inflicted on our ancestors long time ago.

When I asked about his knowledge of the Soutpansberg history, his response was as follows:

I know little about the history of the Soutpansberg from what old people like my uncle Mr. Raulinga, who is well vested in the history of the area told me.

About changes to the museum, Lufuno shared common views with other people interviewed before him. This was his response:

I believe that a change is needed to make everyone to feel at home than it is the case now. I think this will increase a number of visitors to the museum.

In an interview with Mr. Amon Ramuhala, (2002), from Kuvule village, who works for a petroleum company in Louis Trichardt. I found out that most Africans are not happy about the museum presentation of the history of the Soutpansberg. I asked him if he knew the museum, and his response was as follows:

Yes, I know the museum, but this happened by a chance, I visited the museum once while on duty for my company. I went there only once but, I was able to see some of the exhibition in the museum Information Center and I also saw the pioneers' village.

I asked him if he found anything interesting in the museum, and his response was as follows:

I found nothing interesting except seeing the pictures of the trekkers all over the place. What I observed in my short visit to the museum highlighted that the museum is preserving the history and culture of the Afrikaner people. This was made clear to me when I was going through the exhibition of the museum in such a short time there. I never planned to visit the museum, as I have never heard of it before the day of my visit. It was clear to me that the museum belongs to the Afrikaner community not the African communities in the Soutpansberg.

I asked him if he thought people know the museum, this was his response:

My answer on this question will be No, because it is hidden in a remote area. People who are not told about the museum existence in the area would not know about it.

When I asked him if he felt any connection with the presentation of history in the museum his response was as follows:

I do not have any connection with the history in the museum, as it is an Afrikaner museum, presenting their history and culture. It is also biased, as we, Africans, are not represented well in the museum. As a Venda speaking person our history and cultural presentation in the museum is distorted. I think the owners of the museum did not consult with the Venda elders about presentation of the Venda culture and history in the museum.

Finally, I asked him if he thought that the whole community of the Soutpansberg knows the museum. His answer was as follows:

I think the museum is not known, as I said before that it is hidden from the eyes of the public. It is also not well published and its biased presentation of Afrikaner history and culture can also be the cause of African people not knowing it.

I also had an interview with Ndivhudza Mainganya, (2002), a student from ²Technikon Northern Gauteng, who was doing internship in the museum. I asked her what the main intention of those who started the museum was. Her response was as follows:

I think the main idea was to commemorate the first pioneer town in the Soutpansberg.

When I asked her if she thought people are interested in visiting the museum her response was as follows:

In my observation I think the number of museum visits by locals has gone high since I got involved in marketing the museum to the local communities. The museum has recently attracted foreign tourists to its shores. I will cite the recent visit by a group of Swiss scholars to the museum. Some people visit the museum for research purposes and other for leisure. The museum has also started with educational tours to the local schools around the Soutpansberg in its quest to serve as an educational institution.

Finally, I asked her about changes she would make, if given a chance to do so. Her response was as follows:

I will review the presentation of the trekkers' history and culture and integrate the natives' history and culture in the museum. I will also improve on the marketing side of the museum to make the local people to like the museum.

Every one of my informants indicated that the Museum represented Afrikaner history and that this was problematic as it excluded the history of other peoples. All of them said that other histories and cultures should be represented. Nearly all of them recognized that the museum was intimately bound up with Afrikaner nationalism. All the African respondents reported that they did not feel welcome in the Museum because of the attitude of local Afrikaans-speakers. African informants suggest how vigorously 'Afrikaners' have fought in the past to keep 'their' museum and 'their' history to themselves. Some members of the museum staff and municipality now recognize the need for change- often thought of in terms of incorporating other 'cultures' to a greater

² It is now Tshwane University of Technology after the merger between Technikon Northern Gauteng and Pretoria Technikon.

extent, or of substituting African heroes for Afrikaner ones. Some informants suggest a more integrated historical representation. There are suggestions in the interviews that a restructuring of the museum's representation would involve some tensions about whose history would receive prominence, and which versions of history would be told.

The material collected in this chapter strongly suggests that change is inevitable. But what form will it take? How will it proceed?

