

## THE 'CAPE MALAY' CULTURE AS REPRESENTED IN THE SOUTH END MUSEUM AND THE DR. NORTIER'S ROOIBOS MUSEUM<sup>1</sup>

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### **Die "Kaapse Maleier"-kultuur soos verteenwoordig in die South End Museum en die Dr Nortier-Rooibos Museum**

Die kultuur- en godsdienstryke van die Moslem-gemeenskap oor drie eeue in Suid-Afrika is 'n besonder noemenswaardige erfenis. Plaaslike museums in die Kaap huisves veral van die artefakte as deel van hulle permanente uitstallings, terwyl kleiner versamelings soms as tydelike uitstallings uitgestal word. In hierdie artikel word veral klem gelê op 'n paar geselekteerde 'Kaapse Maleier' artefakte en ander items wat op 'n permanente basis uitgestal word by die Dr Nortier Rooibos Museum in Shah Alam (Maleisië). Die kleiner versameling artefakte wat op 'n tydelik basis gedurende April en Oktober 2008 uitgestal was by die South End Museum in Port Elizabeth word ook toegelig. Afgesien van die beskrywing van die artefakte in hierdie artikel, is die doel ook die plasing van hierdie uitstallings binne 'n groter internasionale konteks rakende ontwikkeling, en ten opsigte van die status van museumtransformasie in Suid-Afrika.

**Sleutelwoorde:** Museum, Uitstalling, Maleisië, Suid-Afrika, Kaapse Maleier, Dr. Nortiers, South End, Verteenwoordigende uitstallings

The Muslim community has made a rich input towards religion and culture in South Africa over the past three centuries. At the Cape it has treasured and preserved artifacts and items that have been the central ingredients of its evolving religio-cultural identity. As a consequence of its relatively sizeable heritage, the Cape Malay heritage's representatives in the form of religious and cultural bodies have, to a large extent, set aside artifacts and preserved them in the local museums; some of these

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<sup>1</sup> This researcher wishes to thank the 'South African Museum Association' for permitting him to present this paper in his absence at the SAMA Conference (23-27 June 2008). And he also expresses his gratitude to Messrs Ebrahim Salie (e-mail communication 29 August 2009) and Mogamat Kamedien (e-mail communication 28 August 2009), members of the Cape Family Forum, as well as anonymous readers for their critical observations of earlier drafts; each of them highlighted the essay's shortcomings and suggested ways of addressing these. Although this researcher did not manage to include all of their suggestions, an attempt was made to take much of what they had stated into account.

artifacts form part of permanent exhibitions, whilst smaller collections appear only as temporary travelling exhibits.

Although a part of this essay intends to focus on selected ‘Cape Malay’ artifacts and items that have been transferred and exhibited on a permanent basis at Dr. Nortier’s Rooibos Museum in Shah Alam (Malaysia), it also intends to bring into purview the small collection of artifacts that were temporarily exhibited in Port Elizabeth’s South End Museum between April and October 2008. Apart from describing the artifacts that have been and are on display in these two museums, the essay places these exhibitions within a larger context by connecting it to developments in South Africa regarding museum transformation and also questioning relevant policies associated with the use and preservation of ‘local’ heritage abroad.

**Keywords:** Museum, Exhibition, Malaysia, South Africa, Cape Malay, Dr. Nortiers, South End, Display Representation

## Introduction

Museums,<sup>2</sup> apart from being significant social institutions in housing and exhibiting historical artifacts, curiosities and items, remain critical structures in ‘identity formation.’ During the era of the South African apartheid state, its architects constructed and set up state funded and managed museums that contributed, secured and reflected its racist identity in all forms and shapes. The apartheid regime unashamedly reflected racialist ideology and reinforced its racist stratified identity in all forms and shapes. In line with its racist policies, the regime created special ‘spaces of difference’<sup>3</sup> in the form

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<sup>2</sup> See the document titled *Discussion Paper: Towards a New Provincial Museum Policy for the Western Cape*; it was issued and circulated by Western Cape’s Department of Cultural Affairs and Sports (WDCAS) during 2011. Herein it made reference to various definitions and here mention is made of two definitions given by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) and the South African Museum Association (SAMA); the former stated that a museum is ‘... a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment’ (see <http://icom.museum/>), and the latter mentioned that museums are places that ‘... dynamic and accountable public institutions which both shape and manifest the consciousness, identities and understanding of communities and individuals in relation to their natural, historical and cultural environments, through collection, documentation, conservation, research and education programmes that are responsive to the needs of society’. The authors of the ‘Draft National Museum Policy’ document commented that on p. 18 ICOM’s definition “does not address the role and purpose of museums within a cultural and social context, nor does it address the diversity of formats that museums can take.” And they continued stating that since “the ICOM definition is the operational definition generally used in Europe and Africa ...”, it is a useful starting point to interrogate against South African perspectives before developing a South African definition”.

<sup>3</sup> B. Lord, Foucault’s museum: difference, representation and genealogy, *Museum and Society* 4(1), 2006, p. 11.

of ‘cultural history museums.’ It did not only demonstrate how it accommodated other race groups (namely, Africans, Coloureds and Indians) within the apartheid system but it also showed how inferior their cultures and traditions were compared to those of the White/Afrikaner (and European) community. The exhibits and displays in these cultural historical museums have been noted as forged representations rather than authentic representations of the disadvantaged communities’ cultures; as a consequence of these misrepresentations, the traditions and cultures of the ‘other’ (disadvantaged) communities were negatively viewed and perceived by others/visitors/audience.<sup>4</sup> In this regard it is apt to make reference to Dominy who correctly stated that “cultural history museums were established to celebrate the triumph of white communities in South Africa” and he also noted that they “operated in the milieu of a segregated society.”<sup>5</sup>

## South African Community Museums



**Figure 1: Community Museums**

(Stamp Photographs: South End Museum:

<http://www.mype.co.za>” [www.mype.co.za](http://www.mype.co.za) and Bo Kaap Museum:

<http://www.izikomuseums.com>” [www.izikomuseums.com](http://www.izikomuseums.com))

<sup>4</sup> S. Watson (ed), *Museum and their Communities* (London 2007); S. A. Crane (ed), *Museum and Memory* (Stanford, 2000), and S.E. Weil, *A Cabinet of Curiosities: Inquiries into Museums and their prospects* (Washington, 1995).

<sup>5</sup> G. Dominy, The Politics of Museum Collecting in the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ South Africa, in S. J. Knell, *Museums and the Future of Collecting* (Aldershot, 2004), p.136.

