

Duiwelsdorp (2015): A Sangoma's Story of South Africa

[Carla / Espot/ ESPCAR002]

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

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Abstract

“I live my life with stories that came before me. I tell stories because of stories that were told before. I wrote a story, a screenplay, called *Duiwelsdorp* ‘Devil Town’ because of stories that were told before me, to me and now a story lives within me. I am a storyteller because I am a woman, born from woman, alive through story. I am a woman because I give birth - to story, who actually first gave birth to me...It is in this sense that I then take up my place next to this “new generation of post-apartheid South African filmmakers” (storytellers/historians) and assume the duty of reminding my society “of its near and distant origins, of the experiences that shaped it, of its cultural wellsprings” (Confino, 1997: 1187). I took it upon myself to tell another *real* story of South Africa, the story of Johannesburg, the story of *Duiwelsdorp* (2015)... By choosing to tell the story of Jack McKeone and other white outlaw heroes, *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) challenges the popular notion of criminality and delinquency in South Africa.” - Carla Espost in ***Duiwelsdorp (2015): A Sangoma’s Story of South Africa.***

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***Duiwelsdorp* (2015): A Sangoma's Story of South Africa**

By Carla Inez Espost

“Within each of you there are two different beings, one good and one evil - in constant conflict.” - *Duiwelsdorp* (2015)

Naturally, as “the tool[s] of primitive man” (Minh Ha, 1989: 119), stories are art, culture and symbolism. Culture (here defined as the use of symbolism by human beings) are the initial uniquely human traits that set us apart from other animals – a.k.a. that which makes us human. My hypothesis in this case is that stories are the oldest yet most ephemeral relics of culture and thus humanity. The evidence are the remnants of stories from way back. These stories exist in the living oral history, told to generation after generation so that it exists to this day. “In this chain of continuum, I am but one link. The story is me, neither me nor mine. It does not really belong to me, and while I feel greatly responsible for it, I also enjoy the irresponsibility of the pleasure obtained through the process of transferring... No repetition can ever be identical, but my story carries with it their stories, their history, and our story repeats itself endlessly despite our persistence in denying it. Then someday our children will speak about us here present” (Minh Ha, 1989: 122). Whether changing or not, stories as oral history are the *living* examples of our ancestors. “Every gesture, every word involves our past, present, and future” (Minh Ha, 1989: 122). As we open our mouths to tell the stories we have been taught by our grandparents to speak, to tell, we give meaning to our lives in the present, thereby giving meaning to the future and finally giving meaning to life. To tell a story is to give back, to speak about life is like giving life - like giving birth to culture and thus to humanity, all over again.

I am Carla Inez Espost named after my Grandmother *Ouma* Classina Johanna ‘Inez’ Espost née Moller. Taking after my grandmother, I am a storyteller, a storyteller born from my grandmother’s stories, stories that bear life, I lived my grandmother’s and mother’s lives as they live in mine. I live my life through and with stories that came before me. I tell stories because of stories that were told before. I wrote a story, a screenplay, called *Duiwelsdorp* ‘Devil Town’ because of stories that were told before me, to me. And now a story lives within me. I am a storyteller because I am a woman, born from woman, alive through story. I am a woman because I give birth - to story, who actually first gave birth to me.

MaNthatisi (an old Sotho woman named after the warrior-queen MaNthatisi¹) tells an adapted version of *A Bud Slowly Opens* from Vusumuzulu Credo Mutwa’s *Indaba My Children*ⁱ (1964) to a group of children (and later some curious adults) in *Duiwelsdorp* (2015). We will start at the end of MaNthatisi’s story...

As Amarava turns into Watamaraka, we see, on the cover of a newspaper, Cecil John Rhodes (the then newly appointed Prime Minister of the then Cape Colony) turn into a golden, diamond clawed monster who stands astride the African continent (taken from the caricature

ⁱ Mutwa’s book is an account of the oral history of the Southern 'Bantu'.

in Figure 1ⁱⁱ). Symbolizing the embodiment of evil, Rhodes throws a handful of diamonds that morphs into the small white rock that the sangoma picked up between the bones in the beginning. “Night had fallen by the time Zumangwe and his followers reached the gate of their village. It was the first village in the country... After witnessing all this Zumangwe wished that the name of Amarava should remain one which future generations must honour and respect. So he ordered all those who had seen what had happened never to repeat what they had seen. All the villagers agreed to abide by the falsehood that the search for Amarava had failed and so the secret of Amarava's identity went with the men to their grave” (Mutwa 1964: 16).

As we see in Mutwa’s story, it is the whole community that is responsible for the erasure of events out of a group’s history. As part of a community, as a citizen, you and I are active agents of transferal, whether you like it or not. We are part of a story. We are part of history from the moment we are born. So in this case each member of the community and not just historians are to blame for these *erasures*, cases such as McKeone’s such as Johannesburg’s. These are cases of what I call popular amnesia; it is the total, irrational erasure of historical events from a community’s popular memory. Following the argument of the essay though, I

ⁱⁱ Figure 1. Edward Linley Sambourne, “The Rhodes Colossus,” *Punch*, December 10, 1892.



will look at how popular amnesia can be overcome and what role historians/storytellers play in fighting this kind of 'illness'. I will do this with the use of examples from *Duiwelsdorp* (2015).

Traditional Healers;

“She, however, who sets out to revive the forgotten, to survive and supersede it... she partakes in this living heritage of power. Great Mother is the goddess of all water, the protectress of all women and of childbearing, the unwearied sentient hearer, the healer and also the bringer of diseases. She who gives always accepts, she who wishes to preserve never fails to refresh. Regenerate” (Minh Ha, 1989: 126-127). Speaking about the documentary *The Great Dance: A Hunter's Story* (2000) Botha explains that the filmmakers' (Craig and Damon Foster) affiliation towards the traditional healers in the San of The Kalahari Desert's community is because of the traditional healers' “ability to mediate between the world of nature and spirit in a manner that allows for the co-evolution of all life forms” (Botha, 2014: 16) Besides the screenwriter, “a middle aged female Mosotho Traditional Healer” (Duiwelsdorp, 2015) is the main storyteller in *Duiwelsdorp* (2015). The film's use of the Traditional Healer as mediator between “the world of nature and spirit” can be seen as a vehicle through which the film seeks to accentuate the magical element of Story. In the opening sequence of *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) we see, “a dancing shadow of a group of people around a fire inside Motoulengⁱⁱⁱ (The Fertility Cave) weaving across San rock paintings on

