

## **From a silent past to a spoken future. Black women's voices in the archival process**

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### **Abstract**

In post-colonial societies especially there “has been a growing recognition that western archival science and practice reflect and reinforce a privileging of settler/invader/colonist voices and narratives over Indigenous ones, of written over oral records” and that the archival profession has failed to “understand the priorities of Indigenous communities and embrace Indigenous frameworks of knowledge, memory and evidence.”

In order to address the dilemma of locating marginalized voices in archival collections, scholars have recognized that in order to address the paucity of records on the previously disadvantaged communities, the parameters of what ordinarily would be considered the “historical archive” have to be enlarged.

Over the past decades a number of embroidery projects have been established in previously disadvantaged communities in South Africa, focusing specifically on black South African women. Proponents of these projects claim that the construction of story cloths involves the active participation of a community in documenting and making accessible the history of their particular group and/or locality on their own terms, and more importantly, in providing them with previously denied participation in the archival process.

This article will look at the Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation embroidered story cloth project as an example of such an archive that could contribute in the writing of a more inclusive history, add another perspective to the history of South Africa and possibly democratise the historical record.

**Keywords:** under-documented communities; archival participation; community archiving; embroidered story cloths; alternative archival sources; inclusive history

The questioning of the archival institution, in the wake of the two world wars in particular, comes out of a general questioning of accepted knowledge systems in Western society. In order to counter the dominant historical discourse, postmodern scholars have proposed that the focus be moved away from using the “nation-state [of the Western world] as unit of analysis”,<sup>1</sup> to a history from the “bottom up” that focuses on the complex “diversity of human experience by recovering the marginalized voices”.<sup>2</sup> The latter included the everyday experiences of women, the working classes and indigenous and/ or minority ethnic groups who fell outside the ambit of prevalent Western historiography.<sup>3</sup>

In post-colonial societies especially there “has been a growing recognition that western archival science and practice reflect and reinforce a privileging of settler/invader/colonist voices and narratives over Indigenous ones, of written over oral records”<sup>4</sup> and that the archival profession has failed to “understand the priorities of Indigenous communities and embrace Indigenous frameworks of knowledge, memory and evidence.”<sup>5</sup>

In order to address the dilemma of locating marginalized voices in archival collections, scholars have turned their attention to the methods and strategies of the production of archives. They have recognized that in order to address the paucity of records on the previously disadvantaged communities, the parameters of what ordinarily would be considered the “historical archive” have to be enlarged.<sup>6</sup> They propose that the focus of historical enquiry should move away from the “grand narratives” that present history as “simply a series of event-driven, dramatic interruptions to normality”<sup>7</sup> to include the voices from outside the dominant political realm, situated in the everyday life situations in which these ordinary people find themselves.<sup>8</sup> In order to capture these experiences, the definition of archival material should be expanded if researchers become aware of “alternative historical material available to us when we wander outside conventional ‘houses of history’”.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the notion of a centralized archive as sole custodian of a nation’s memories has to change to allow marginalized communities and groups outside the archival discipline to bring together and control their own collections.<sup>10</sup>

By providing a platform that enables different historical narratives to be heard, archives will not only document the past, but also enable communities to negotiate, honour and celebrate their different identities within the larger national unit. This recognition will allow previously

marginalised groups a place within the national history and memory, which in turn could empower these communities.<sup>11</sup>

In this article, I will focus on community-based embroidered story cloths projects as means to give black South African women a voice in the archival process. In South Africa it is acknowledged that for many years black women in particular bore the brunt of discrimination. One could describe their position as a “triple denial”: the repression they suffered and still do to a certain extent, in their traditional societies and under colonialism compounded by the apartheid system, have made black South African women the most marginalised of the marginalised.

Since the early 1980’s a number of embroidery projects have been established in previously disadvantaged communities. Apart from economic empowerment, the aim of the projects has been to encourage participants to discuss and to “write down” their stories through the means of embroidered story cloths. Advocates of the projects propose that these offer a means and a space for previously marginalised groups to be actively involved in the establishment of an archive to preserve the stories and memories of their particular group and/or locality on their own terms. Furthermore, they claim that despite the lack of “an overtly articulated political agenda”,<sup>12</sup> the story cloth projects provide a means to “[l]ocate the voices of the silenced native”<sup>13</sup> women in the archival discussion. In a country that has suffered under the oppressive regimes of the colonial and apartheid governments which disrupted people’s lives and destroyed communities, the question could be asked as to how projects, that depict a “still point” in a country actively pursuing revolutionary change, can result in a more popular and democratised history?

I consider the contribution embroidered story cloth projects could make in constructing a more inclusive history, in adding another perspective to the history of South Africa and possibly democratising the historical record. As a practical example, I will focus on the Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation (MCADF) embroidery story cloth project, referring to similar projects in South Africa as well as abroad.<sup>14</sup>

First, I will consider story cloths as potential archival records and rhetorical tools for previously marginalised groups.