The establishment and formation of these museums were specific representations by the respective colonial and apartheid regimes of the ‘other’; the two regimes were essentially responsible for crafting the identity of the South African society, and that of the growing ‘Cape Malay’ community, who formed a sub-set within the Cape Coloured community, into a racist one. The latter belonged to those communities who could and were not permitted to represent themselves except by the colonial government and thereafter by the apartheid state. Since these regimes grafted onto South Africa’s socio-cultural and historical landscape a system steeped in racism, communities such as the ‘Cape Malays’ still experience difficulty in shaking off the racist connotations associated with their inherited identity during the post-apartheid era. Although the display of the artifacts at the Bo-Kaap ‘Cape Malay’ Museum (est. 1978) in Cape Town reflected aspects of the identity of the Muslims at the Cape, it was essentially an exhibition of items that was constructed and fashioned to fit into the apartheid state’s racist policies. In fact, the mentioned museum was unlike the District Six Museum (est. 1994) that created ample space within which members of the community engaged one another in debates about their social history, their past political life, and their museum’s relevance in a post-apartheid period.<sup>6</sup>

And since only a handful of individuals was co-opted and worked with the apartheid state in the formation of the ‘Cape Malay’ Museum and willingly conformed to the demands of the policies, there were a few community activists and former members of the vibrant Cape Muslim Youth Movement (1957-1963) such as Tahir Levy and Thabit ‘Bali’ Booley who called into question the issue of representation of the museum when it was eventually established in 1978.<sup>7</sup> Towards the final years of the apartheid state a growing number of anti-apartheid Muslim activists, who preferred to employ the term ‘Cape Muslims’ as opposed to the term ‘Cape Malay’ – a contested designation since the 1950s (if not before), openly expressed their disapproval of these public institutions that they regarded and described as deeply racist in character.

From their vantage point, the ‘Cape Malay’ Museum reflected a distorted image of Muslims and as a consequence they publicly advocated that the museum not only be boycotted but rejected. As a religio-ethnic minority in a politically charged atmosphere, these anti-apartheid representatives influenced the larger community and thus struck an important cord that made the status of museums irrelevant in their eyes. These

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<sup>6</sup> C. Rasool, Community museums, memory politics, and social transformation in South Africa: histories, possibilities, and limits, in I. Karp, C. Kratz, L. Szwaja and T. Ybarra-Frausto, *Museum Frictions* (Durham, 2006), pp. 290-293. Also consult E. Rankin, Creating/Curating Cultural Capital: Monuments and Museums for Post-Apartheid South Africa, *Humanities* 2, 2013, pp. 72-98.

<sup>7</sup> Y. Larney, *The Establishment of the Cape Muslim Youth Movement (1957-1963) and the reawakening of Islam as an Ideology*, BA Honours Thesis University of the Western Cape History. 1990.

emotional responses and outbursts had an impact not only upon the psyche of the Cape Muslims but also on the Cape (anti-apartheid) society on the whole. However, during the post-apartheid South Africa, the status of all of these institutions has been radically transformed after having undergone a process of overhauling and renaming that was initiated by South Africa's Department of Arts and Culture.<sup>8</sup> Cape Town's Bo-Kaap 'Cape Malay' Museum was thus among those institutions that underwent a process of renovation and revamping and at present it is viewed through broader lenses and with a different understanding.

This essay, which highlights the question of representation with regards to the museum and exhibition, sets its sights on assessing and reviewing the nature of permanent museums and temporary exhibitions that celebrate and commemorate the heritage of the 'Cape Malays.' It, however, places this assessment and review within a broad historical context by taking into account the role that religio-cultural organizations have been playing in securing their cultural identity through the conservation and preservation of some of its extant heritage. And it, moreover, raises issues pertaining to the policy making processes regarding artifacts that are on display abroad.

### **The Question of Representation**

At the heart of the debate regarding the existence of museums and exhibitions is the question of representation. The concept of representation – like many others – has been a dynamic if not a problematic one; since scholars<sup>9</sup> have defined and explained it, this essay will rely on the useful insights shared by Durrans.<sup>10</sup> But before drawing upon Durrans' scholarly comments and interpretations, the essay first provides the dictionary meaning of the term to demonstrate its literal meaning.

According to the dictionary entry, the word conveys 'the act of representing' or 'the state of being represented.'<sup>11</sup> This literal meaning has further been elaborated by Mayhew when she stated that 'representations' are basically "(t)he ways in which meanings are formed, conveyed, and shared among members of social groups. These representations can be defined as culture, and cultural forms, notably language,

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<sup>8</sup> See the draft paper that was issued during 2011 by the South African Department of Arts and Culture ([www.dac.gov.za](http://www.dac.gov.za)) that requested for inputs regarding overhauling and revamping the Museums.

<sup>9</sup> For an informative text on the issue of representation one should read the edited text by Stuart Hall's chapter 'The work of Representation', in S.Hall (ed.). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. (Milton Keynes, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> B. Durrans, Museums, Representations and Cultural Property: Behind the scenes – Museums and Selective Criticisms, *Anthropology Today* 8(4), 1992, pp. 11-15.

<sup>11</sup> See the word 'representation' in: A.S. Hornby *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Oxford, 2000), p. 997 and S. Mayhew, *Webster's Dictionary* (Springfield, 2004).

(and) to some extent shape the reality they represent.”<sup>12</sup> And this implies that these representations may also be understood according to the discipline that is employed; i.e. it may be comprehended from an anthropological, sociological, political, and religious dimension. Based upon this broad understanding, ‘representation’ is also perceived as a process<sup>13</sup> that does not take on a neutral position and nor is it free of any form of power relations.

On this point Durrans’ thoughts are quite appropriate since he has dealt with the question of representation at length in his essay. Durrans also made the point that exhibiting and displaying cultural artifacts have been criticized for being hegemonic devices of particular groups and have thus been viewed as ‘overtly and implicitly political.’<sup>14</sup> When reflecting upon his observations, which were made at the beginning of the 1990s, it is not difficult to relate them to the era of apartheid when ‘Cultural History Museums’ became its flagships of representing ‘others.’ These museums, which were viewed through historical lenses, essentially reflected particular understandings of the artifacts that had been displayed and exhibited; these institutions were established to represent communities such as the ‘Cape Malays’ in ways that were not acceptable to them. In the words of Durrans, “(t)hey distort[ed] and hence mask[ed] the oppression of the cultures they supposedly represent[ed]; and their ideological messages appear[ed] as ‘truth’ because museums do not or cannot reveal to their publics the actual choices and negotiations through which cultures are (mis)represented in particular objects or displays.”<sup>15</sup> Durrans posed two significant questions: (a) how far a particular representation is adequate to the purpose it is meant to serve, and (b) how far that purpose is itself justified. The concerns of these two questions, Durrans argued, relate to who possesses the power to represent whom.<sup>16</sup> It stands to reason that within a racist stratified society such as apartheid South Africa and its specially constructed museums, it was indeed highly unlikely that any of the oppressed communities would have been given the necessary powers to represent themselves; this situation has, since then, radically changed.

In a post-apartheid society communities have not only been encouraged but empowered to represent themselves; this they have done via the formation of a plethora of community museums in different parts of the country. For example in Cape Town the community established the District Six Museum,<sup>17</sup> and in Port Elizabeth the former

<sup>12</sup> S. Mayhew, Representation, *Webster’s Dictionary* (Springfield, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> J. Lemke, Affect, Identity and Representation, unpublished International Congress of the Learning Sciences (Chicago, 30 June 2010).

<sup>14</sup> B. Durrans, Museums, Representations and Cultural Property, *Anthropology Today* 8(4), 1992, pp. 11-15.

<sup>15</sup> B. Durrans, Museums, Representations and Cultural Property, *Anthropology Today* 8(4), 1992, pp. 11-15.

<sup>16</sup> B. Durrans, Museums, Representations and Cultural Property, *Anthropology Today* 8(4), 1992, pp. 11-15.