ⁱⁱⁱ “Motouleng or Fertility Cave is a cave with an enormous sandstone overhang and is situated alongside a stream in a ravine in the mountainous area of the Eastern Free State between the town of Fouriesburg and Clarens. The site and entry to it is on private land, albeit on different farms and pilgrimage to this site come and go in relative freedom. Access to this site is semi-controlled and an entry fee is charged” (NHC Project Document 2009: 7). Today Motouleng is still a sacred place for the Basotho of South Africa and Lesotho.

the cave walls” (*Duiwelsdorp*, 2015). It is in this setting that we are introduced to the traditional healer character: She “heaves and puffs as she calls forth the ancestors before she throws the bones” (*Duiwelsdorp*, 2015). She chants, “Great Spirits of our ancestors! Come forth! We honour you, we respect you! Come forth and show us! Show our warriors the way! We honour those that came before us! Show us in this troubled time! We need you! Heee! Because we know we are blind to our faults, show us so we may know them and can prosper!” (*Duiwelsdorp*, 2015).

Minh Ha explains that “in many parts of the world, the healers are known as the living memories of the people... they know everyone’s story” (Minh Ha, 1989: 140). Which in turn, Minh Ha says, accounts for the fact that “their principle of healing rests on reconciliation” (Minh Ha, 1989: 140). The healer reignites Story’s ability to cure: “the story as a cure and a protection is at once musical, historical, poetical, ethical, educational, and religious. Curing means re-generating, for understanding is creating” (Minh Ha, 1989: 140). Therefore in order to cure, Story cannot be limited to one sphere of storytelling - the story as cure is interdisciplinary. The storyteller must know everyone’s story. This neatly outlines *Duiwelsdorp* (2015)’s ambitions. The healer sets out to reconcile stories about South Africa’s past so that she can regenerate South Africa’s popular memory. She brings healing through an understanding of the past.

“South Africans have been progressively exposed to film debates and films that are released elsewhere in Africa... This contact was an enriching influence on South African film culture.” From this influence there emerged “a new generation of post-apartheid film-makers [that] dealt with events, which were conveniently left out in official South African history books” (Botha 1996; 2006) (Botha, 2014: 7) and other media of that time. What is most significant here for me, is that these filmmakers *re-addressed* the past - they *retold* history,

fixing it, healing it so that South Africans can know, see and hear the *real* story, the truth. Like Botha says, “they became guardians of popular memory within the socio-political process in South Africa” (2014: 14).

In an essay on the scholarly use of the word ‘memory’, A. Confino explains that the word comes to mean very different things depending on how it is used, save for the one meaning which all these share: “the way in which people construct a sense of the past” (1997: 1386). So if, as Confino says film is a “vehicle of memory,” then we can safely assume that film is a method with which people construct “a sense of the past” (1997: 1386). In another article about historical methods and historians’ moral duty in the world, the author, McNeill, notes that “what a group of people knows and believes about the past channels expectations and affects the decisions on which their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor all depend” (McNeill, 1986: 10). History and how it is told are not light subjects. Storytellers of the past, whether it is filmmakers or historians, have a great responsibility towards those that they talk about or represent in their stories. It is in this sense that I then take up my place next to this “new generation of post-apartheid South African filmmakers” (storytellers/historians) and assume the duty of reminding my society “of its near and distant origins, of the experiences that shaped it, of its cultural wellsprings” (Confino, 1997: 1187). I took it upon myself to tell another *real* story of South Africa, the story of Johannesburg, the story of *Duiwelsdorp* (2015).

Duiwelsdorp (2015) is set in the late 19th century South Africa when the country was but a muddle of conflicting authorities - people came, from far and wide, to try and claim their own fortunes in the then newly found mineral riches of diamonds and gold. The late 19th century was also, like Meredith says, “a time which saw the determined enforcement of segregation measures,” which set up a system in which the black working class was always kept at an

(un) comfortable distance from the white elites, which in turn “culminated eventually in the apartheid system” (2008: 262).

Another historian, Charles Van Onselen, has written an extensive collection of books investigating this utterly fascinating and significant time in South Africa’s history. He tells the story of The South African Republic’s² rapid transformation from an agricultural economy into the home of “the world’s largest and most technologically sophisticated gold-mining industry” (Van Onselen, 1982: 16). He tells the story of why Johannesburg (that started as Ferreira’s Camp), was once also called *Duiwelsdorp* (Devilstown). This story is also the story to which *Duiwelsdorp* (2015)’s owes much of its historical content - clearly also the title.

A South African Story

Throughout the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century the South African Republic underwent a “traumatic transition” (Van Onselen, 1982: 15). The area saw the rule of four different governments and then “punctuated by an attended coup,” it came to an end during the Second Anglo Boer War: “a bloody conflict lasting two and a half years.” (Van Onselen, 1982: 15) With this context in mind, *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) sets the experience of selected groups of ordinary people from Johannesburg (and surrounds) within the wider context of the industrial revolution that engulfed the Witwatersrand at the turn of the 19th century. These groups’ experiences within the emerging structures of the society are then refracted through the audiences’ experience of the remaining oppressive inequalities in current South African society.

The film seeks to demonstrate how, “during these formative decades, the ruling classes gradually came to assert their control over [the] subordinate classes and how the subordinate classes in turn resisted this oppression through various intimidatory displays such as assaults and gang activities”(1982:16). The film’s dialogue for example, consisting of a mixed Afrikaner/Dutch and Afrikaans/Sotho/Zulu and other informal languages, raises yet another interesting topic (only raised here to show as an example of one of the extended themes), namely the birth of *fanakalo*³. It was also this setting, where the need to speak a common language, perhaps so as to resist the new proletariat generation’s power, that gave birth to this diverse South African vernacular. Above all else I can say that, *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) shows how ordinary people, boxed in by the then newly growing capitalist world, set forth the all too well-known human struggle of finding a place of dignity and security in this world. Zooming in on the way that South Africa’s then politicians built the country’s economy, I criticize the rich and powerful through the everyday citizens that stood up and fought against their corrupt leaders. *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) lays bare the West’s conquest for wealth in Africa by placing the De Beers epoch’s main character, Cecil John Rhodes under scrutiny in.