CHAPTER SIX

6.1. Way Forward and Conclusion

In this chapter the research makes some suggestions that might inform the reconstruction of Schoemansdal Museum. (The research will take into consideration the ideas gathered from the literature available about Soutpansberg, which is the location of the museum, views from the archaeologists and the views of people interviewed when making recommendations.) The research has shown that African informants feel, not only that the Museum does not show their history, but that they are not welcome there. They talk about the possessiveness with which the 'Boers' behave. African informants are not apathetic as some of the staff suggest. Their experiences and perceptions of what the museum stands for are extremely negative (The research will also refer to the National Heritage Resources Act, No.25 of 1999 in recommending changes to the museum).

It is evident that the informants are generally supportive of the integration of other people besides the trekkers into the Soutpansberg history and culture in the museum. In interviews conducted with some Venda people and members of the Buys community, this researcher came to a conclusion that the presentation of history and culture of the people of the Soutpansberg needs special attention by the South African Heritage Resources Agency, the museum administration, historians, archaeologists and members of all the communities affected by this presentation of history, which does not recognise anybody else except a small group of 'pioneers'.

This might be possible if the Schoemansdal Museum is ready to face the challenges of engaging with the concerned groups and listening to their grievances. This might be possible if a task committee is formed to look at matters of how to integrate the history and culture of African people of the Soutpansberg. This committee should liaise with the communities and the museum to come up with the solution to this problem. But there is no easy solution to this problem. Work has to be on going with the continuous presentation of different perspectives. It might not always be possible to reconcile them and then they will be shown as different perspectives. Africans need to be role players in this committee. Many museums in Europe and America have started such initiatives long time ago and it is a success. The evidence to

support this argument was cited by Steven Lavine in Karp, Kreamer and Lavine (1992) when he said:

Many museums have taken up the challenge of responding to their various constituencies and relating to them more inventively; many have even begun to reimagine who those constituencies might be. Museums often try to accomplish these goals by appointing one or more trustees from groups the museum has newly targeted as part of its constituency, or by adding staff, usually in the lower-level and out-reach positions, from underrepresented groups. These efforts result most often in occasional exhibitions and special festival programs centered around themes designed to appeal to certain target groups. Museums hope that these efforts, along with their outreach programs, will win new audiences for their regular work. These developments increasingly are accompanied by a good deal of institutional worrying and conversation-seminars, guest speakers, workshops, community advisory committees-about the relation of these new enterprises to the institution's historical mission.

This researcher echoes the sentiments of Lavine with regard to the situation in Schoemansdal. I am of the opinion that Schoemansdal should start engaging with the communities of the Soutpansberg who are underrepresented in the museum, and they should be given a real voice in deciding how to represent what is an extremely complex history. Even academic researchers still grapple with the complexities of this region so it will not be easy. Should the intention be to attempt to create an inclusive, single history, or a number of parallel histories that tell the story of separate 'groups'?

I do not dismiss the fact that the museum has started with initiatives to engage the local people. The argument I am trying to make on this matter is that the interaction of the museum with these people has to be on a full-scale non-stop basis. It is also the idea following this research that the museum should also start empowering these people by employing them in the museum. This will help the museum to interpret the history of these people in other ways and will also give the museum a chance to give a presentation in these people own voices. As a result of these initiatives local people will grasp some knowledge and contribute to the development of new knowledge about local history and culture.

Schoemansdal Museum should involve local people in creating exhibitions that represent their cultures and histories and invite responses. The dominant Afrikaner paradigm should be contested and the power of its narrative undermined. The exhibitions of the Venda and the Shangaan artifacts in the museum are not impressive to the black people, because they feel the museum should have invited them to help in creating those exhibitions and they feel humiliated by the way the museum put up their artifacts. They also feel that some of the

artifacts are sacred (Such as the display of a picture of the drum alleged to be *Ngomalungundu* in the museum) and the museum staff would not know how to handle them and for proper handling the museum should consult with the local people. This is also my idea that this museum should start enlisting the help of the black people, who know the meaning of those objects in the museum. Karp has said in Karp, Kreamer and Lavine (1992) that:

When people enter the museum they do not leave their cultures and identities in the coatroom. Nor do they respond passively to the museum displays. They interpret museum exhibitions through their prior experience and through the culturally learned beliefs, values, and perceptual skills that they gain through membership in multiple communities.