<sup>17</sup> District Six Museum, [www.districtsix.co.za](http://www.districtsix.co.za).

residents of the area known as South End refurbished the local museum to create the South End Museum.<sup>18</sup> In each case, the communities demonstrated and expressed the satisfaction in having been granted the opportunity of possessing the power of constructing and owning their museums, and, more importantly, of displaying and exhibiting artifacts and information that reflect and represent their past. Bearing in mind this brief theoretical frame regarding the question of representation, the essay shifts focus and provides a socio-historical context within which the museums emerged and developed.

### **Socio-Historical Context**

When the socio-political context changed from a predominantly apartheid system to a inclusive democratic one by the mid 1990s in South Africa, the government authorities and various stakeholders in civil society began to review the objectives, role and impact of museums;<sup>19</sup> this phenomenon was, however, not confined to South Africa but also observed to have been ongoing in other nation-states such as Kenya, Australia, the USA and the UK. One of the main ideas behind this process was to respond to the question – and to borrow from Crain Soudien’s University of Cape Town 2007 Summer School presentation – how relevant are they in the (South) African context? In answering the question, Soudien analyzed the concept of ‘Africanization,’ which has impacted upon many – if not all – sectors of our lives, within the broader South African context.<sup>20</sup> And as far as we could gather, he did so in order to demonstrate how critical this was when overhauling institutions such as the museums.<sup>21</sup> The significant exercise to evaluate the position of museums in a new South Africa resulted in positive outcomes such as redefining, revamping and rebranding the museums. Part of this outcome was for the museums to effectively contribute towards the nation-building process and thus include everyone who form part of the South African multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious landscape.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> South End Museum, [www.southendmuseum.co.za](http://www.southendmuseum.co.za)

<sup>19</sup> H. J. Bredekamp, Transforming representations of intangible heritage at Iziko Museums, SA, unpublished ICME Museums and Living Heritage conference 2-4 October 2004.

<sup>20</sup> C. Soudien, Museums and Heritage Education. Unpublished Iziko Museums of Cape Town Summer School Lecture (Cape Town, February 2007).

<sup>21</sup> V. Msila, The Red Location Museum and Africanisation, in V. Msila: The Liberatory Function of a Museum: The Case of New Brighton’s Red Location Museum, *Anthropologist* 15(2), 2013, pp. 209-218

<sup>22</sup> S. Nanda, South African Museums and the Creation of a National Identity, *American Anthropologists* 106(2), June 2004, pp. 379-385.

## *Identity Debate*

Whilst it might not have been a major problem from the side of the government to have initiated changes via the formulation of new policies as well as the issuing of a ‘White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage’ on the 4<sup>th</sup> of June 1996,<sup>23</sup> it was not easy for South Africa’s stakeholders to have brought about the needed changes such as identity transformation. This was because they were (and still are) challenged by remnants of a racist system that are deeply embedded in the minds and hearts of the multi-ethnic and religio-cultural South African society. In our opinion, the heterogeneous ‘Cape Malays,’ who form an integral part of South Africa’s multi-cultural society and who were (and are) closely associated with the Bo-Kaap Museum (formerly the Bo-Kaap ‘Cape Malay’ Museum), have been among those that had been psychologically scarred by the system.<sup>24</sup> This may be observed when taking into account their inequitable treatment of domestic workers as well as foreigners (particularly their co-religionists who come from Malawi and Somalia).

Apart from having been expressively disfigured by the apartheid system, they also had to get to grips with the idea as to ‘who they really were’ during the latter part of the apartheid era and in the post-apartheid period; they, it should be stressed, faced a crisis of identity that was clearly articulated by the young Muslim anti-apartheid activists.<sup>25</sup> When we look back at that period, it was observed that the ‘young Turks’ within the Muslim anti-apartheid camp argued against the use of the term ‘Cape Malay’ and preferred the term ‘Cape Muslims;’ for them the religious identity should have been given priority and emphasis and not their ethnic identity. Their argument was essentially based on the fact that their ethnic identity was an invented one;<sup>26</sup> an identity was unwittingly constructed by their own selves but that was shrewdly employed by

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- <sup>23</sup> See references to the White Paper in the Draft National Museums Policy document circulated in 2011. Visit: [http://www.archivalplatform.org/images/resources/Draft\\_National\\_Museum\\_Policy.pdf](http://www.archivalplatform.org/images/resources/Draft_National_Museum_Policy.pdf) p. 14
- <sup>24</sup> P. Tichmann, The Bo-Kaap Museum: Challenges of Community, Identity and Representation. In a Changing Society, *South African Museums Association Bulletin* 36, 2013, pp. 7-12; L.S. Roman, Politics and the Role of Museums in the Rescue of Identity, in P. Boylan, *Museum 2000: Politics, People, Profession and A Profit* (London, 2002), pp. 25-31.
- <sup>25</sup> M. Haron, The Crisis of Identity: The Case of South Africa’s Cape Malays, *E-Thought: A Journal of Opinion on Malaysians and International Affairs* 3(1), 2002, January-March.
- <sup>26</sup> It is indeed interesting to note the scholarly comments of F. Todescini, a Cape Town city planner and architect. F. Todescini Some Reflections on Place, Tangible and Intangible Heritage and on Identity Construction. Online: [www.icomos.org](http://www.icomos.org) 2003. Also consult J. Mayson: Malays of Cape Town, South Africa, in: *Transactions of the Manchester Statistical Society* (Manchester, 1855), F. Bradlow. The Origins of the Early Cape Muslims in F. Bradlow & M. Cairns: *The Early Cape Muslims* (Cape Town, 1978); R. Ridd, Creating Ethnicity in the British Colonial Cape: Coloured and Malay Contrasted, Unpublished Africa Seminar paper, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 31st March, 1993; and S. Jeppie Reclassifications: Coloured, Malay, Muslim, in Z. Erasmus (ed.), *Coloured by history shaped by place: New perspectives on coloured Identities in Cape Town* (Cape Town, 2001).



the White/Afrikaner regime through its segregationist policies. The ‘young Turks’ thus viewed the existence of the Bo-Kaap ‘Cape Malay’ museum as an outcome of these policies. Now that these policies have been repealed by the democratic South Africa, this religio-ethnic minority has since experienced different challenges such as religio-cultural transformation in a multi-religious pluralist, secular oriented society.

The new socio-political circumstances forced the ‘Cape Malay’ community to re-assess its position vis-à-vis the cultural museums that are, according to Kavanagh,<sup>27</sup> ‘social spaces’. These are spaces where their artifacts are not only publicly displayed but they are locales that should be used in order to adapt to the Africanization agenda that Soudien spoke about<sup>28</sup>. Even though the latter issue has not been discussed and debated in depth, some of the ‘Cape Malay’ representatives have had no qualms with this agenda as long as it did not undermine and conflict with their ‘Islamization’ agenda; an external, international process that has affected and influenced the lives of Muslims locally.<sup>29</sup> Others from within this community have, however, emphasized that the nature of the culture of the ‘Cape Malay’ is such that it would be able to adjust to the Africanization process without losing any positive features. The mere fact that these different camps exist demonstrate that there will be no definite agreement as to which opinion has the right to be appropriated at the expense of the other; both, it appears, have rightful spaces to co-exist and to be respected.