Second I will discuss the content of story cloths, using examples from the the Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives (MEAA). The women who create the story cloths are defined as “illiterate” and “uneducated” according to Western categorisation, highlighting the fact that they have been excluded from “traditional” archives due to the insistence on written records. In addition, as their lives are confined to the quotidian environment of the household, their experiences have seldom, if ever, been recorded.<sup>15</sup> When studying the contents of the story cloths, one is struck by the wealth of information contained therein and come to the realization that “apparent victory of proclaiming the settlers as the true bearers of the territory and the history, and by rendering indigenous people and their claim absent, was actually a failure”,<sup>16</sup> thereby contesting the very foundations of apartheid.

In conclusion, I will consider the importance of incorporating embroidery story cloth projects into the national memory and archives, with specific reference to the South African context where under colonial and apartheid rule “official or publicly sanctioned memories and histories were shaped around silences and lies.”<sup>17</sup> The aim is to illustrate the contribution their stories could make in constructing a representative national memory and more importantly, how black women can be reinstated as “citizens – at least symbolically – in historic continuity and legitimacy”.<sup>18</sup>

### **Story cloth voices**

In craft art literature the term “story cloth” is used to define a form of narrative, pictorial textile craft art, presenting single scenes and descriptive sequences in either embroidery and/or appliqué.

Historical scholarship has been considered as “a mastery of historical material and logical reasoning”.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, for many centuries, women have been excluded from the study and writing of history as critics thought that “women were considered incapable of such feats”.<sup>20</sup> Yet, the Bayeux tapestry, one of the best-known examples of a story cloth, is considered an authoritative archival source.<sup>21</sup> Since the early eighteenth century, it has attracted attention from a large and diverse group of scholars as it is an early source of information on the Norman Conquest of England (1067). Even today, this embroidery’s sophisticated narrative structure attracts scholarly attention.<sup>22</sup>

In contemporary society, story cloths are still created in a number of cultures. Most of these projects are found in former colonies, which currently are confronting the economic, political and social challenges of their colonial pasts. The women who participate in these projects have been excluded from the archival process due to their gender, race or socio-economic position.<sup>23</sup>

Over the past three decades a number of scholars have looked at story cloths as potential rhetorical tools, <sup>24</sup> enabling an under-represented group of women to occupy their rightful place in national projects of “remembering” and of “belonging”.<sup>25</sup> The conclusion of their research is that story cloths are indeed “key texts that enact concepts of historicity, cultural identification, intercultural communication, and collective action”,<sup>26</sup> and that the embroidery projects indeed provide women with meaningful way of contributing to the democratic dispensation by reinstating and repositioning women’s histories. This in turn confirms the women’s worth, dignity and agency, thereby empowering them with “a sense of participation in the rebuilding of a nation’s collective history”.<sup>27</sup>

Considering story cloths as archival records represent a noticeable aspect of widening the scope of what is considered an archival record and a definite move away from written and therefore “stable” records as was deemed preferable by traditional archivists and historians.<sup>28</sup> It entails opening up to alternative, often hidden, perspectives to the mainstream historical narrative. This is more democratic as it allows voices from below to be heard<sup>29</sup> enabling the production of alternative histories or modes of knowledge<sup>30</sup>, providing alternative ways of dealing with the past and alternative forms of historical documentation and of transmitting historical knowledge<sup>31</sup> and creating alternative and independent spaces of archiving.<sup>32</sup>

### **Documenting everyday life**

As mentioned previously, unlike the “grand narratives of the histories of apartheid”,<sup>33</sup> story cloths reveal the everyday struggles of black South African women. Common to the majority of the embroidery projects is that these were founded as a means to relieve the abject poverty, which cripples many former apartheid-created homelands as well as townships for migrant labourers near mining and industrial towns. The hope was that these projects could provide the women with some form of income. It soon became evident that the stories captured on these embroideries, offer a unique glimpse into the daily activities and the culture of the

community.<sup>34</sup> In terms of the time frame, the story cloths contain for the most part depictions of contemporary life, spanning from the 1980s, when the majority of the projects were founded, to the current day. As the images are positioned within the social context, scholars of popular culture and textile experts have compared the cloths to newspaper headlines or comic strip posters as each cloth is a form of social and political pictorial commentary on contemporary popular culture.<sup>35</sup> The craft artists' keen sense of observation and attention to detail make these cloths valuable sources from which to glean such information.

According to Andrew Flinn the importance of a project that portrays everyday life is measured by the extent to which it not only is "motivated by the desire to celebrate and recover every voice".<sup>36</sup> Rather "whether the project, in a critical sense, wishes to go further by exploring areas of difficulty and complexity in the group's or community's history, histories that might challenge the community as well as reinforce any preconceptions about identity".<sup>37</sup> He points out that archives and history-making activities which go beyond acts of celebration and build upon the acts of recovery, "offer something more compelling, discursive, and ultimately more impactful".<sup>38</sup> In line with this, Antoinette Burton points out that the "fragments of [women's] lives and dramas that we have only glimpses of, serve as testimony to fugitive work of gender and the fleeting presence of women as subjects in the past".<sup>39</sup> She is of the opinion that these stories can tell us more about a specific country's history than monographs or textbooks.<sup>40</sup>