Of Oppression;

In the preface of Vusumuzulu Credo Mutwa’s *Indaba My Children*^{iv} the author’s sponsor, a certain A.S Watkinson, writes that “one is under a spell when one listens to Credo [Mutwa]” (1964: 9). Since I was little I loved stories, not necessarily for what happened in them, but the way I felt after I read them - *spellbound*. The word ‘spellbound’ has always been a very significant term for me. There are those stories that were told to me, when I was but a small

^{iv} Mutwa’s book is an account of the oral history of the Southern 'Bantu'.

child, that I remember to this day. These stories must have cast a strong ‘spell’ on me indeed. Stories possess a power like no other in the sense that they make us believe in things that do not exist. Believing a made up story is like believing in magic. For example fictions: every word, spoken or written is like the many incantations used to cast a spell - is it not?

Duiwelsdorp (2015) is a parallel narrative with multiple protagonists. The overarching narrative is set in 1867, the year the first diamond, the Eureka diamond, was found in Hope Town, South Africa. However the story begins with King Moshoeshe I (the father of the Lesotho nation) leading his troops to fight in the Seqiti War⁴. We then see the traditional healer ‘throwing the bones’, seeking help from the ancestors (as referred to above)- so as to predict the future of the Basotho nation. The bones fall and a small white rock lies isolated on the one side. This little rock ‘becomes’ a small white boy, who sits between the grandchildren of King Moshoeshe I in a village under the Thaba Bosiu⁵ Mountain. The children are listening to MaNthatisi telling the story of Amarava and Odu. It is also in this very village that Mary Mckeone (an Irish lady) gives birth to a pale blanketed baby (Martha McKeone). And from here we go forth to the next scene where the pale blanketed baby ‘becomes’ a diamond that a Boer finds amongst his son’s game of marbles. From here the story flows quickly, rushing from the Eureka diamond to the opening of claims on the De Beers farm to the year 1880. We are introduced to John McKeone (Mary’s husband), who sells guns to the rebel Basotho warriors as they ready themselves for the Basotho Gun War⁶. Pause. Rewind. A Boer finds a diamond amongst his son’s marbles. Diamond. Stop.

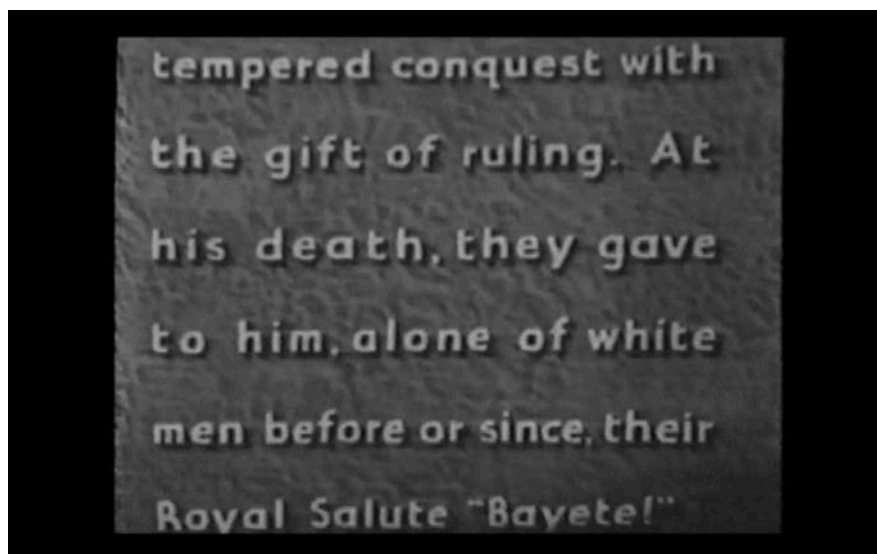
This sequence of the film is an appropriation of a scene out of the 1936 film by Berthold Viertel *Rhodes of Africa* (1936). The film is a glossy biography of the well-known politician and mining magnate Cecil John Rhodes. *Rhodes of Africa* (1936) celebrates Rhodes’ life by showing how he went from being a diamond-miner in Kimberley to become Prime Minister of the then Cape Colony with big plans for Matabeleland, once Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe.

This is not the only historical account that describes and upholds Rhodes as a thriving and ambitious entrepreneur. “More than thirty biographies and biographical sketches of Cecil Rhodes have been published” (Meredith, 2007: 528). Amongst these writers were people like Rhodes’ friends, some mere acquaintances, like his banker - “who wrote an official biography in 1910” (Meredith, 2008: 528) - his secretary and his architect, who gave an extensive account of Rhodes life in his own memoir. Then came the historians. First was Basil Williams (The Beit Professor of Imperial History at Oxford), who, like Meredith explains, also “fell under [Rhodes’] spell” (2008: 528), writing that Rhodes “was, with all his grievous faults, a great man, and that at the root of his imperialism were great qualities that have done good service to mankind. His character was cast in a large mould, with enormous defects corresponding with his eminent virtues” (Williams in Meredith, 2008). Finally a somewhat more critical perspective emerged from William Plomer in 1933 and John Flint in 1974 (Meredith, 2008: 528), with others, like Meredith following in pursuit. Thanks to these historians some of us know now that Rhodes was actually “a ruthless entrepreneur with command of private armies... the first of a dynasty of ‘money kings’ who had emerged as ‘the real rulers of the world’” (Meredith, 2008: 9). Meredith substantiates this viewpoint by explaining that Rhodes, together with the Afrikaner Bond “sought to overturn the established tradition of Cape liberalism with a series of measures restricting African rights... supporting a parliamentary amendment to the Masters and Servants Act,” also called the “Every Man Wallop His Own Nigger Bill” by opponents of this institution (2008: 261). Meredith writes that Rhodes regarded ‘natives’ “important only as an engine of labour...referring to them as “‘lazy’, as at best ‘children’, at worst ‘barbarians’, requiring discipline and instruction on ‘the dignity of labour’” (2008: 261). Rhodes also spoke about his acquaintances, or friends as some might call them, as “tools” that he will throw away when he is done with them. (Meredith, 2008: 262). With this display of outright racist and tyrannical attitudes it is clear

that Rhodes was definitely not intent on doing “a good service to mankind” (Williams, in Meredith, 2008).