To restate and conclude this section: the one camp contains supporters of the use of the term ‘Cape Malays’ as a broad and appropriate term, and the other still prefers that the term ‘Cape Muslims’ be employed in the academic and popular literature. It is gravely doubted whether this debate will ever be resolved within the next couple of years; it might take two to three generations – in our estimation – before this issue will die out and for the term ‘Cape Muslims’ to come into full use. Perhaps it might be best that the national term combined with the religious terms, namely ‘South African Muslims,’ come into vogue. This would, however, not be easy since the ‘Indian Muslims’ still continue to hold firmly onto their cultural practices that are shared by South Africa’s Indians who are Christians and Hindus and have strong connections with the motherland, i.e. India. They essentially try to set themselves apart from other co-religionists whose ancestry either came from Southeast Asia or parts of Africa,

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<sup>27</sup> G. Kavanagh, Making Histories, Making Memories, in G. Kavanagh, *Making Histories of Museums* (Leicester, 1996).

<sup>28</sup> C. Soudien, *Museums and Heritage Education*. February 2007.

<sup>29</sup> A.K. Tayob, *Islamic Resurgence in South Africa* (Cape Town, 1995), pp. 134-160; also consult Author unknown, *IIIT Islamization of Knowledge: General Principles and Work Plan* (Washington: IIIT, 1989/1997); H. Dzilo The Concept of ‘Islamization of Knowledge’ and its Philosophical Implications, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, 23(3), 2012, pp. 247-256.

and this therefore makes it awkward for a ‘South African Muslim’ identity to evolve. In these instances, the revamped South African museums and exhibitions might and would perhaps play an important role and stand in a good position in highlighting and demonstrating the complex religio-cultural elements that make up these communal identities in the years to come in a transformed South Africa.

### ***Transformed Cultural Museums: From Bo-Kaap to Port Elizabeth***

This brief detour and discussion about identity is critical when revisiting the debates regarding the relationship of the museums and the communities that they represent and serve. This has been particularly the case when looking at the South African Cultural History Museum – particularly the Bo-Kaap ‘Cape Malay’ Museum which is now known as the Bo-Kaap Museum – that was created and constructed by the apartheid regime to fulfill its racist objectives.<sup>30</sup> The control by the government of this museum compelled visitors (local and international) to view the artifacts through racist lenses; this thus gave the impression that the ‘Cape Malays’ en masse accepted the apartheid state’s policies and practices; in reality, this was not the case at all. Whilst there were those from within Cape Town’s Muslim community who identified with the Bo-Kaap ‘Cape Malay’ museum since its inception, there were Muslim activists – such as the earlier mentioned CMYM – who vehemently rejected this form of representation. Nonetheless, since the apartheid policies were out of tune with the desires of the communities that the mentioned museum served, the democratic regime has proactively tried to set things right. This implied that members of the Muslim community took the opportunity of reflecting upon their own position within the new democratic dispensation; they were already made aware of the new opportunities prior to the actual governmental change in April 1994. They, for example, celebrated 300 years of Islam in South Africa and show-cased the contributions that some of their forebears made – such as the use of Arabic-Afrikaans – towards South African socio-political culture.<sup>31</sup> The South African government even issued a series of stamps that celebrated the socio-cultural inputs of the Muslims (see figure below).

Nevertheless, what the new circumstances did was that it helped them to re-assess their status in democratic South Africa and more importantly re-define their identity in these changed circumstances; instead of harping upon the negative dimensions of ‘Cape Malayism’ that was mooted and supported by the Afrikaner scholar, namely

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<sup>30</sup> P. Tichmann, The Bo-Kaap Museum: Challenges of Community, Identity and Representation, *South African Museums Association Bulletin* 36, 2013, pp. 7-12.

<sup>31</sup> S. Jeppie, Commemorations and Identities: The 1994 Tercentenary of Islam in South Africa, in T. Sonn, *Islam and the Question of Minorities* (Atlanta, 1996), pp. 73-91.

Dr. I.D du Plessis, the representatives of the Muslim community at the Cape decided to give it a positive slant through their understanding of what ‘Cape Malay’ culture meant and implied within a new socio-political context;<sup>32</sup> this therefore also influenced the way they comprehended the position of the museums and exhibitions that – temporarily or permanently – displayed their artifacts. The temporary ‘Cape Malay’ exhibition that was set up in April 2008 at the community oriented and driven South End Museum in Port Elizabeth is a case in point.

## South African Postage Stamps



**Figure 2: Special Postage Stamps**

(Stamp photographs with acknowledgement from:

(Image left: <http://www.awqafsa.org.za/sh-yusuf-documentary-in-the-making/>

Image right: [http://colnect.com/en/stamps/stamp/391563-Toerang\\_hat\\_and\\_Kaparangs-Joint\\_Issue\\_with\\_Indonesia-South\\_Africa](http://colnect.com/en/stamps/stamp/391563-Toerang_hat_and_Kaparangs-Joint_Issue_with_Indonesia-South_Africa))

Since 1994, most of these museums and related institutions have undergone a radical face-lift in making representative memories.<sup>33</sup> The government – as already indicated – issued a 1996 ‘White Paper’ that initiated the transformation through the specific legislated Act. Through this Act, the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA)<sup>34</sup> was

<sup>32</sup> I. du Plessis, *The Cape Malays* (Cape Town 1944).

<sup>33</sup> G. Kavanagh, *Making Histories, Making Memories*, pp. 1-14.

<sup>34</sup> The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) White Paper 1996, [www.sahra.org.za](http://www.sahra.org.za).

eventually set up and that in turn operates under the aegis of South Africa's National Heritage Council (NHC).<sup>35</sup> The NHC has been given the task of managing the daily affairs of South Africa's huge heritage of which various museums form a part. According to the South African 'Draft National Museum Policy' document, NHC's role is to "monitor and coordinate the transformation of the heritage sector, with special emphasis on the development of living heritage projects."<sup>36</sup> When these structures were put in place Bredenkamp<sup>37</sup> pointed out that a number of state-aided institutions became part of what came to be referred to as the 'Iziko Museums of Cape Town' of which the South African Cultural History Museum and other related institutions formed an integral part. During this time the Bo-Kaap 'Cape Malay' Museum was also changed to the "Bo-Kaap Museum" and these developments were embraced by the Cape Muslim community.

Some of the current generation's professional leadership who had been leading members of the anti-apartheid movement and who had then rejected the term 'Cape Malay' considered this transformation of the Bo-Kaap Museum as a significant development.<sup>38</sup> In their view the transformed museum had created new spaces and opportunities to project an identity that aligned itself with democratic state policies and that, to a large degree, brought an end to their previously contested identity. Vollgraaff demonstrated how this space has been employed by certain stakeholders such as the Cape Muslim women when they held an exhibition entitled 'Out and About Muslim Women' on the 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2005; she concluded that the transformed space has been used to "undermine its Orientalist roots" that was mooted by Du Plessis and his 'Cape Malay' supporters.<sup>39</sup> We hasten to add that though the 'Cape Malay' identity has generally been sidelined, there are others such as the 'Forum of Cape Malay Culture in South Africa' that functions and operates under the guidance of Mrs. Tasneem Kalam (a cultural activist) who ardently supported 'Cape Malay' as a legitimate label.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> South Africa's National Heritage Council (NHC), [www.mhc.org.za](http://www.mhc.org.za). Regarding this footnote and footnote 34, this researcher wishes to thank the editor for reinforcing the point that whilst SAHRA was established in terms of the National Heritage Resources Act, (Act 25 of 1999) with the broader South African heritage goals (such as the identification, conservation, protection, management and promotion of the heritage resources) in mind, the National Heritage Council was established with different aims all together. That being the case, it was further underlined that neither of these bodies has anything to do with IZIKO which is one of South Africa's two national flagship museums; institutions that are governed by the Department of Arts and Culture in terms of the Declared National Institutions (Act 119 of 1998).