McEwan therefore considers it critical that the "memories of people who experience the minutiae of social and community life under apartheid should not be lost or erased in old or new forms of grandiose history writing".<sup>41</sup> For that reason, in several cases archives and or museums have been established to house the cloths created by the various projects. In the case of the MCADF, Dr Elbé Coetsee, the founder and director of the foundation, established the Mogalakwena Research Centre, acting on her strong conviction that research in the region should be encouraged. Recognising that these story cloths serve as a resource of information on the contemporary culture in the Blouberg area, Coetsee has also put in place measures to catalogue and contextualise them. In 2010 Katrin Schmitter, a scholar from Switzerland, worked at the Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre, focusing on cataloguing and categorising photographs of embroidered panels in specific categories. In the cataloguing of the cloths, the following broad themes have emerged: Business, Trading and Transport; Education; Environment and nature; Farming and hunting; Governance; Health and healing; Religion and

faith; Sport and leisure; Traditional dance, song and entertainment; Traditional skills and customs; Village life; Food and recipes.<sup>42</sup> This process of documentation was been expanded and Petra Terreblanche, an anthropologist with extensive experience in the indigenous cultures of the Limpopo Province, was employed to research and document additional information pertaining to the various categories of story cloths. Terreblanche conducted her work at the Craft Art Centre and regularly interviewed the craft artists on specific aspects pertaining to the story cloths. This could be considered as another way of ensuring that the women are part of the archival process.<sup>43</sup> It is only since late 1970s that research gradually started to appear on urban black women. However, archival sources used rarely included oral testimony of the women themselves and on their own perceptions of their own roles as wives and mothers.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the majority of the research was done by white historians, “reflecting the patterns of racial exclusion and hierarchy that structure South African academic institutions”.<sup>45</sup> Story cloth projects on the other hand allow rural women to be actively involved in the creation, collection, appraisal and contextualisation of their own records.

Where possible, the cloths have been dated and the information included in the archives. These measures are important in ensuring the integrity and contextualisation of the story cloths as archival sources. However, the lack of specific dates, as well as the fact that the craft artists revisit certain themes is a characteristic of the study of the everyday. It indicates a move away from the linear or chronological narratives that characterised the records found in traditional archives, towards an approach which is not necessarily quantifiable, but which allows for the mundane and repetitive quotidian practices to be recorded.

In the portrayal of their “world”, it becomes evident that the communities in which the story cloth projects are situated showed very little development of any kind. Little investment in infrastructure was made in the former homelands and many of these areas only received basic services after 1994. As indicated earlier, the craft artists have emphasised the impact receiving electricity and running water has had on their lives, especially not having to perform the arduous tasks of collecting firewood and water. This is also visible in the story cloths. Electricity poles, electric lights and taps, even if it is only an outside tap, that allows them to water their vegetable garden, are clearly depicted.<sup>46</sup> (Figure 1) Having services such as banking being established in some of the rural settlements has also made it possible for them to manage



**Figure 1.** Sinah Matikitela & Paulina Makobela, Photograph 4.17 Serapaneng. Gathering fruit, 2008. Embroidery, Coll. Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives (MEAA).





**Figure 2.** Paulina Makobela, Photograph 1.33 Alldays post office, 2008. Embroidery, Coll. Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives (MEAA).



**Figure 3.** Anna Mphe, Photograph 11.1 Anna Mphe's House. 2006. Embroidery, Coll. Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives (MEAA).



**Figure 4.** Sinah Matikitela, Photograph 11.16 Lapa La Ga Makobela, 2007. Embroidery, Coll. Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives (MEAA).

their money.<sup>47</sup> In several story cloths either a bank or the post office where money can be drawn and deposited with the cashiers safely behind a barred counter are depicted.<sup>48</sup> (Figure 2)

Many people construct their own houses to save costs, but a number have also received Reconstruction and Development Project (RDP) houses.<sup>49</sup> These rectangular structures with corrugated iron roofs are easily identifiable on the story cloths, often next to a more traditional thatch roof hut.<sup>50</sup> (Figure 3) Despite having received electricity and running water, the majority cannot afford electric household appliances and many homes are still without a bathroom. The story cloths dealing with village life give an idea of what it entails to run a household for these women: although they no longer have to make their own soap and can buy brand named washing powder, clothes are still washed in the river and babies and young children are washed in a zinc basin outside the house. In many households cooking is done on an open fire outside.<sup>51</sup> (Figure 4)