Viertel’s depiction of Rhodes in *Rhodes of Africa* (1936)’s is yet another romantic and unblemished account of the man. The film starts with a sequence of superimposed text that reads as follows; “The life of Cecil Rhodes is the drama of a man who set out single handed to unite a continent. In pursuit of this task he spared neither himself nor others. By some he was hailed as an inspired leader, by others he was reviled as an ambitious adventurer. But to the Matebele -- the very people he had conquered -- he was a Royal warrior. Who tempered conquest with the gift of ruling. At his death, they gave to him, alone of white men before or since, their royal Salute “Bayete!” Perhaps these children of Africa came closest to understanding the heart of this extraordinary man.” See figure 2^y below for a still from this sequence. With this sequence as an introduction to the film, it is clear that *Rhodes of Africa*, a film from the year 1936, fits into Maingard’s description of South Africa’s cinema history as “deeply intertwined with the histories of colonialism” (2007: 2). Also notable is the fact that Rhodes’ political and economic power seems to have influenced the way that historians

^y Figure 2. Rhodes of Africa (1936) (02:21)



portrayed him. I wonder if Rhodes did not have the amount of money that he had, if he would still have been hailed as such an extraordinary man? The historian, McNeill (1986) notes that “all human groups like to be flattered” - is this perhaps why these historians, filmmakers (storytellers) fell under Rhodes’ ‘spell’? Or were they tempted, like McNeill suggests, “to conform to expectation by portraying the people they write about as they wish to be”?

However in this case Rhodes’ name is but one of many incantations used in the ‘spell’ that keeps South Africans’ popular memory bounded to a purely mythical Past. Master exorcist of myth Van Onselen, writes that the “timid historians” of the industrial revolution indeed fell under this larger spell, of not only one but many ‘Randlords’ belonging to the “dynasty of ‘money kings’ who had emerged as ‘the real rulers of the world’” (Meredith, 2008: 9). Marking an “absence of an indigenous aristocracy,” in contrast to the historians’ acute focus on the “small number of ruling class actors,” Van Onselen says that these historians ignored (*left out*) “the people” - consequently endowing the city of Johannesburg with “a mythical collective past”. Unfortunately, Van Onselen says, these historians “have tip-toed through the tree-lined avenues of the northern suburbs [in Johannesburg], peering into the homes and lifestyles of the ‘Randlords’ attempting to put a romantic gloss on the ceaseless pursuit of wealth at a time when, “elsewhere in the city, the dusty streets were bursting at the seams with a seething mass of struggling humanity”. Perhaps they did this because, van Onselen mockingly suggests, this mythical account is more “becoming to [Johannesburg’s] present role as one of the major finance capitals of the world” (Van Onselen, 1982: 15).

“Story, history, literature (or religion, philosophy, natural science, ethics) - [was once] all in one.” The most important thing for a storyteller was that it should simply be “The story of a people. Of us, peoples.” But then “history separated itself from story”. And “started indulging in accumulation and facts. Or it thought it could. It thought it could build up to History

because the Past, unrelated to the Present and the Future, is lying there in its entirety waiting to be revealed and related. Managing to identify with History, history (with a small letter h) thus manages to oppose the factual to the fictional (turning a blind eye to the “magicality” of its claims); the story-writer - the historian - to the story-teller” (Minh Ha, 1989: 119 - 120). In this article Minh Ha talks about the origin of stories and tells us that story and history was once one, but then one day history (note the lower case ‘h’) separated itself from story she says. Perhaps Rhodes’ “spell” is also the kind of History with a capital ‘H’ that Minh Ha refers to here. In McNeill’s words this “spell” can be explained as “a mingling of truth and falsehood, blending history with ideology” (1986), resulting in the “mythical: the past as we want it to be, safely simplified into a contest between good guys and bad guys, “us” and “them”... Most national history and most group history is of this kind” (McNeill 1986: 5). Minh Ha says that storytelling is the oldest method by which one can build a historical consciousness. Historical consciousness is myth is it not? Ideological myth. When Botha talks about the new generation of post-apartheid filmmakers readdressing the past, it can also mean that they in fact unmasked an ideologically *mythified* national consciousness - ‘mythical histories’. In this way *Duiwelsdorp* intends to unmask, or rather *undo*, the “spell” that Rhodes has left on the South African popular memory. A simple example to show that this “spell” still exists: In Cape Town the Rhodes Memorial, amongst many of the other statues of the man, still stands unchanged. I am of the opinion that this lingering presence of the old Prime Minister perpetuates for one - his racist ideals. I believe that love is based on actions and not words. How can we love our country if we still celebrate people who led us out of the frying pan and into the fire? If we abolished racism we must stop honouring those that openly stood and implemented laws that institutionalized it. Even though Rhodes was not physically part of Apartheid, he was very much parcel to its justification.

Back to *Duiwelsdorp*: John McKeone (Mary's husband) sells guns to the rebel Basotho warriors to fight in the Basotho Gun War⁷. A montage follows: Set to Miriam Makeba's 'A Piece of Ground' "with its Mexican style guitar and COWBOY-GALLOP-RYTHM starts playing" *Duiwelsdorp* (2015). The montage acts as a parallelism by setting up the four McKeone and three Sotho kids' play-fight against the British fighting the Basotho in the Gun War. Pause. Rewind. Play. Now watch and listen.

Maama and his Rebel Warriors attack The Colonial Troops "with pistols and rifles CLICK CLACK against each other as the boys set forth their SeSotho style stick-fighting battle" (*Duiwelsdorp*, 2015). Hear Makeba sing: "Then one fine day in 1883, gold was discovered in good quantity. Now the country was rich and was richer than planned and each digger wanted his own piece of land" *Duiwelsdorp* (2015). "Tall men with rifles; shiny gold buttons, feathers, horses' hooves, army boots and animal skin dresses flash past" *Duiwelsdorp* (2015). The next scene flows in: "A now Older Jack and Hugh sidestep boots, shovels, mounds of dirt and sifting pans as they try to escape a group of angry DIAMOND BUYERS" *Duiwelsdorp* (2015). In this sequence Makeba's song is specifically used to situate *Duiwelsdorp*'s concerns within the the age-old and still continuing issues of land ownership and race and class inequalities in South Africa. 'Piece of Ground' was written by Jeremy Taylor^{vi} and recorded with Miriam Makeba in the United States of America. Taylor was "banished from South Africa for ridiculing apartheid" (Online). I thus conclude that Taylor can be seen as a politically progressive musician. So with Taylor as the writer and the anti-apartheid activist Miriam Makeba as the artist speaking through 'Piece of Ground', the song can clearly be framed as an unflinching lament to those who suffered decades of oppression throughout the history in South Africa. With this in mind watch Jack and Hugh:

^{vi} Taylor is well known for his song 'Ag Pleez Deddy', which "set South Africa alight in the sixties" (Online).

“Crouching, they slip past hundreds of sweating diggers who toil with picks and shovels in the scorching sun. Rocks fly and roll down as they're thrown, one shovelful after another onto the ever growing heaps” (*Duiwelsdorp*, 2015).