<sup>36</sup> South Africa's Draft National Museum Policy p. 16.

<sup>37</sup> H. J. Bredekamp, Transforming representations of intangible heritage at Iziko Museums, pp. 3-5. Also see [www.culturalheritageconnections.org](http://www.culturalheritageconnections.org).

<sup>38</sup> P. Tichmann, The Bo-Kaap Museum: Challenges of Community, Identity and Representation pp. 7-12.

<sup>39</sup> H. Vollgraaff, Transforming the Iziko Bo-Kaap Museum. Unpublished Iziko Museum paper. 2006.

<sup>40</sup> M. Haron (ed), *Going Forward: South Africa and Malaysia Cementing Relations* (Kuala Lumpur, 2008).

This attitude was observed when community organizations reclaimed and revamped existing ones such as the South End Museum in Port Elizabeth<sup>41</sup> and the establishment of new ones such as the District Six Museum<sup>42</sup> and Lwandle Museum.<sup>43</sup> Community museums have come in vogue because of the significant position that they held in terms of exhibiting the contributions of specific communities in their struggle against the apartheid state. As a matter of information, on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 2006, the Museum of Sydney in collaboration with the Museums and Galleries in NSW in Australia hosted an afternoon seminar that concentrated on ‘Empowering Communities: A focus on South Africa’s District Six Museum.’ The event affirmed and tangibly indicated the extent to which these types of museums have captured the imagination of scholars of museology and researchers from other disciplines locally and globally.

Whilst District Six and other similar museums have been given ample attention by the academics in South Africa and abroad as noted from some of the articles that have been published, other museums have remained neglected. One of these is the ‘The Heritage Museum: Amlay House (built 1858)’; a family house that was transformed into a museum by the Noorul Islam Historical Society (NIHS) – members who were former and are current residents of Simon’s Town on the 26<sup>th</sup> of July 1998. In the words of Kamedien, the heritage museum’s activists “used their own cultural paradigm to select and give meaning to artifacts of cultural significance to their community’s history and cultural life.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> P. Kadi, ‘South End: The Books and the Museum’, See Chapter 4 in P. Kadi *The Group Areas Act and Port Elizabeth’s Heritage: A Study of Memorial Recollection in the South End Museum* Unpublished Mini-Thesis University of the Western Cape November 2007, pp. 105-122; P. Kadi, *The making of the South End Community Museum, Port Elizabeth (Eastern Cape)*, Fort Hare Institute of Social and Economic Research Working Paper no. 44 April 2003.

<sup>42</sup> C. Rasool, Community museums, memory politics, and social transformation in South Africa: histories, possibilities, and limits, in I. Karp, C. Kratz, L. Szwaja and T. Ybarra-Frausto, *Museum Frictions* (Durham, 2006), pp. 290-293.

<sup>43</sup> B. Mgijima and V. Buthelezi, Mapping Museum – Community Relations in Lwandle, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32(4), December 2006, pp. 795-806.

<sup>44</sup> Personal archive, Kamedien email report pp. 4-5.

## Cape Malays Headgear



**Figure 3: Headgears<sup>45</sup>**

The Heritage Museum houses, *inter alia*, a variety of handwritten ‘koples’ (memorized) books, bridal outfits, a pilgrim’s attire, a typical bridal room, cooking utensils used by families in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and late 19<sup>th</sup> century photos. The museum demonstrated that it has preserved a rich collection of early Cape Muslim heritage that the family of the ‘Iziko Museums of Cape Town’ should feel proud of because the NIHS took the initiative to change and transform the museum into a fairly attractive tourist destination in Simon’s Town. In his correspondence Kamedien stated that community museums such as The Heritage Museum “portrays rare windows into social stratification of the under-classes (i.e. marginalized communities)” and may have benefitted from the input of professional curators associated with the Simon’s Town Museum; they, he assumes, may have been involved in the selection and the display of the artifacts and, he concludes, their participation as professionals is therefore critical in assisting community museums in meaningfully transforming themselves.

Regrettably, as noted, museums such as this have not been given attention by academics. Their existence and contribution form part of the larger socio-cultural history of the Cape that needs to be written into socio-cultural and historical texts so that all cultures and communities are adequately represented. The same argument applies to the Bo-Kaap Museum and the South End Museum respectively. Since mention was made of the South End Museum that was established on the 21<sup>st</sup> of March 2000,<sup>46</sup> we should

<sup>45</sup> See [www.toyerfarrath.wordpress.com](http://www.toyerfarrath.wordpress.com) and <https://plus.google.com>; this particular picture has been used for the cover page of G. Baderoon’s *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-Apartheid* (Johannesburg, 2014). See also: visual and info on “Straw hat-toedang” as in <http://www.sahistory.org.za> and bride medora available in <http://www.witspress.co.za> [www.witspress.co.za](http://www.witspress.co.za).

<sup>46</sup> P. Kadi, *The making of the South End Community Museum, Port Elizabeth (Eastern Cape)*. p. 8.

pause here and briefly describe and discuss the commendable efforts that were made by a few volunteers in creating the temporary ‘Cape Malay’ exhibition at the South End Museum. This description and discussion should be seen in a larger context of museum transformation in South Africa and also in the light of communal contributions in making museums friendly environments for visitors and audiences.

### **South End Museum: The Temporary ‘Cape Malay’ Exhibition**

Port Elizabeth has been the home of a ‘Cape Malay’ community for almost two centuries. According to the available records, even though there have been many popular articles about this community, there have been an absence of academic articles that provide an insight into Port Elizabeth’s Muslim community’s history and contribution. The one noteworthy contribution that, however, paid attention to ‘South End’, a Port Elizabeth suburb where many Muslims used to reside alongside non-Muslim communities who hailed from a variety of socio-cultural and ethnic backgrounds,<sup>47</sup> was the article co-authored by Yusuf Agherdien and others.<sup>48</sup> Since Port Elizabeth has a rich cultural history as highlighted in the mentioned book, there is a need for researchers to carry out more intense research to fill the necessary gaps.

From our interaction and unstructured interviews with members of the Port Elizabeth Muslim community during the latter part of the month of May 2008, it appears that research outputs covering these aspects will appear in the near future. In the meanwhile, one other method of sharing insights into their lives is the holding of temporary exhibitions. Members of the Port Elizabeth Muslim community, who were also associated with the former Islamic Congress of the Eastern Cape that was active in the 1960s and 1970s, considered it critical to salvage some of their heritage through setting up a temporary exhibition and also in reinforcing their religio-cultural identity. When they were granted this opportunity by the South End Museum, they immediately got to work at the end of 2007 to have it staged in 2008.

The group of volunteers led by Mr. Naeem Rashdien, who is a semi-retired building contractor and the then administrator at the Port Elizabeth based Saabireen Islamic Library, were given less than 6 months to put together a reasonable number of artifacts about their community; this was indeed a great challenge for them since none of the volunteers had experience in setting up exhibitions – small or big – of this kind. Having been thrown into the deep end, they had to work daily for more than 4 months on the project. They had nothing substantial to go on in terms of research papers. Mr.

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<sup>47</sup> P. Kadi, *The making of the South End Community Museum, Port Elizabeth (Eastern Cape)*. pp. 4-5.