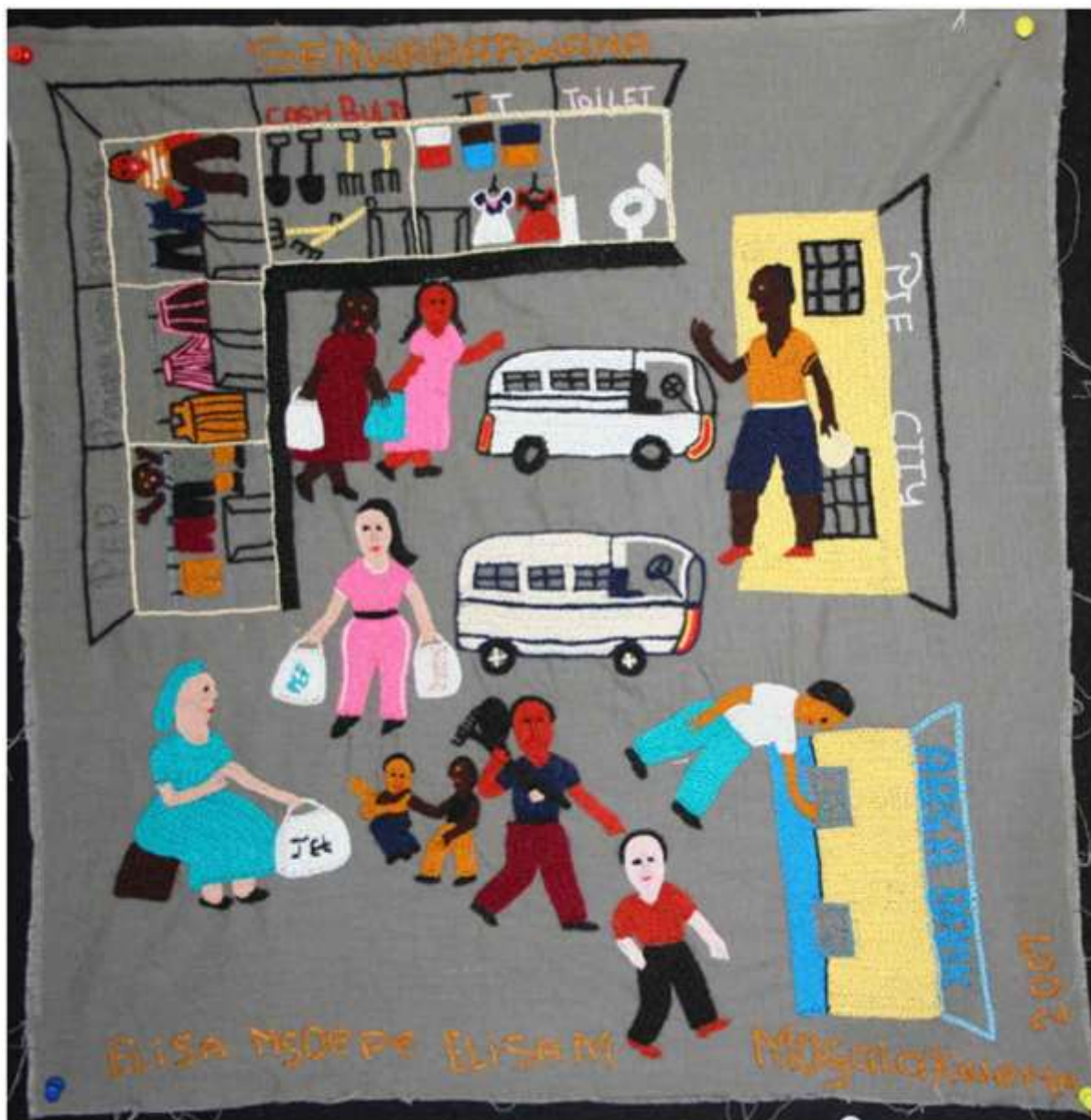
In addition to the lack of development, the isolation and rural setting have contributed to a far more traditional lifestyle been maintained. However, urban influences are encroaching and the meeting of the rural, almost old-fashioned way of life with a more modern life can be seen.<sup>52</sup> (Figure 5) The many examples of taxi ranks and taxis show their dependence on this more informal means of public transport as the majority cannot afford a motor vehicle.<sup>53</sup> (Figure 6) Migrant labour is very much part of their lives and mention is made in the accompanying text of workers stopping at the local fuel station before continuing with their journey home.<sup>54</sup> In contrast with the more “dramatic” memories of those who participated in the liberation struggle, and which is well documented, these portrayals underline how apartheid, in the long term, impacted on the black population of South Africa, making them political and economic outsiders in their own country.

An aspect of great importance to the women is ensuring that their children receive a good education. A number of local schools feature in the stories of the MCADF with accompanying text such as “Education is light”.<sup>55</sup> Although all the figures on the cloths are neatly dressed in school uniforms and are smiling, the lack of facilities is clearly visible. These schools merely consist of two or three classrooms with outside toilets and with no essential facilities such as a school hall or sport grounds.<sup>56</sup> (Figure 7) Amongst the story cloths on education is one telling





**Figure 5.** Paulina Makobela & Elisa Mangka, Photograph 1.18 Le benkele, 2007. Embroidery, Coll. Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives (MEAA).



**Figure 6.** Elisa Mangka, Photograph 11.27 Senwabarwana, 2007. Embroidery, Coll. Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives (MEAA).



**Figure 7.** Asnath Makabila, Photograph 2.4 Modikwa School, 2005. Embroidery, Coll. Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives (MEAA).

of the feeding scheme at a local nursery school, which was necessitated by the large number of orphans left in the wake of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.<sup>57</sup> (Figure 8)

However, story cloths also allow the craft artists to celebrate aspects of significance in their lives. Receiving the right to vote in 1994 has been an important event in their lives and several story cloths have been completed depicting meetings of the Blouberg municipal council.<sup>58</sup> The fact that a woman has been elected mayor is important to these women who are accustomed not to have a say in the traditional power structures and mayoress Refilfoe is by far the largest physical figure portrayed on the story cloth.<sup>59</sup> (Figure 9)

A large number of story cloths depict the performance of certain song and dance rituals called *mokang-kanyane*<sup>60</sup> or *manthlakalane*.<sup>61</sup> This, as well as the great detail in which the different traditional costumes worn by the various groups are portrayed, could be seen as an indicator of the importance of these for the women. (Figure 10) J.A. van Schalkwyk as well as Joubert note that the song genre of the *mokang-kanyane* provide these women with “culturally defined spaces” in which they can give commentary on community matters and social experiences and this genre allows them the freedom of expression to even mock the chief or their husbands.<sup>62</sup> These are also evident in the story cloths.