The echo of Makeba's song adds another layer to the previous sequence's juxtaposition. Rewind. “Jack's team follows in close pursuit. Tall men with rifles; shiny gold buttons, feathers, horses' hooves, army boots and animal skin dresses flash past...The boys dodge flying and rolling rocks that the diggers throw, one shovelful after another, onto ever growing heaps”. Now imagine the kids fighting and running into the future, battle after battle off around them: The Jameson Raid, The Second Anglo Boer War (a.k.a.) South African War, The Sharpeville massacre, The Soweto uprising and then into the present. The kids run past hordes of dead black miners lying under police guns: The Marikana massacre. “The multitude of battlefields... Blood River, Isandlwana, Majuba and Spion Kop” (Meredith, 2007). Hinting at the copious civil wars and conflicts South Africans have endured, this sequence seeks to present how the “actions taken in the late nineteenth century continued to reverberate for a hundred years” (Meredith, 2007). Delving into South Africa's history is like trying to feel one's way through an abyss of conflict, churning, gyrating - it spits out generation after generation, descendant upon descendant, who grows up amidst aggression - in turn only cultivating yet another outburst of anger. It is a vicious and never-ending cycle. “When will this all end?” one feels to ask, but then one becomes numb quicker. “*Dis soos om te poep teen donderweer*” (It's like farting against thunder) my dad always says when he refers to something that is utterly out of your control, so far beyond mending that it seems absolutely futile to waste the effort to even talk about it or to get passionate enough to actually care. This is when you become bored and sit, staring into the television, trying to escape the world - and someone asks, “So... who's fighting who next?” South Africans are living in a wrestling show where the children of the now adult wrestlers' only hope for the

future is to pick up where their parents left off - to put on that pair of weathered wrestling boots that they inherited, and join their ancestors in the ring. And so, the show goes on, generation after generation, fight after fight. The show must go on, and so it does, because it's not the fighters who are the audience, it is the middle class, always striving to be elite. And so the elite easily use the middle classes to push down the workers and ta-da, they stay up top without even getting their hands dirty. "So... who's fighting who next?"

By exposing the unjustifiable oppression and prejudice inflicted on the indigenous people of South Africa throughout the centuries *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) stresses that what happened in the late 19th century was indeed very weighty in the greater scheme of things. Like Meredith says, "modern South Africa was shaped by events of [the late nineteenth century], in particular the rise of its fortunes from diamonds and gold and the steady dispossession of African land. It was also a time which saw the determined enforcement of segregation measures that culminated eventually in the apartheid system" (Meredith, 2007).

Outlaws;

Let us skip to where the McKeone boys finally grow up. It's the year 1889. They are now in their twenties. This older Jack, "a South African-Irish-Mosotho" as Van Onselen calls him (2010: 61), is the main protagonist in *Duiwelsdorp* (2015). As Jack grew up he was exposed to many different people and cultures, languages and lifestyles. Jack also apparently spoke fluent Afrikaans-Dutch (one of the variants of Dutch spoken in the ZAR) English and SeSotho^{vii}. This then is the hero of the story.

^{vii} Like I said, *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) is only partly based on Van Onselen's account of Jack McKeone's life - therefore, in *Duiwelsdorp* Jack speaks a more contemporary *fanakalo*-like mix of various South African languages as they are spoken and mixed in this point of time a.k.a. the year 2015.

Duiwelsdorp (2015) sets forth to tell the story of Jack's first experience of injustice as based on Van Onselen's accounts: "On 27 May 1889, Jack McKeone went to the mining commissioner's office to have his diggers license renewed" (2010: 50 - 51). It was here that it all started. Unfortunately for Jack the clerk tried to bribe him and Jack, being the principled man he was, turned the bribe down. This made the clerk so angry that he arrested Jack for "attempted fraud" and the "use of abusive language" (Van Onselen, 2010: 50 - 51). This incident not only led to Jack's first night in prison, "it was [also] to be a life changing incident, one that Ned Kelly and legendary outlaws around the world would have understood all too well" (Van Onselen, 2010: 50 - 51). Jack was put on trial. When given a chance to speak Jack openly contested the corrupt Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek. But this did no good. He was sentenced to three months in prison. But, lo and behold, he left much sooner than that. Not too long after he returned, Jack escaped from prison with the help of Scotty Smith (one of the more well-known South African outlaws). Affiliating Jack with Scotty Smith and the notorious 'One Armed' Jack McLaughlin creates the right circumstances to depict how the subordinate classes, resisted the Randlords' oppression. Take, for example, the scene where Jack meets Scotty Smith during his first time in prison. Scotty, a "burly blonde" (*Duiwelsdorp*, 2015) Scotsman approaches Jack (who's trying to file some fake diamonds in order to bribe a guard). Scotty introduces himself and mentions in passing that he has been employed by "mister Cecil John Rhodes himself not too long ago" (*Duiwelsdorp*, 2015). Scotty explains that, following the orders of Hans Sauer, Rhodes' "genial ruffian," (Meredith, 2007) Scotty himself, McLaughlin and others set out one day to raid the small mining camp, Eureka City. "Ya, ya, not too far from Barberton. Ja, so Rhodes' problem was that this little encampment was at that time, you see, almost entirely devoted to the 'illegal' trade of diamonds you see? You see, De Beers wants all diamonds to go through them so they can control the market!" (Scotty in *Duiwelsdorp*, 2015). We flash back to the year 1883 in Eureka City. After a somewhat unnecessary and violent bar fight, "The group of men burst into a dusty room where men sieve through gravel, looking for diamonds. The group pillages the place after which they seize all the cleaned and packaged diamonds" (*Duiwelsdorp*, 2015). After this we are back in the prison cell,

where Scotty says to Jack, “I sent back some money to the poor townsfolk via a horse I had taken from there. I see my part in it as warning those poor people to stay clear of the diamond game once and for all you see. Because Jack-O my boy, that man Rhodes, he's ruthless as fuck!” (*Duiwelsdorp*, 2015). This event is partly real, but half imagined as well. However, not a total castle in the sky, it is built on the suspicions of van Onselen himself who writes about various situations where a leader, similar to standing as Hans Sauer and Rhodes, were coincidentally at the same time and place as some of the most notorious of these and other criminals. In the introduction of the book *Masked Raiders: Irish Banditry in Southern Africa 1880-1899*, van Onselen says that some of “the suited-ones...themselves manifest alarming criminal tendencies seldom acknowledged fully by their followers” (Van Onselen, 2010: 60).