<sup>48</sup> Y. Agherdien, A.C. George & S. Hendricks, *South End – As We Knew It* (East London, 1997); and C.A. George, S. Hendricks, & R. Uren (eds.), *South End The Aftermath: Where Are They, Now?* (Port Elizabeth, 2003).

Rashdien was fortunate to have stumbled across the papers collected by Mr. Abrahams, his father-in-law. The latter collected material in the early 1980s for a magazine that he had subsequently produced and published; this was the only magazine, as far as we know, that made a real attempt in capturing aspects of the community's history. In any event, the material that was archived by Mr. Abrahams was used by Rashdien and his team. As a result of the many months of work, the team put together a temporary 'Cape Malay' exhibition at the beginning of April 2008 at the community managed South End Museum in Port Elizabeth. Prior to its official opening, the team organized a special evening where members of the community were addressed by the Vice-Chancellor of the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and Mr. Ebrahim Rhoda, a retired Strand primary school headmaster and an avid researcher on Cape Muslim history. The team also produced a popular magazine for the occasion.

This exhibition demonstrated aspects of 'Cape Malay' culture in Port Elizabeth and its surrounding areas; even though we were somewhat disappointed at the amount of material that had been displayed, there is little doubt that the efforts that were put in by non-specialists and volunteers have been commendable. On display, there was, among others, a bridal dress, a 'doopmal' (birth of a new born) attire, a set of kaparangs (sandals) used by elders when performing ablution, a copy of a handwritten text produced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a 'matchstick' mosque completed by one of their community members on display, and a lithographic produced letter written by one of Abu Bakr Effendi's – the famous Turkish shaykh who had penned the significant Arabic-Afrikaans theological text in the 1860s<sup>49</sup> – sons at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The designers made use of two floors at the museum in order to showcase their exhibition. On the first floor, many artifacts were located in window displays and on the second floor a series of photographs without any detailed annotations or texts were displayed. There was unfortunately no audio-visual equipment to assist in reflecting upon the rationale for the exhibition, and nor were there material other than the community produced magazine that helped in this regard; if the audio-visual material had been added, it would certainly have enhanced the presentation/exhibition and it would, more importantly, have assisted in contextualizing the exhibition. Nevertheless, what the display seemed to have reflected was that South Ends' 'Cape Malays' reminisced about their past and that they seem to express the notion that during the earlier years there was a culture of acceptance and tolerance that seemed to have disappeared and a point that was underscored by Kadi's assessment of the museum.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> M. Haron, The Making, Preservation and Study of South African Ajami Mss and Texts, *Sudanic Africa: A Journal of Historical Sources* 12, 2001, pp. 11-12; A. Davids, Words the Cape Slaves made: A Socio-Historical Linguistic Study, *South African Journal of Linguistics*. 8(1), 1990, pp. 1-24; H. Willemsse & S.E. Dangor (eds.), *The Afrikaans of the Cape Muslims: Afrikaans at the Cape from 1850 to 1915 – A Socio-Linguistic Study* (Pretoria, 2011).

<sup>50</sup> P. Kadi, *The making of the South End Community Museum, Port Elizabeth (Eastern Cape)*, p. 9.



At this point we want to pose the following questions:<sup>51</sup> How did they represent themselves in the small exhibition? What happens to the artifacts after they had been exhibited at the end of October 2008? Who will take responsibility of the items – the community or the government? If it is the community, then which organization takes responsibility? Where will the organization be able to store them, if they are left in its care? Though we consider these inter-related questions to be critical for the community to take note of and think about, we do not intend to respond to them except to say that since SAHRA has taken charge of addressing these issues, its representatives should be brought in to discuss the future of these temporary exhibitions. What we can definitely say is that the volunteers who had been involved in this project have creatively constructed their social history and identity through artifacts and photographs. They have undoubtedly done sterling work and have tangibly demonstrated how communities, if and when given the chance, are able to contribute in telling their communal stories and demonstrate how religion and culture live side-by-side and reflect different dimensions of a developing and growing community.

As stated earlier, community organizations through the process of empowerment have come to the rescue of their respective communities' past by collecting artifacts, curiosities, and items that have significant socio-historical interest. Consequently, their memories have been preserved and this has also given a fresh insight into the identities and how they represented themselves. In the case of the 'Cape Malays,' the formal reconnection with Southeast Asia particularly with Malaysia and Indonesia stimulated some of their cultural organizations such as the Forum to forge ties with cultural organizations in the mentioned nation-states.<sup>52</sup> Since the Malaysians stole a march on the Indonesians, one of its foremost cultural organizations, namely the National Writers' Association of Malaysia (GAPENA), sent a delegation of about 50 individuals during 1993 to forge socio-cultural ties with the local groups in South Africa in general and Cape Town in particular; the delegation took part in a seminar that was organized at the University of the Western Cape.<sup>53</sup> The outcome led to further cultural activities and with the planning of a Melayu Studies program at UWC;<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> L. Young, Rethinking Heritage: Culture Policy and Inclusion, in R. Sandell, *Museum, Society, Inequality* (London, 2002), p. 209.

<sup>52</sup> M. Haron (ed), *Going Forward: South Africa and Malaysia Cementing Relations* (Kuala Lumpur, 2008).

<sup>53</sup> M. Haron, The Crisis of Identity: The Case of South Africa's Cape Malays, *E-Thought: A Journal of Opinion on Malaysians and International Affairs* 3(1), January-March 2002.

<sup>54</sup> Although this project never materialized because of Malaysia's economic meltdown, new efforts were made by Ms. Nazreen Salie who heads the Cape Malay Consultants; this idea has basically been supported by the Malaka based Dunia Melayu Dunia Islam, [www.dmdi.com.my](http://www.dmdi.com.my), and the newly formed World Melayu-Polynesia Organization, <http://drhashimjofhappiness.blogspot.com/2014/04/the-2nd-international-maori-melayu.html>.

something that did not materialize because of the socio-economic conditions that affected the Southeast Asian nations at the end of the 1990s.

One of the concerns at that time was that some of the Malaysians wanted to buy some of the ‘Cape Malay’ artifacts such as the Arabic-Afrikaans manuscripts with the idea of permanently housing them among their collections and also occasionally displaying them at exhibitions on ‘Maleyu Manuscripts.’ Whilst we had no control over their desire and request, it was a major concern since the manuscripts were and remain a national heritage that should not leave South Africa’s borders without any clear agreement from the relevant authorities. At that point, there was a White Paper but there was no agency that could assist in overseeing issues such as this. Fortunately, as far as we are informed, none of these manuscripts left the Cape or the country except in the form of photocopies; however, even this method of transmission needs to be secured. Disappointingly, other ‘Cape Malay’ artifacts left; in this instance there seems to have been partial agreement between the South African Melayu Cultural Society (SAMCS), a Cape based Muslim NGO, and local government representatives.