Furthermore, having the opportunity to observe the everyday life of these women by way of story cloths provides an indictment against colonialism and apartheid, which were built on the belief that the way of life of indigenous cultures was inferior. The ability to produce story cloths through which their own stories as black, marginalised women are told, challenges this notion of stagnancy and establishes them as producers of knowledge.<sup>63</sup> Through their work, these women challenge the perceived notion of history and archives as “grand narratives” that represent sites of public, political and masculine thinking. Women’s memories and writings of their lives in the domestic realm constitute legitimate, reliable and valuable historical archives as much as the “disciplinarily-sanctioned public offices”. The creation of story cloths archives show that these too involve processes of selection and interpretation in their creation and maintenance and neither public nor community archive is more valid nor more important as a historical source than the other.<sup>64</sup>





**Figure 8.** Paulina Makobela & Selina Phukela, Photograph 2.2 Mabusha Preschool, 2012. Embroidery, Coll. Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives (MEAA).



**Figure 9.** Elisa Ngoepe, Photograph 5.3 Blouberg municipality. s.a. Embroidery, Coll. Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives (MEAA).



**Figure 10.** Elisa Mangka, Photograph 9.21 Mokankanyane, 2007. s.a. Embroidery, Coll. Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives (MEAA).

Seeing the positive reception of the story cloths over the years in terms of their artists' merit and especially their research value on a national and international level, the craft artists have started to realise the importance of this project. Having their lives already disrupted due to forced removals, migration and rural impoverishment, the recognition of their voices could provide some sense of stability and continuity.<sup>65</sup> Staff members of the various projects, as well as returning researchers, have observed a change in the craft artists in terms of self-confidence.<sup>66</sup> In the case of the MCADF the craft artists' initial sense of unimportance, brought on by years of being disregarded and discriminated against, is evident in the fact that the initial story cloths' imagery was very small. Coetsee points out that she has never specified the size of the imagery, but gradually, over time, as the women's self-confidence has grown large colourful images that fill the cloth have replaced the earlier small designs. Furthermore, only in 2005, eleven years after the establishment of the Foundation, did the members start to put their names on the story cloths as they had felt confident enough to be recognised for their individual contributions.<sup>67</sup>

The same argument can possibly be put forward for the women's decision to add explanatory text to the story cloths – as they became more self-assured, they felt the need to share and explain their stories.<sup>68</sup> Stott argues that the “art work, the act of creativity (reconstituted memory) constitutes the pivotal ‘new story’ where the women experiment with new self-images for new futures. The act of creativity transforms the senselessness of suffering from hopelessness to an understanding of it.”<sup>69</sup> This newly found confidence can be seen as a form of empowerment.

Celia de Villiers, the co-ordinator of the Intuthuko Sewing Group, also mentions that the combined effects of a guaranteed income and the fact that the women know that their work will be appreciated internationally, has had an effect on their self-esteem. Furthermore, she remarks that it “definitely makes them innovative and motivates them to uphold their reputation concerning their skill and artistry”.<sup>70</sup> This aspect is also mentioned by Laura Lepionka in her research on the story cloth projects in India. She points out that when the story cloths were introduced as income-generating projects, the craftswomen “poured their innermost feelings through talented fingers”<sup>71</sup> which not only empowered them economically but also psychologically. If the role of arts and craft as “instruments” to make sense of one's world is considered, as well as the observation by Francis Blouin and William Rosenberg that archives

represent “artifacts of culture” that indicate “who we are and why”,<sup>72</sup> story cloths could be seen as the means through which marginalised women can make sense of their lives.

These projects have helped to develop an identity based on a sense of worth<sup>73</sup> and pride in the positive contribution their stories can make in their respective countries.<sup>74</sup> This delight in their work and strengthened cultural awareness are evident in a number of embroidery projects in South Africa and countries such as Palestine and India. It is echoed in statements from craft artists such as “Embroidery is our heritage. We love embroidery... and we are proud of it”<sup>75</sup> and “[t]he patience and labour expended on them would not tire us out because we would feel happy and proud with the sense of achievement”.<sup>76</sup>

The importance of the role shared memory can play in forging new forms of belonging and making sense of the world is explained on the Kaross<sup>TM</sup> Foundation’s website:

This awareness of who you are within a more global environment is an important concept in terms of sustainable development and the upliftment of people. There exists a need for women in the rural areas of South Africa, [...] to acknowledge and explore their own capacity to take part in making a difference in their communities and South Africa as a whole.<sup>77</sup>