However, as a storyteller/ film maker/ historian I acknowledge that “historians can only be expected to be heard if they say what the people around them want to hear in - in some degree” (McNeill, 1986). This is also why in *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) I chose to portray the story of the outlaw hero and not that of the blatantly criminal, whether ‘suited’ or not, because see, “our fascination with heroism is based on the dual status of the hero who is recognizably one of us, yet at the same time apart from us by virtue of his actions or experiences” (Seal, 1996: 2). The outlaw hero “is at once a representative of the dissatisfactions of the particular social groups who sympathize with him, and someone set apart from the members of such groups by his outlawry” (Seal, 1996).

It was on the night of Jack and Scotty’s escape from prison (*Duiwelsdorp*, 2015), on his way back through Ferreirasdorp, that Jack developed the idea of robbing the Standard Bank. And so Jack and the bold Joseph Stevens, or Dick Turpin (as he called named himself after a well-known British highwayman) robbed the new Standard Bank of Johannesburg. They stole a fortune in gold and some cash. Fortunately they stashed the gold somehow, because just after the robbery the cops managed to catch them. Jack gave quite the soliloquy defending himself

in court after he and Turpin was caught. In *Duiweldsorp* (2015): When the judge allows Jack a chance to state a plea in mitigation, Jack takes up the stand with force, “I for one, your Honour, stand for the truth! And will speak it, so help me God, so that all men might know the injustices to which I have been subjected and so that all the world can read it in the papers! It is not the accused who should be on trial here today, but the besotted establishment who unashamedly propagate a stature they so clearly lack, sending innocent men to jail in the name of justice, ha! What farce!” After that we follow Jack in and out of jail, court, and the newspapers, all the while openly contesting the corrupt Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek and its Randlords. Jack is seen as the real outlaw, because he stole from the rich to give to the poor in the sense that, as Seal explains, “The single most important of these [narrative] elements, indeed the defining motif, is that the outlaw hero ‘robs the rich to help the poor’” (Seal, 1996: 4): “the rich may be the forces of economic oppression, and injustice. Similarly ‘the poor’ are generally those members of the social group that sympathizes with and supports the outlaw hero, and from which he has usually arisen or for whom his activities are appealing. These groups perceive themselves as suffering under various forms of injustice and oppression, and see the activities of their outlaw hero as justified against those forces and their representatives” (Seal, 1996: 5). As seen in *Duiweldsorp* (2015) as adapted from Van Onselen’s accounts, Jack definitely did not lack in support. Thousands of diggers and working class men and women alike supported Jack. The many newspaper articles covered by the newspaper *The Star* also shows the unwavering support Jack received from the sometimes openly loyal media.

Together with this and Jack’s highly developed sense of morality and his seemingly opposing criminal tendencies, Jack appears to fit Seal’s idea of the outlaw hero quite perfectly. “The outlaw hero” Seal notes, “inhabits the grey area between criminality and political or pre-political protest” (Seal, 1996: 2).

Outsiders;

There is one other bandit who is actually the ‘real’ bandit of that time. It is Mzuzephi Mathebula the so-called father of South African gangs, otherwise known as ‘Nongoloza’.

“Nongoloza is seen as a social bandit who led a legitimate form of black resistance against the process of proletarianisation by directing a campaign of robbery and violence against the more powerful and wealthy in the country - the whites” (Van Onselen, 2008: 56). Nongoloza, the founding father of the notorious prison gangs in South Africa, is actually much more of an outlaw hero than Jack McKeone. Very coincidental, but somehow anticipatable, Nongoloza was born in the year 1867, the same year that the first diamond was discovered^{viii} and passed away in the year 1948, the year Apartheid was officially introduced by D.F. Malan, the then Prime Minister of the National Party.

In van Onselen’s book, *The Small Matter of A Horse* (2008), something of a semi-autobiography of Nongoloza, where Van Onselen, together with transcribed recordings of interviews a prison warden did with Nongoloza in 1912^{ix}, describes how Nongoloza’s journey of resistance started with the ‘small matter of a horse’. At that time Nongoloza was a young man working for a white farmer. He was in charge of the farmer’s stables as well as the garden. So one day, as he returned to the stables after working in the garden, the farmer confronted him and set off accusing Nongoloza of losing the horse that was now missing from the stables. Nongoloza contested this saying that he could not possibly have lost the horse because he was working in the garden. However the owner did not believe Nongoloza and told Nongoloza that he would henceforth be working, earning nothing until he paid of the

^{viii} As I’ve noted before.

^{ix} This was when Nongoloza was still going by his birth name, Mzuzephi

costs equivalent of a new horse. Nongoloza resisted this exploitation and decided to abandon the farm and escape to Johannesburg (Then still called Ferreira's Town). After a few years, in an effort to escape the farmer's punishment once and for all, Nongoloza cut ties with his family.

In early 1888 Nongoloza was working as a horse groom with a Messrs. Tyson and McDonald and two other Irishmen at a small house in Turffontein. These men stayed at home the whole day and then went out at night. They always seemed to bring back some money with them and Nongoloza used to see them counting it at night. They eventually took Nongoloza with and over the following weeks they showed and taught him how to stage coach robberies, waylay company carts taking wages to remote gold mines, all with the use of a revolver...

“The forces that shaped modern industrial South Africa, Van Onselen is telling us, were brutal, wrenching generations of people from their lives” (2008: 13). People were gradually being forced to become migrant labourers in order to pay their taxes (for example the hut tax) and above this they had to abide by the vicious pass law system. “Within the relatively short space of six or seven decades, hundreds of African peasants or pastoralists were reduced to the status of proletarians labouring in agriculture, mining or manufacturing in order to earn a living” (Van Onselen, 2008: 13). It is fairly easy to understand how a person like Nongoloza could have emerged under these circumstances. The environment in which Nongoloza, the man, the myth and the legend was made, is due much more recognition than commonly understood. In the intro to Van Onselen's book, another contemporary historian, Jonny Steinberg answers the mystery of the Nongoloza accordingly: “pathological social processes produce pathological forms of political expression” (Van Onselen, 2008:10). It is not to say that, if every man endured what Nongoloza did, he would end up with a name so notorious as

Nongoloza's. On the contrary, Nongoloza was not made of everyday character at all. He was an exceptionally determined and intelligent person with an intense commitment to the cause for political justice. Nongoloza was well known, feared and respected throughout the country's underworld for his uncompromising brutality. During his prime Nongoloza was said to have fashioned himself a necklace adorned with human teeth (probably from his victims' teeth). Nongoloza's reputation did not only resonate through the underworld though. The story of Nongoloza's determined and zero-tolerance-like resistance remains spoken of today. "As long as our economy remains heavily reliant on labour-repressive institutions and instruments such as... prisons... so Nongoloza's name will...continue to resonate and in a number of different ways - continue to resonate with the lived experiences of some of the weak, underprivileged and the unashamedly criminal in our society" (Van Onselen, 2008: 55).