### **Dr. Nortier’s Rooibos Museum’s Mini-‘Cape Malay’ Exhibition<sup>55</sup>**

Whilst it is acknowledged that Dr. Nortier’s Rooibos Museum is indeed an exceptional museum in Southeast Asia that exhibit all aspects associated with the Rooibos tea, it also has another display that is unique in its own way in that it showcases cultural artifacts of the ‘Cape Malays’ within the same building in Shah Alam. Let’s pause for a moment and spend a few paragraphs on sharing thoughts on some of the cultural players or agents that have been instrumental in setting up this mini-display and for keeping us abreast with Cape Malay culture. Since our concern is not to discuss each and every major player we will only expand on the activities of one. We, perhaps, need to mention that the contributions of the ‘Forum for Malay Culture in South Africa’ – mentioned earlier in this essay – should be seen as part of a broader Cape Malay movement that made its inputs over the past few years in a fairly substantial way; this may partly be attributed to its objectives such as the promotion and preservation of Malay culture and the implementation of cultural projects wherever and whenever possible. Over the years it succeeded in promoting, preserving and implementing ‘Cape Malay’ cultural programs. In a way the Forum complimented the activities of the organization that we want to give attention to in the next few paragraphs, namely the SAMCS.

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<sup>55</sup> Dr. Nortier’s Rooibos Museum’s Mini ‘Cape Malay’ Exhibition, <https://toyerfarrath.wordpress.com/2011/09/02/cape-malay-mini-museum-kuala-lumpur/> and [www.dr.nortier-museum.org](http://www.dr.nortier-museum.org).

### *South African Melayu Cultural Society*

According to oral sources, the history of the SAMCS' formation goes back to the late 1980s under the leadership of Mr. Hashiem Salie. The founding members, led by Mr. Salie, established the society as a non-profit cultural organization and one that was solely guided by the Quran, the primary sacred source for Muslims, which categorically stated in a specific verse that 'God created humankind into males and females, into nations and tribes that they may know one another'.<sup>56</sup> Though SAMCS' founding members did not elaborate on this verse, it – in a sense – implied and justified the use of 'Cape Melayu' as an acceptable term within the South Africa context. It saw as its mission the promotion of 'our' culture and (our) 'way of life' in the new South Africa. This is, of course, based upon the notion that 'the system of authority within democracy' is in place in contemporary South Africa and that everyone has the right to express his/her religio-cultural identity. SAMCS further asserted that 'within our Melayu culture we witness the flowering of Islamic culture and thought'. This statement<sup>57</sup> clearly stressed that SAMCS as well as the Cape Malays in general did not make a distinction between religion and culture; the two for them was intertwined and inter-connected.

It may be argued that SAMCS gained a new lease of life soon after the historical GAPENA visit during April 1993.<sup>58</sup> As a 'Cape Malay' organization it saw itself, through GAPENA's noteworthy efforts, being able to play a significant role in forging socio-cultural ties with similar organizations and groups in Southeast Asia. It thus listed a few objectives; some of which are:

- To strengthen the conservation of existing Melayu culture in South Africa;
- To ensure the development of young people in various arts and crafts;
- To provide a forum via which the young could express their views and influence the democratic process; and
- To interact with other cultural groups in and outside South Africa so that they may learn to understand and appreciate different cultural expressions and practices.

The society produced a beautifully designed, illustrated booklet that highlighted a few of its achievements. Amongst these was its participation in the cultural celebrations that was organized by the Cultural International Organization for Festivals and Folklore (est. 1996) in Malaysia. During the celebration that took place in 1996 the then

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<sup>56</sup> Qur'an Chapter 49 Verse 13.

<sup>57</sup> SAMCS circulated a pamphlet in which they outlined their organization's objectives and activities; the information mentioned here was extracted from that specific handout.

<sup>58</sup> M. Haron, Gapena and the Cape Malays: Initiating Connections and Constructing Images, *SARI : International Journal of the Malay World and Civilisation* 23, 2005, pp. 47-66.

Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology,<sup>59</sup> Mrs. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, also took part and demonstrated support for its activities as a religio-cultural organization. The society also organized the participation of a *maulood* (birth of the Prophet Muhammad) group in Malaysia the year that followed and was also instrumental in popularizing the play, *Rosa*, which was written and directed by Zulpha Otto-Sallies; a production that went on tour to Jakarta, Indonesia. The society thus strengthened their connections with the Ministry of Culture in Indonesia and this resulted in the distribution of bursaries for its young members to study Indonesian cultural dancing. SAMCS thus acted as facilitators on behalf of the Indonesian Consulate that was located in Cape Town to perform cultural activities in various parts of South Africa and Southeast Asia. The SAMCS' international contacts and relations gave rise to a fairly rich profile that attracted partners such as Dr. Nortier's Rooibos Museum. It is this partnership that gave birth and life to what may be identified as a 'mini-Cape Malay' museum.<sup>60</sup>

### *The Museum's 'Cape Malay' Artifacts*

It was during these commercial and cultural developments that Mr. James Tan, a Malay Chinese business man, realized the economic potential of certain unique South African products in Southeast Asia. After laboring for 6 years building up the necessary contacts and identifying 'Rooibos' tea as one such important product, he, with the support of the Nortier company in the Western Cape, decided to establish and create the Dr. Nortier's Rooibos Museum. He became acutely aware of the properties of this tea and quite certain that this product, if properly marketed and distributed, would do well in the Southeast Asian region and beyond. When the product took off with the assistance of Mr. Tan's team, the product became quite popular as a health drink among the Chinese communities in the region. As his business was growing he also became familiar with the cultural groups in the Western Cape through the office of the South African High Commission in Kuala Lumpur. And it was through these connections that the SAMCS was supported and brought to Malaysia.

On the 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2001 Dr. Nortier's Rooibos Museum, located in the old industrial area just outside Shah Alam's city centre, celebrated its first anniversary. This celebration also coincided with the opening of its 'Cape Malay' museum section which was the brain-child of the museum's commercial director, namely Mr. Jeffrey

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<sup>59</sup> The name of the Department has since been changed. Two departments were created; the one concentrates on Arts and Culture whilst the other's focus is on Science and Technology.

<sup>60</sup> This researcher wishes to mention that when he went to Shah Alah during June 2014 he tried to visit the mini-display and was informed that it was indefinitely closed and that it was not open for viewing. Since this is the case, the questions that arise are: it is not a permanent display and if not what is the status of the artifacts? Well this matter will have to be addressed by the Iziko Museums and other related structures

Sng. The latter was in close contact with SAMCS which provided all the artifacts with, it seems, the blessings of South Africa's Department of Arts, Culture, Science & Technology, which has since split into separate ministries. It gave tacit support for the formation of this museum and this was at a time when issues of heritage were intensely reviewed in South Africa. For the record, at the opening SAMCS expressed its gratitude in working with Dr. Nortier's Rooibos Museum to bring about this significant development;<sup>61</sup> one that would assist in educating Malaysians about the culture of the Cape Malays.

The museum organized a 'Cape Malay Charitable Concert' in order that certain institutions such as the Cheshire Home in Malaysia's Gombak under the management and guidance of the Selangor Council of Welfare and Social Development that was under the secretariatship of the Hon. Secretary, Puan Hajjah Khatijah Suleiman could financially benefit from it. In addition to the concert, members of the SAMCS also performed and displayed their musical talents at quite a few performances in some of the other Malaysian states such as Melaka and Negri Sembilan. The SAMCS established its reputation as a seasoned cultural organization in Malaysia and Indonesia over the first decade of the new century. SAMCS' name has however been closely associated with the mini-Cape Malay museum.