The celebration of the Craft Art Centre, the Blouberg area, as well as the Limpopo province that is portrayed through their embroideries, is testament of the craft artists of Mogalakwena’s sense of pride and belonging. Just like the women of other embroidery projects, their position has changed from what Schmahmann describes in her article on the Mapula Embroidery project as follows: “from inadvertent residents of [a] homeland ... to South African citizens capable of enjoying full civil rights.”<sup>78</sup>

### **Story cloth value**

It is apparent that the impact of story cloth creation is visible and measurable in terms of newly gained confidence and economic benefits. However, in the final assessment the question also needs to be answered whether an archive that results from a community project such as the MCADF embroidered story cloths can make a contribution on a national level. Both Flinn and McEwan argue that local-level community memory schemes all have the potential, if supported and preserved, to create a postcolonial archive that will encompass beliefs and ideas about the past that help a public or society understand both its past, present and by implication its future.<sup>79</sup>



They indicate that such projects can “challenge and subvert the authority of mainstream histories and archives”,<sup>80</sup> “counteract archival violence of the past”<sup>81</sup> and add an alternative perspective to South African history.

Several scholars have highlighted the consequences of the “endemic gender-blindness”<sup>82</sup> that had characterised South African historiography until recently. There has been a growing recognition that “there is precious little men’s history that can be divorced either from women’s contributions or, perhaps more importantly, from men’s pervasive consciousness of and attempts to enforce women’s subordination”.<sup>83</sup> Claire Robertson points out that “[w]ithout the inclusion of women, without the consideration of people as gendered beings, our historical vision is so impaired as to be unacceptably inaccurate”.<sup>84</sup> In a similar vein Helen Bradford concludes that

if women are omitted, or trivialized, or not examined with the same rigour automatically accorded men, then the price is frequently interpretations with limited purchase on the past. Numerous analyses of key events or processes - class formation, the emergence of ‘democracy’, black resistance, mass starvation - are flawed by the inapplicability of interpretations to the female majority, or by the impossibility of accounting for these phenomena without according serious attention to women.<sup>85</sup>

Elaine Unterhalter underlines the necessity of autobiographical writings in post-apartheid South Africa. According to her such writings

have created a new language through which forms of recognitional justice, particularly concerning race, can be acknowledged. They suggest a form of ethics through remembering. ... In recognising a common humanity, a new society, a new orientation beyond the fragments, conditions may begin to be established that allow gender, race and class inequalities to be addressed. ... Attending to the truths others tell in word that may be framed by memory, and in formats that are sometimes unsettling because they are not the ‘master narratives’ is part of that task.<sup>86</sup>

In the foreword to *To remember and to heal: Theological and psychological perspectives on truth and reconciliation*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu underlines the importance of “storytelling” in South Africa. He refers to a quote from Ellen Kuzwayo, namely that “Africa is a place of storytelling. We need more stories, never mind how painful the exercise may be. ... Stories help us to understand, to forgive and to see things through someone else’s eyes”.<sup>87</sup>

For black women specifically “the simple act of publicly telling a story in their own language has provided, and continues to provide, a sense of symbolic liberation.”<sup>88</sup>

The necessity to include the voices of specifically black women in the South African national narrative extends beyond being merely an attempt to establish a more comprehensive history of South Africa. Susan Geiger’s observation that women’s life histories need to be acknowledged to understand the impact of colonialism and urbanisation is therefore of particular importance in the South African context.<sup>89</sup> Scholars<sup>90</sup> agree that in order for South Africa to develop into a stable and equitable democracy, there is a need for opportunities that allow for the recalling, retelling and “re-membering” of the past. The voices of black women are essential to shape the nation and citizenship and the “central role that women play in consolidating the building of nation, homes and communities”<sup>91</sup> have to be acknowledged.

In terms of democratising the historical record and acknowledging the agency of ordinary women, story cloths, as community memory craft art projects, could be seen as a step towards addressing the absence of women in history and their role in contributing to the collective memory acknowledged. These projects provide a means that enables black South African women to communicate despite cultural differences and language barriers and present them with a vehicle and a space to articulate their experiences.<sup>92</sup> Story cloth projects contribute towards giving them agency and confer a “sense of belonging and which embeds the notion of recognising individuals’ social standing and their historical agency”.<sup>93</sup> In addition these could be seen as the physical manifestation of a move beyond the archival institution as sole “repository”.<sup>94</sup>

This then could be considered the value of community memory projects: they add to the notion that the creation of a postcolonial, post-apartheid inclusive memory archive is significant firstly in memorialising the past, and not only the privileged master narratives, but by keeping multiple versions of a country’s history alive. This includes memories of fracture and dissonance and by resisting “various kinds of amnesia”.<sup>95</sup> A number of scholars consider such memory projects as being of “considerable urgency” as they are seen as playing an “important activist role” by starting to fill the “great blank space of still repressed memory in South Africa.”<sup>96</sup> Their mere existence and the stories they tell could possibly assist researchers in the construction of “an inclusive local and national heritage in which all communities, all relations

and interactions are included”.<sup>97</sup> If these stories could be stitched together, they could possibly connect “people to places, communities and traditions, and thus contribute to a wider social justice agenda”<sup>98</sup> which in turn could result in a multi-faceted memory of society within a representative archive.<sup>99</sup>