I support the arguments made above but it seems not to be the idea supported by Schoemansdal Museum at the moment. When black people visit this museum they want to be able to relate to their history, culture and experiences. These views were highlighted in chapter four of this research where some of the visitors suggested to one of the museum staff members, Mr. Netshivhodza that they want to see their history and culture presented in full in the museum. This raises difficult questions. The museum has to realize that people who visit the museum do not want to be passive when gazing at the exhibitions on display. They want to feel connected to the exhibitions and relate them to their identity (as in the case of the white schoolboy interviewed in chapter four of this research). This is possible if Schoemansdal Museum can move away from a singular presentation to the multi cultural and historical presentation.

I suggest that Schoemansdal Museum should put up multiple communities programmes in the museum that would involve all the communities of the Soutpansberg. This should involve programmes such as cultural festivals, open exhibitions that will give local communities the opportunity to come and display their cultural objects and the museum should also host cultural conferences to engage different communities in debates about the diversity of history and culture in the Soutpansberg. These efforts could create tolerance and respect amongst different communities of the area.

The views of the people in chapter five of this research shows that people are willing to participate in the museum programmes if they are approached; the museum should ask the communities whose objects are displayed in the museum to inform them about the meaning

of the artifacts in their possessions. There are many knowledgeable people within the communities of the Soutpansberg who need to be approached by the museum to give the museum more information about their history and culture.

The researcher suggests that the museum should put good marketing plans in place to publicize the museum to the public, which is not informed about the museum at the moment. This can be achieved by releasing a museum brochure with more information about what the museum can offer to the public. Included in the brochure should be a map directing people to the route they will have to follow when visiting the museum. This information booklet should be made available at the museum office in Louis Trichardt, the tourism center in town and at the museum information center. I hold the view that these places are accessible to people of the Soutpansberg and the museum should also start to place adverts to inform people about its existence on the local radio stations and newspaper. This would make the museum known to all people of Limpopo and the outside world.

Schoemansdal Museum should also move away from the notion of the museum as a timeless institution standing apart from the processes of change operating on the past only and not aligning itself with the present day life situation of people who are outside the 'Afrikaner' group. I hold the notion that the museum should not commit itself to recording views of people about its historical and cultural presentation and observing their concern about the presentation it offered but it should act as an institution which is willing to participate in changes. Macdonald in Karp, Kreamer and Lavine (1992) has this to say about the role of museum in the communities they serve:

If we accept their purpose is to be of service to society, then it is vital they be responsive to their social environment in order to remain relevant to changing social needs and goal.

I hold the same idea as Macdonald in the sense that it is also calling for Schoemansdal Museum to show its responsibility to all the communities of the Soutpansberg through multicultural presentations in its exhibitions. The museum should invite the Venda, Shangaan, Pedi, Buys, and the descendants of the Ndebele if there are still living in the Soutpansberg and the Afrikaner community in Louis Trichardt and surrounding areas to come and give their opinions and engage in debate on the current and future exhibitions in the museum. Christine Mullen Kreamer in Karp, Kreamer and Lavine (ibid.) says that:

The history of museum representations of communities and museum activities with or about communities is an important element in current relations between museums and communities. History is not just something that happened; it is a living part of the people's sense of who they are and how they relate to other elements of civil society. Until recently, museums have often been elitist, authoritarian institutions in which the public voice was almost entirely absent and decisions about what to collect and what (and how) to exhibit rested with a small group of museum professional, private collectors and patrons.

This is the situation this research has shown with regard to the situation at Schoemansdal Museum where African voices were absent. Drawing on this argument I feel it is time for this museum to give voice to Africans. It is my idea that for this museum to receive financial injections from the business and government sectors, it has to show without any reasonable doubt that it is ready to face the challenges of integrating the history and culture of the previously marginalized communities of the Soutpansberg into their programmes. Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) can also help funding the museum if the museum follows the route of change. The museum may add to the existing presentation in the museum but it cannot continue in its precise present form because it is racist and alienates other people. So how can it be changed without “Afrikaners” being made to feel insecure? The problem is that the Afrikaner presentation excludes other people and it shows them as barbaric. This has to be addressed. It is difficult to know how trekker history will be represented in the future and this will also require extensive negotiations, given past hostilities.