Nongoloza was a much more vicious character than Jack McKeone. Jack's circumstances were definitely much less besetting than Nongoloza's though. However, according to Seal's concept of the outlaw as someone that steals from the 'rich' to give to the 'poor' (1996), both these men were significant in their resistance towards the 'rich' - each in his own right of course. But in terms of resonating reputations, Nongoloza's will definitely take the prize. So how come I chose to tell the story of Jack McKeone and not Nongoloza Mathebula, who's story clearly carries the metaphorical burden of a much larger significance in terms of explaining the workings behind the present South African society?

It is not only the 'spell' cast by Rhodes' that *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) intends to undo. First and foremost, I wanted to contest the racist notion that not all criminals are and were always black. Secondly I wanted to highlight the fact that Nongoloza, the so-called founding father of gangsterism in South

Africa^x was in fact taught to steal by white men^{xi}. Van Onselen writes in *Unmasked Raiders* that many an Afrikaner was involved in the criminal underground of those years. Most noted amongst them is a nephew of the much-celebrated Afrikaner General Koos De La Rey. ‘Groot Adriaan’ De La Rey “was sufficiently well known for his extra-legal adventures to be described as a ‘filibuster’... who himself had more than passing knowledge of the Irish brigade” (Van Onselen, 2010: 78). History has quite the sense of irony. Van Onselen speculates, perhaps somewhat tongue in cheek, that “working in the same, admittedly thin, vein, it might be asked whether, on the outer margins, some of the much vaunted Boer genius for guerilla warfare did not in some cases derive from prior experience of brigandage” (2010: 78).

Referring to the history of Johannesburg in particular, Herman Charles Bosman challenges a similar notion of an undeserving respectability inherited by the white people of South Africa in particular. “They are trying to make snobs out of us, making us forget who our ancestors were. They are trying to make us lose our sense of pride in the fact that our forebears were a lot of roughnecks who knew nothing about culture and who came here to look for gold...” (Van Onselen, 1982: 15). Just as much as historians must pay heed to what “the people around them want to hear”, they must “also tell the people some things they are reluctant to hear - in some degree” (McNeill, 1986). It is in this way then that by choosing to tell the story of Jack McKeone and other white outlaw heroes, *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) challenges the popular notion of criminality and delinquency in South Africa.

Van Onselen substantiates this, saying that “it is the social historians’ duty to help stir the raw depths of the city” (Van Onselen, 1982), so that the memory within can awaken, rumbling like an earthquake beneath the feet of those that are all too comfortable in their misshapen

^x Currently one of the world’s most disgracefully criminal societies to date

^{xi} Messrs. Tyson and McDonald, the Irish robbers he worked for.

memories - those who purposefully forget where they come from, those who discriminate against and oppress those that seem to stimulate even the vaguest of memories into recognition.

Then last but not least, the reason why I chose to write about the Irish Brigade and especially Jack McKeone's story: Van Onselen challenges the same criticism by highlighting the fact that it is inadvertently because of the Irish that South Africa eventually became a union. But it is precisely *because* the Irish formed such a small part of the demographic make-up of southern Africa's interior, yet were disproportionately active as brigands between 1880 and 1899, that their story is worth telling" (2010: 1-2). This little community of Irish that existed on the margin of Johannesburg's late Victorian era society was a very special kind of marginalized society. These bandits, brigands, highwaymen and outlaws, like the McKeones and McLaughlins, were mostly refugees, immigrants or former criminals and gangsters. 'Stuck' in South Africa as part of an ethnic minority these Irish bandits - as the "vulnerable and resentful English-speakers" (Van Onselen, 2010: 3) dubbed them - were "neither Afrikaner republicans nor insurgent British imperialists" and thus, as Van Onselen frames it, had no real loyalties to any of these causes in the then geopolitically divided states in the late nineteenth century South Africa. It is thus this absence of political purpose that urged them to seek out targets for their "economic rather than their political significance" (Van Onselen, 2010: 5). Perhaps this is why outlaws such as Jack McKeone invested such urgency in the cause for justice as a matter of righteousness rather than a specific political ideology.

An important thing to note though is that the Irish were not passive victims of marginalization. On the contrary, they embodied their marginalization by forming tight knit communities. In this way they could much easier resist oppression. However it seems that the forces which brought them together, were in this case, rather than through conscious effort,

established much more organically. Either way, the Irish Bandit community's close-knittedness in itself accounts for the strong resistance that they displayed against the oppressive forces in the late 19th century. However the most significant characteristic of the Irish Brigade in this instance, is the fact that these men were to a great extent responsible for the birth of the modern Union of South Africa in 1910, which in the long run means that they were a large part of the inception of the Republic of South Africa as it exists today.

And Popular Amnesia:

Truth, history, story, magic; "The Mother's power... her speech, her storytelling is at once magic, sorcery, and religion. It enchants. It animates, sets into motion, and rouses the forces that lie dormant in things, in beings. It is "bewitching." At once "black" and "white" magic... The same "medicines," the same dances, the same sorcery are said to be used in both. As occasion arises, the same magic may serve for beneficent *and* maleficent ends" (Minh Ha, 1989: 129). In the meantime Martha fell in love and eloped with Letsienyane (the grandson of King Moshoeshoe I). This caused conflict between King Lerotholi and the British authorities. And MaNthatisi's story continues: Amarava's husband, Odu, commits suicide, which eventually triggers Amarava to do the same. Amarava's many children try to stop her, but unfortunately for them a monster catches their beloved Queen before they can. *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) ends in a fiery culmination of drama between the lovers, cops, robbers, the sangoma's prophecy and MaNthatisi's story - with the monster revealing that Amarava is actually *Watamaraka* "The Goddess of Evil. Mother of all Demons" (Mutwa, 1964: 7).