- <sup>1</sup> Olick and Robbins, "Social memory studies," 126-127.
- <sup>2</sup> Cook, "Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth," 17.
- <sup>3</sup> Ibid.; Johnston, "Whose history is it anyway?," 213-214; Fox-Genovese, "Placing women's history in history," 133.
- <sup>4</sup> McKemmish, Faulkhead and Russell, "Distrust in the archives," 218.
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid., 212.
- <sup>6</sup> Stoler, "Colonial archives and the arts of governance," 88-91.
- <sup>7</sup> Moran, "History, memory and the everyday," 57.
- <sup>8</sup> Cook, "Fashionable nonsense or professional rebirth," 17; Ballantyne, "Mr Peal's archive," 103-104; Perry, "The colonial archive on trial," 345; Harris, "Claiming less, delivering more," 132-141.
- <sup>9</sup> Glassie, *Material culture*, 44; Deetz, *In small things forgotten*, 5; Rowat, "The record and repository as a cultural form of expression," 203; Shilton and Srinivasan, "Participatory appraisal and arrangement for multicultural archival collections," 87-101; Woollacut, "Women writing history," 185-186.
- <sup>10</sup> McKemmish, Faulkhead and Russell, "Distrust in the archives," 217.
- <sup>11</sup> Seremetakis (ed.), *The senses still*, 64; Edensor, *National identity, popular culture and everyday life*, 14; McKemmish, Faulkhead and Russell, "Distrust in the archives," 217.
- <sup>12</sup> Flinn, "Archival activism," 9.
- <sup>13</sup> Manoff, "Theories of the archive from across the discipline," 15.
- <sup>14</sup> South African story cloth projects include Kaross™, the Keiskamma, Mapula and Tambani embroidery projects, the Mogalakwena Craft Art Development Foundation (MCADF), and the Intuthuko Sewing Group. International story cloth projects include countries such as Mexico, India, Palestine and Vietnam.
- <sup>15</sup> Taylor, "Women in the documents," 189; Woollacut, "Women writing history," 191.
- <sup>16</sup> Perry, "The colonial archive on trial", p .345.
- <sup>17</sup> Pohlandt-McCormick, "In good hands," 299-300.
- <sup>18</sup> Jewsiewicki, "Historical memory," 62.
- <sup>19</sup> Hatavara, "Fredrika Runeberg's strategies in writing history of Finnish women," 153.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> This story cloth is in fact an embroidered work, despite the use of the term "tapestry".
- <sup>22</sup> Owen-Crocker, *The Bayeux Tapestry*.
- <sup>23</sup> Lepionka, "Visible links," 176; Livingstone and Ploof, *The object of labor*.
- <sup>24</sup> Peterson, "Translating experience and the reading of a story cloth," 6; Joubert, "Memory embroidered"; Schmahmann (ed.), *Material Matters*, 119-136; Arnold and Schmahmann, *Between union and liberation*; Schmahmann, "A framework for recuperation."
- <sup>25</sup> Botha, "Amazwi Abesifazane"; Becker, "Amazwi Abesifazane: Voices of women"; McEwan, "Building a postcolonial archive?," 270.
- <sup>26</sup> Peterson, 13.
- <sup>27</sup> Stott, *The reconstitution of African women's spiritualities*, 16.
- <sup>28</sup> Nichols, "An artifact by any other name," 138.
- <sup>29</sup> Fidelis, "Recovering women's voices in Poland," 116.
- <sup>30</sup> Bastian, "Reading colonial records through an archival lens," 273; Brockmeier, "Remembering and forgetting," 21.
- <sup>31</sup> Ketelaar, "Archives as spaces of memory," 9; Perry, "The colonial archive on trial," 343; Steedman, *Dust. The archive and cultural history*, 103.
- <sup>32</sup> Goodwin, "Revealing new narratives of women in Las Vegas," 177, 184; Kumbier, "Ephemeral material," 58-60; Taylor, *The archive and the repertoire*. 20; Fritzsche, "The archive and the case of the German Nation," 197; Olick and Robbins, "Social memory studies," 126; McEwan, "Building a postcolonial archive," 747.
- <sup>33</sup> McEwan, "Building a postcolonial archive?," 750.
- <sup>34</sup> Joubert, "Memory embroidered," 97-126.
- <sup>35</sup> Lepionka, "Visible links," 167, 171-172, 175.
- <sup>36</sup> Flinn, "Archival activism," 9.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>39</sup> Burton, "Foreword," vi.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> McEwan, "Building a postcolonial archive?," 754.