I have suggested that the historical Venda royal settlement that was also part of the interaction between the trekkers and Chief Makhado people be added to the museum presentation. Aspects of the Soutpansberg's history including hunting and child slavery, that historians have written about (Delius and Wagner) present problems for future representations, but my arguments cannot be ignored. The museum would have to move from its present legitimating role to a more truly educative one (which does not mean that the leisure aspects should be excluded). Perhaps, the challenge is how, instead of reconstructing an idealized trekker town, to recreate the sense of a dynamic and changing hunting frontier (as a zone of interaction), with the sense of interaction continuing into the present.

Finally there is the issue of the museum offices, based far away from the museum in Louis Trichardt. I propose that the museum administration offices be moved to the museum in

Schoemansdal to see to the proper running of the museum. The office should be seen as accountable to the day-to-day museum operations rather than to be just office that cannot be accessible to people the museum serves. I also feel that the name of the museum at the moment seems to be not relevant to unite the communities of the Soutpansberg. The Northern Province has recently changed its name to Limpopo and most of the towns in the province have their names changed. Often towns were called after notable's Afrikaner leaders, e.g. Louis Trichardt recently has changed its name to Makhado and it is back to Louis Trichardt after a court ruling. As I have indicated in one of the chapters the debate on the name of this Soutpansberg town is not yet over. Similarly Potgietersrus, is presently known as Mokopane.

I hold the opinion that the name changes reflect an intention to embrace the broader history of this area. As this report has shown this is an extremely difficult thing to do. But certainly we must ask whether a museum that is devoted to a presentation of trekker history has a place in the new Limpopo Province. How should the story of the Great Trek and trekker settlements be told in Limpopo? These are important issues, which the museum should tackle if it wants to survive in the post apartheid South Africa. The National Heritage Resources Act, No 25 of 1999 states that:

Our heritage is unique and precious and it cannot be renewed. It helps to define our cultural identity and therefore lies at the heart of our spiritual well being and has the power to build a nation our nation. It has the potential to affirm our diverse cultures, and in so doing shape our national character. Our heritage celebrates our achievements and contributes to redressing past inequities. It educates, it deepens our understanding of society and encourage us to empathise with the experiences of others. It facilitates healing and material and symbolic restitution and it promotes new and previously neglected research into our rich oral tradition and customs.

The museum might make a beginning here by changing its identity. But how will it become a museum that embraces our diversity of cultures and history? How will it educates and deepen our understanding of society? As Professor Fernandez has observed: 'Schoemansdal is too historical a site to be left marginalised on the outskirts of Louis Trichardt', Fernandez (2007).



Fig. 5 Pioneer A - Framed House in the museum. Photograph by Lufuno Mulaudzi



Fig. 10 Schoemansdal Monument Badge. Photograph by Lufuno Mulaudzi



Fig. 2 Schoemansdal Information Centre. Photograph by Lufuno Mulaudzi



Fig. 1 Schoemansdal Museum Entrance. Photograph by Lufuno Mulaudzi



Fig. 11 Venda artifacts cabinet in the museum. Photograph by Lufuno Mulaudzi



Fig. 9 Pioneer Outside Oven in the museum. Photograph by Lufuno Mulaudzi



Fig. 7 Pioneer Ox-Wagon in the museum. Photograph by Lufuno Mulaudzi



Fig. 3 Venda traditional house in the museum. Photograph by Lufuno Mulaudzi



Fig. 12 A Picture of Makhado and his Ndebele wife on the right and a Picture of Tshivhase on the left. Photograph by Lufuno Mulaudzi



Fig. 4 The front of the A -Framed House. Photograph by Lufuno Mulaudzi



Fig. 8 The Pioneer Garden in the museum. Photograph by Lufuno Mulaudzi



Fig. 6 The Pioneer Hard Reed House in the museum. Photograph by Lufuno Mulaudzi

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