The story must be told. There must not be any lies. *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) attempts to tell the story as it was, as it is and how it can be. *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) *retells* the story of the late nineteenth century in southern Africa (I say southern Africa, because it includes much of

Lesotho's history as well). The fact of the matter is that those in power will always write history. This is definitely one moral of *Duiwelsdorp* (2015)'s story. Ultimately *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) suggests that we must not only look at the borders that we see in our contemporary world, but as historians do, we must search deeper, look back further and dig in the archives of our national consciousness and consider the real events of the past and not just those that we are spoon fed in the supposedly historical media of our time. The truth like people is deceiving. Truth, like people are vehicles for both the good and the bad. Do not blindly trust history, for just like Amarava/Watamaraka's real identity was taken to the witnesses' graves, the history that we think is real might just be a quarter or even less of the truth.

Mythistory;

By including various cultures within Southern Africa and explaining the real events in separate but intertwined pasts, *Duiwelsdorp* sets out to represent a 'mythistory' that not only readdresses the past of a specific cultural group, but also explains the history of a broader southern African community as it tells the story of the birth of Johannesburg, a place that represents the diverse cultural mix of southern African society like no other.

At the end of *Duiwelsdorp* (2015), MaNthatisi finishes her story to an astonished audience. MaNthatisi's story of Amarava and Odu comes from the chapter *A Bud Slowly Opens* in Vusamuzulu Credo Mutwa's *Indaba My Children* (1964) Mutwa's book is an account of the oral history of the Southern 'Bantu'.

And Mutwa continues: "Night had fallen by the time Zumangwe and his followers reached the gate of their village. It was the first village in the country... After witnessing all this Zumangwe wished that the name of Amarava should remain one which future generations

must honour and respect. So he ordered all those who had seen what had happened never to repeat what they had seen. All the villagers agreed to abide by the falsehood that the search for Amarava had failed and so the secret of Amarava's identity went with the men to their grave” (Mutwa, 1964).

The reference to oral storytelling is one which reverberates back to most adult’s childhood when a mother, grandmother or elder told us stories. This space is a very important space for commonality, the much needed factor which will determine more humanity centered histories, because if we can note here that “living is neither oral or written” (Minh Ha, 1989: 126), half of the battle for more ‘mythhistories’ is already won. Similar to Mutwa’s story, Amarava also turns into the monster Watamaraka in *Duiwelsdorp* (2015). However in *Duiwelsdorp* (2015) the transformation continues: Cecil John Rhodes, the newly appointed Prime Minister of the then Cape Colony, and MaNthatisi (the storyteller) turn into a golden, diamond clawed monster who stands astride the African continent (taken from the caricature in Figure 1). Symbolizing the embodiment of evil, Rhodes throws a handful of diamonds that morphs into the small white rocks that the Traditional Healer (the character) picked up between the bones in the beginning of the screenplay.

“It’s already turned loose/ It’s already coming / It can’t be called back. A story is *not* just a story. Once the forces have been aroused and set into motion, they can’t simply be stopped at someone’s request. Once told, the story is bound to circulate; humanized, it may have a temporary end, but its effects linger on and its end is never truly an end” (Minh Ha, 1989: 133). The story that is not just a story is a living story and living story, like ‘mythistory’, story cures, heals, regenerates and births life. It takes as much as it gives though. But that is life and that is what we all have - that is what we all share; what we are all concerned about.

See living is what the 'living' are concerned about. And what the living are concerned with is what the storyteller, the social historian should be concerned about if he or she is at all concerned about preserving life. "The story depends upon every one of us to come into being. It needs us all, needs our remembering, understanding, and creating what we have heard together to keep on coming into being. The story of a people. Of us, peoples. Story, history, literature (or religion, philosophy, natural science, ethics) - all in one" (Minh Ha, 1989: 119). If a people can be held accountable for the amnesia of a community's past, then surely the individual has a share in that guilt. As individuals able to tell, to talk, to story-tell, we are all active agents of transferal whether we want to be or not.

So what role do historians/storytellers' play in fighting popular amnesia? McNeill says that a serious historian helps "the group he or she addresses and celebrates to survive and prosper in a treacherous and changing world by knowing more about itself and others" (McNeill, 1986). He says that the only way for everyone on the planet to live together (somewhat) peacefully is to create a 'mythistory' - something between myth and History with a capital 'H'. He suggests that a historian must attempt to tell a broader history of humankind but at the same time insert some form of significance to the individual in its specificity. "A wise historian will not denigrate intense attachment to small groups. That is essential to personal happiness, in all civilized societies, a tangle of overlapping social groupings lays claim to human loyalties. Any one person may therefore be expected to have multiple commitments and plural public identities, up to and including membership in the human race and wider DNA community of life on planet earth" (McNeill, 1986: 7-8). McNeill suggest we balance our loyalties in this sense so that "no one group will be able to command total commitment" (McNeill, 1986: 7-8).

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¹ “MaNthatisi (Mosayane) of the Tlokwa (ca. 1781–ca. 1836), ‘the famous conqueror’, was said to have had the first voice in his council as well as displaying a celebrated ‘martial genius’ and engaging in conflict (Bird 1965, Vol 1; Bryant 1929; Coquery-Vidrovitch 1997; Ellenberger 1992). She assumed the leadership around 1817, during the early Shakan wars.” (Weir, 2007:13)

² The South African Republic, commonly known as Transvaal Republic was an “Emigrant Farmer...territory north of the Vaal River - the Transvaal, or the Zuid Afrikaansche Republiek as they called it. The British officials recognized the dependence of this Boer republic in 1852. (Meredith, 2008: 7)

³ “Fanakalo (also spelled ‘Fanagalo’) is an intriguing South African pidgin language.” There is an assumption by many that it is used only in the mining industry, however “its origins are uncertain, even though a number of explanations have been proposed to account for them” (Adendorf, 2002: 179)

⁴ “The Seqiti War (1865-1868). Also known as “The War of the cannon’s Boom,” the Seqiti War marked continued hostilities between the Basotho and the Orange Free State (OFS)... the two sides engaged on and off in an unequal fight that favored the better-armed Free State forces. (Rosenberg, 2004: 375)

⁵ Thaba-Bosiu is “the birth place of the Basotho nation”; “their sacred mountain”; “the matrix of the Basotho Nation as it is known today”; “Thaba-Bosiu which protected Moshoeshoe”; the “mountain of the night” (Rosenberg, 1999: 55).

⁶ “During the so-called Gun War of 1880/81... the Sotho successfully resisted efforts by the Cape government to disarm them and to open Sotho lands to white settlement.” (Kunene, 1977)

⁷ “During the so-called Gun War of 1880/81... the Sotho successfully resisted efforts by the Cape government to disarm them and to open Sotho lands to white settlement.” (Kunene, 1977)