- <sup>42</sup> Written information: Dr E. Coetsee, 2013-06-04.
- <sup>43</sup> Personal information: Mrs P. Terreblanche, 2013-01-14; Written information: Dr E. Coetsee, 2013-06-04.
- <sup>44</sup> Hay, "Prostitutes and peasants," 436-437.
- <sup>45</sup> Manicom, "Ruling relations," 442.
- <sup>46</sup> MEAA. Category 3: Environment and Nature. Photograph 3.10; Category 4: Farming and hunting. Photographs 4.12; 4.26; 4.31; 11: Village life. Photograph 11.16.
- <sup>47</sup> Personal information: Mrs A. Jooste, 2013-01-14.
- <sup>48</sup> MEAA. Category 1: Business, Trading and Transport. Photographs 1.112; 1.16-1.17; 1.33-1.34.
- <sup>49</sup> The RDP was implemented after the first democratic elections in 1994. According to the government's policy document on development it is an integrated, coherent socio-economic policy framework, which "seeks to mobilise all our people and our country's resources toward the final eradication of apartheid and the building of a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist future." The Nelson Mandela Organisation.
- <sup>50</sup> MEAA. Category 11: Village life. Photographs 11.1; 11.17; 11.19; 11.22; 11.29; 11.31.
- <sup>51</sup> MEAA. Category 11: Village life. Photographs 11.11; 11.16; 11.20.
- <sup>52</sup> MEAA. Category 1: Business, Trading and Transport. Photograph 1.18 & 11.29.
- <sup>53</sup> MEAA. Category 1: Business, Trading and Transport. Photographs 1.1-1.2; 1.4-1.7; Category 11: Village life. Photographs 11.15; 11.26-11.27.
- <sup>54</sup> MEAA. Category 1: Business, Trading and Transport. Photographs 1.3-1.4.
- <sup>55</sup> Mogalakwena Ethnographic Art Archives (MEAA). Category 2: Education. Photograph 2.4.
- <sup>56</sup> MEAA. Category 2: Education. Photographs 2.2-2.6; 2.9.
- <sup>57</sup> MEAA. Category 2: Education. Photograph 2.1.
- <sup>58</sup> MEAA. Category 5: Governance. Photographs 5.4-5.9; 5.14; Category 11: Village life. Photograph 11.34.
- <sup>59</sup> MEAA. Category 5: Governance. Photograph 5.3.
- <sup>60</sup> MEAA. Category 9: Dancing and Entertainment. Photographs 9.1; 9.2; 9.4; 9.17; 9.19-9.25.
- <sup>61</sup> MEAA. Category 9: Dancing and Entertainment. Photographs 9.4; 9.5; 9.12; 9.13.
- <sup>62</sup> Van Schalkwyk, "Ideologie en konstruksie van 'n landelike samelewing," 221-223; Joubert, "Memory embroidered," 108-109, 115.
- <sup>63</sup> Becker, "Amazwi Abesifazane: voices of women," 115-116.
- <sup>64</sup> Woollacut, "Women writing history," 185-186; Burton, "Dwelling in the archive."
- <sup>65</sup> Van der Merwe, "Story cloths as a counter-archive," 64-68; Bennett and Watson, *Understanding everyday life*, 352.
- <sup>66</sup> Krüger and Verster, "Development debate and practice," 245.
- <sup>67</sup> Interview author with MCADF Craft artists, Mogalakwena Craft Art Centre, 14 and 15 January 2013.
- <sup>68</sup> Olick and Robbins, "Social memory studies," 110.
- <sup>69</sup> Stott, "The reconstitution of African women's spiritualities," 40.
- <sup>70</sup> Header, "African Threads."
- <sup>71</sup> Lepionka, "Visible links," 161.
- <sup>72</sup> Blouin and Rosenberg, *Archives, documentation and institutions of social memory*, vii.
- <sup>73</sup> Olick and Robbins, "Social memory studies," 110.
- <sup>74</sup> Written information Dr. E. Coetsee, 2013-06-18.
- <sup>75</sup> Allenby, "Re-inventing cultural heritage," 107-108.
- <sup>76</sup> Maskiell, "Embroidering the past," 381.
- <sup>77</sup> Kaross.
- <sup>78</sup> Schmahmann, "Stitches as sutures," 59.
- <sup>79</sup> McEwan, "Building a postcolonial archive?" 742; Flinn, "Archival activism," 4; Flinn, Stevens and Shepherd, "Whose memories, whose archives?," 76.
- <sup>80</sup> Flinn, "Community histories, community archives," 165.
- <sup>81</sup> McEwan, "Building a Postcolonial Archive?" 742.
- <sup>82</sup> Manicom, "Ruling relations," 463.
- <sup>83</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Feminism without illusions*, 144.
- <sup>84</sup> Robertson, "Never underestimate the power of women," 440, 450.
- <sup>85</sup> Bradford, "Women, gender and colonialism," 352.
- <sup>86</sup> Unterhalter, "Truth rather than justice?" 112-113.
- <sup>87</sup> Tutu, "Foreword," 7.
- <sup>88</sup> McEwan, "Building a postcolonial archive?" 755.
- <sup>89</sup> Van der Merwe, "Story cloths as a counter-archive," 17, Geiger, "Women's life histories," 343-346.
- <sup>90</sup> McEwan, "Building a postcolonial archive?" 752; Josias, *Toward an understanding of archives*, 107; Klein, "On the emergence of memory," 130, 144; Butler, "'Othering' the archives," 68.
- <sup>91</sup> McEwan, "Building a postcolonial archive?" 752.
- <sup>92</sup> Becker, "Amazwi Abesifazane," 115-116; Lepionka, "Visible links," 747-748.

<sup>93</sup> McEwan, "Building a postcolonial archive?" 740-741.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 754.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 739, 753-755.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 739.

<sup>97</sup> Flinn, "Community histories, community archives," 161.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 161-162, 165; Robertson, "Mechanisms of Exclusion", 69.

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