This mini-display contains donations from SAMCS' numerous members. Since there are a sizeable number of items, it will suffice to list selected ones to give an idea as to what were and are still on display, and more importantly to underscore how 'Cape Malays' were represented. But prior to listing this selection, it should be borne in mind that SAHRA did not formally exist at the time when this mini-museum was created and officially opened; the reason for making this point is basically to state that it allowed and permitted cultural artifacts such as those that belonged to South Africa's national heritage to slip through South Africa's legal system without questioning the implications of the formation of permanent or semi-permanent exhibitions abroad.

Related to this, a number of questions readily come to mind: Should these items remain on permanent loan to that museum in Shah Alam? What was the agreement that was signed? Who is ultimately responsible for their sale – if there was one? Why has this not been debated in the Cape community? What policies were in place then to deal with the 'exportation' of South Africa's cultural heritage? Which policies were there to help in securing this rich heritage? It perhaps may be argued that even though the museum was established on foreign soil, it could be seen as part of South Africa's collection of 'foreign-based' museums. And that these types of museums may provide opportunities through legal agreements and partnerships for similar

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<sup>61</sup> Dr. Nortier's Rooibos Museum's Mini 'Cape Malay' Exhibition, <https://toyerfarrath.wordpress.com/2011/09/02/cape-malay-mini-museum-kuala-lumpur/>

museums to be set up in strategically located places around the world where South Africa's rich culture may be 'permanently' showcased. In fact, they may be exhibited in societies and communities such as Indonesia, India, Greece, France and China that share similar socio-cultural histories. All of these developments and agreements have undoubtedly significant policy implications that should be addressed in future.

That said, let's turn attention to the artifacts that are exhibited at the museum in Shah Alam and that, it should be stressed, do not adequately represent the 'Cape Malay' community.<sup>62</sup> Be that as it may, the exhibits are located in two small rooms that are located at the back of the sizeable Dr. Nortier's Rooibos Museum. The construction of the displays in the museum by the designers was not very much different from those at the Bo-Kaap Museum or for that matter at The Heritage Museum: Amlay House. There is, in fact, a need to re-display the exhibits with the intention of showing and highlighting how these communities, despite their marginalized status and conditions, managed to hold onto their socio-cultural practices and reflect them as an independent and proud under-class and discriminated community throughout the colonial and apartheid periods.

As stated above, since there are too many items, we will only mention a few brief comments thereafter:

- Hajira Moos R Ganie's designed dress and bridal headgear band;
- Jurayda Salie's wedding dress;
- Aisha bint Hanief's *abaya* (cloak);
- Moegsien Salie's paraffin lamp;
- Yusef Stemmet's grinder;
- Zaid & Raschida Zaghra Fagrodien's 'doopmal' doek, embroidered apron, baby cotton dress and pillow cushion;
- Zainab Davidson's copy of a 1835 'gajaat kitaab' (religious gathering text), 1842 'Masalah kitaab' (juristic-theological text) and 'Tafsir Kitaab' (a commentary text [on the Quran]) in Melayu;
- Shaykh Ebrahim Gabriel's 'Rihal';
- Anwar Baker's *Step-by-Step: Guide to Hajj* (Cape Town, no date);
- Caurohn Cornell's *Slave Art at the Cape: A Guide Book for Beginners' research* (Bellville: UWC, 2001).
- Portraits of unknown personalities and a selection of photographs; and
- Other items: (i) ornate tin container for the 'sorbaan' (headgear); (ii) used guitar; (iii) rebana; (iv) wooden keparangs (sandals); and (v) rotang toeding (stick).

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<sup>62</sup> M.G. Simpson, *Making Representation: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (London, 2001), p. 15.

Each and every item that has been placed in this museum comes from the different family collections at the Cape. On a small scale, all the donations on display reflected and demonstrated the rich ‘Cape Malay/Muslim’ culture. If one compares some of the artifacts listed here to those displayed at the Bo-Kaap Museum or The Heritage Museum: Amlay House or to those exhibited at the South End Museum, then we note that similar (but slightly different) items have been exhibited. For example, in all cases bridal dresses have been exhibited and ‘doopmal’ outfits have been displayed. What struck us about these exhibits and displays were the fact that these items represented the handy work of a variety of individuals from different eras.

One example of note is the beautifully beaded colourful wedding dresses that had been put on view in Shah Alam and Port Elizabeth; in each instance, they reflected the handy-tailor work of different, skillful dressmakers and tailors. In fact, the displays underlined the fact that the work of these highly skilled individuals has not been given the attention that they deserve; their histories as dressmakers and tailors have not been adequately recorded in texts on arts and crafts. Another popular item about which little has been written is the variety of family and personal portraits that have been and are found at these exhibitions; what this tells us is that the ‘Cape Malays’ had no problems in taking photographs in preserving their memories and their past. This tradition has, however, not been wide-spread among their co-religionists from South Asia; some of whom regarded the taking of photographs a forbidden act according to their understanding and interpretation of Muslim theology and jurisprudence.

To wind up, what the museums and exhibitions in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Shah Alam showed was that the Cape community possesses a rich cultural tradition and heritage; this was and is visibly reflected in the variety of items and curiosities that have been and still are on show. And it showed that each of these displays has unique stories and histories that could be told and described in historical and literary texts; and they acted, to quote Simpson, as ‘storerooms of a nation’s (and community’s) treasures.’<sup>63</sup> It is an undisputed fact that these artifacts tangibly contributed towards the making of a rich and interesting past despite the travails experienced by the forebears of the ‘Cape Malay’ community and it is an aspect of South Africa that should be treasured and recorded.

## Conclusion

In this essay the author tried to review the status of two cultural museums; one permanent and another temporary; the former is the Dr. Nortier’s Rooibos Museum and its mini-‘Cape Malay’ exhibits, and the latter is the temporary ‘Cape Malay’ exhibition at the

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<sup>63</sup> M.G. Simpson, *Making Representation: Museums in the Post-Colonial Era* (London, 2001), p. 15.

South End Museum. At the heart of assessing the permanent and temporary exhibitions is the question of representation. It was noted that the museums were constructed during the apartheid era and they served the racist state in a specific way; and soon after the demise of this state, it was shown that these institutions underwent a radical face-lift in order to serve the interest and needs of their respective communities. Whilst communities such as the Cape Malays have benefitted from the significant socio-political changes in general and the developments in the museum sector in particular, the issue of state policies towards national heritage has become a matter of critical concern; this is raised in the light of the artifacts and items, which are of national value and importance, that have been exported and exhibited overseas without any formal agreements having been made between the exhibiting institution and the South African Ministry of Arts and Culture as well as the relevant communal stakeholders.

Apart from noting these concerns and issues, there are a number of questions that come to mind when discussing community museums and exhibitions. Since it was beyond the scope of this essay to discuss these questions, we wish to pose them without providing any suitable answers: How have artifacts found their way to foreign countries and communities who have little or no knowledge about the social history of the community who produced them? What impact do they make on the visitors of those museums? Do they give sufficient insights into aspects of the community's socio-religious and cultural history? Who created the exhibitions and for what purpose? Have museum visitors been educated through the cultural artifacts that were on display? These are but a few of many questions that we should ask when dealing with South Africa's cultural heritage. South Africa's disparate communities have to be educated regarding the importance and significance of the artifacts and heirlooms that are in their possession; this is indeed an issue that has been and is still very much neglected. It is, however, not only the responsibility of those entrusted with taking care of museums and exhibitions that should be involved in the educational process but also the many stakeholders who have been assisting in trying to secure and preserve these items and curiosities.