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Trafficking Politics in Cultural Guise: South Africa's Coverage of Millennium 2000

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A new-world space of cultural production and national representation is simultaneously becoming more globalized (unified around dynamics of capital logic moving across borders) and more localized (fragmented into contestatory enclaves of difference, coalition and resistance) in everyday texture and composition.¹

Global/Local Synergy.

Analysis in cultural studies seeks out points where global impact can be measured in a local environment and further addresses how local cultures either resist, assimilate or co-opt global culture. Global/local synergy seeks the transnational imaginary and resists predictions of a homogenous global culture (often expressed as fear of American imperialism) as a threat to the fragile equilibria of local, domestic, national culture and identity. Central to the global/local nexus is the notion that local cultures

¹ Wilson and Dissanayake 1996:1

can *not* be sublimated into the global. “Attention to local conjunctures needs to be linked, at all points, to global processes without falling into the by now tired modernist binary of the universal (global) subsuming the particular (local) explained through a colonizing master-narrative of undifferentiated homogenizing forces.”²

The theme of this paper is relations between globalization and local media in South African national politics. Any assumption of a homogenous national culture is a myth; “ex-centrics,” marginal cultures exist as sites of hegemonic contestation. However, certain political agendas in national politics remain dominant and pervasive. My aim is to contextualize the resulting interaction between marginal cultures and dominant political agendas, and to show that “global culture” (in a broad sense that also evokes Americanism) is not always an imperial ploy but also a terrain of cultural exchange, resistance, and export. Taking the Global New Year 1999/2000 television event as an example, I will show that a global context can be effectively utilized to enhance national political objectives, not only to further global ends but also to reaffirm national political aims.

“Localism,” as Arif Dirlik traces it in “Global in the Local”, was suppressed and ravaged by modernity, which favored global trends. The local is seen by Dirlik as a site of “promise and predicament.” This sense of promise is a result of global social and ideological changes of the last decade, forcing a reassessment of the local as a site of resistance and liberation. “In its promise of liberation, localism may also serve to disguise oppression and parochialism. [Thus] the local becomes a site of resistance to and liberation from oppression.”³ Dirlik ascribes this shift to “the post-modern repudiation of Enlightenment metanarratives” and shifting patterns in capitalist trends, particularly transnational production of capital.

For the purposes of my analysis I will concentrate on the resurgence of the local and its dualism of promise and predicament, since this aspect speaks directly to my example. In the case of contemporary South Africa the promise is one of capital entering the national environment. Unlike in the United States and Europe, where activism is centered around women’s movements and ecological initiatives, the hope for Africa is a desire for foreign capital and investment. The sustainability of new and emerging industries (especially the privatization program of the new South African government) makes the influx of new capital all the more necessary. This is antithetical to the Western/Northern protests against globalization expressed at

² Ibid., 6

³ Dirlik 1996:22

demonstrations at world economic summits in Seattle and 1999 and Genoa in 2001. Thus local contexts, cultures, languages and historical conditions need to be accommodated if transnational corporations are to enter a local environment. However, such prescriptions are rarely adhered to. It is apparent that the synergy of global/local is really an issue of (in)equality between “totalizing” global forces and the small scale of the local. If such is the predicament, then the site of resistance as a space of authentication becomes all the more vital for local cultures and identity. “Resistance that seeks to reaffirm some authentic local culture, in ignoring the conjunctures that produced it, is condemned to failure; if only because the so-called authentic local culture is daily disorganized by the global forces.”⁴ In Dirlik’s conclusion assimilation of local cultures into the global is seen as the most challenging and significant problem. While it is clear that capital, modernity, and conditions of transnational production affect local cultures, these sites of resistance and pockets of authentic culture and identity continue to thrive and are more resistant to ‘totalizing’ effects than is commonly assumed. As Shohat and Stam show in their analysis of Media Spectatorship, the notion of “negotiated readings” (derived from Stuart Hall’s model) “is an endless dialogic process.”⁵ Therefore, if we concur with the thesis that in the context of both local and global cultures, heterogeneous variants and interpretations of dominant, resistant, and residual cultures exist, then the more interesting point of analysis is to review how and what contexts determine reception and interpretation. A horizon of meaning and reading therefore becomes possible. As Derrida would assert, this facilitates the endless possibility of meaning, relying on *differance* to prevent any “totalizing” effect of any one particular culture over another.

The Politics of Local Media and Global Media.

The progressive enframing of key political debates within print and radio, and the dominant medium television has been one of the major cultural transformations of the twentieth century. The development of a sophisticated array of visual codes and repertoires that interrupt the agendas of more hegemonic institutions and cultures is an essential armament within semiotic society. To have access to cultural citizen-

⁴ Dirlik 1996:40

⁵ 1996:159

ship therefore is to be able to make an intervention into the public sphere at the local, national or global level.⁶

One of the most impressive television events of the twentieth century was the Millennium 2000 New Year Global Broadcast. A 26-hour live feed which took three years to plan was co-produced with the BBC and WGBH Boston. The aim of the program was to enable local broadcasters to participate in a global project in which cultural and artistic diversity could be shared. All events of the participating partners were sent to the “mother-station” (BBC). Each local network was allocated various time slots during the 26 hour broadcast. Of the four African representatives South Africa was the largest and only contributing partner. Senegal’s broadcast network RTS, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau and Mozambique were all licensees, which meant they had access to the global coverage but did not have to provide content as part of the participation. South Africa therefore, measured in terms of African representation, had a sizeable share as a partner.

Guidelines for the local networks were issued by the consortium encouraging short segments of “spectacular, surprising and innovative form and content.”⁷ It emphasized performance and entertainment which was not language dependent but at the same time reflected the uniqueness of the country with its traditional rituals and ceremonies. The guidelines also provided a set of conditions for programmers to avoid. They were as follows; “Contributions should not: (i) rely on in-vision hosts to tell the story (ii) include messages from heads of state or other national politicians (iii) use the broadcast for political or religious propaganda and, (iv) use the broadcast to promote special causes, charitable or otherwise.”⁸

South African Broadcasting Cooperation (SABC), as a new democratic medium, saw this as an invaluable opportunity to participate in a global event with the sanction of the new president, Thabo Mbeki. After years of international isolation such an event would be seen both locally and internationally as a symbol of South Africa’s democracy and reaffirm its position as a global player. Taking this opportunity would augment South Africa’s public relations globally, encouraging tourism and trade. Most importantly it would reveal that the media industry and in particular SABC have the expertise to participate in a large and technically innovative project. Such an undertaking would bode well for television personnel who need to

⁶ Stevenson 2001:5

⁷ Content Guidelines 1999

⁸ Content Guidelines 1999

display their know-how when South African representatives lobby for sporting events like the soccer world cup and the Olympic games.⁹

For a South Africa just coming off the second national democratic elections, with the victory of the ANC and Thabo Mbeki as president, along with the close of a highly charged but nevertheless internationally praised Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the SABC's millennium global participation could not have come at a better moment. It was seen as an occasion to show that South Africa was on its way to healing national wounds and poised to undertake economic challenges. Moreover, on a personal note it would give South Africa once again a chance to applaud the man responsible for taking his people to freedom, Nelson Mandela. It is worth quoting Andre Brink at length:

At the end of a millennium, when the rest of the world's media are trying to pick a "man of the century", their leader of leaders, it is interesting to see how the same names keep cropping up: Winston Churchill, Charles de Gaulle, David ben Gurion, Dwight Eisenhower – these names linger in the mind because of their inspirational roles in times of war; but their achievements in peacetime government invariably turned out to be, putting it generously, less impressive, if not downright embarrassing. And other names? John F. Kennedy was saved by assassination. So was Che Guevara. The ones who do stand out as exemplary – Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. – rose to eminence in their campaigns for liberation against all odds and then fell victim to violence, their moral greatness intact, without ever being submitted to the ultimate test: succeeding in their struggle and coping with power themselves. In this respect Mandela must be exceptional, if not unique; which makes his withdrawal from the scene after the elections in South Africa an event certain to reverberate through the country and the world.¹⁰

Given Mandela's low profile after the second democratic election it was clear that some type of sanction or show of Mandela's support for the new president had to be established. In this respect Mandela's distance from the new government had be-

⁹ South Africa has been trying to win bids for these events for the past several years, making a strong case that the international community has long been biased against Africa and claiming that some of these sports have their largest following on the African continent. Besides the financial costs of hosting such event, the political rhetoric is one of accusing international sporting committees of not making such events accessible to less privileged supporters, who cannot travel the world to attend these tournaments.

¹⁰ Weekly Mail and Guardian June 7, 1999

come particularly audible locally, especially with Mbeki's visible absence from the country on account of his many foreign travels. Marking the Global New Year celebration with such pomp and circumstance would enable Mbeki to reiterate his African Renaissance project. The agenda seemed clear: to create content which would bolster the economy and show off the democratic stability of the new state and its technological efficiency. All this while celebrating the "man of the century" in Africa. In so doing it would reinvolve the euphoria experienced by the South African peoples during the dismantling of apartheid, reminding the nation of the men responsible for these transformations. In order to serve these manifold aims and meet the guidelines of ensuring artistic and cultural entertainment, the SABC had to find a venue and stage an event of local significance but with global appeal. Mbeki alone would be of little interest internationally but with Mandela who still commands the interest of the world and the respect of locals, it would be a winning formula. The generational difference of the two men would be useful for addressing the significance of Mandela's presence with Mbeki: Mandela "the father of the nation" handing over the beacon of leadership. In retrospect the Robben Island Global New Year celebration seems like an obvious choice, a brilliant site to stage an event to usher in South Africa's new century of democracy.

Robben Island.

This infamous small, flat island with a circumference of twelve kilometers was made known to the world because of Nelson Mandela's twenty-seven year incarceration. It lies eleven kilometers off the southwest coast of Cape Town. Limestone quarries give the island an iridescent white sheen, the same quarries where political prisoners were forced to chisel through the long hot summers. Before it came to be the stronghold for political prisoners in South Africa it was a leper colony, an insane asylum, and a military outpost. It is also an ecological wonder, being the home of the endangered African "jackass" penguin and the breeding home of seals. (Recently, after much media persuasion, the penguins on the island received legal protection.)

On September 24, 1997 (Heritage Day) the island opened its doors to the public as a museum and a national monument. The museum and research center is controlled by the Department of Arts and Culture under the directorship of Professor Andre Odendaal from the Mayibuye Center. The ANC has been very articulate about Robben Island as a symbol of the liberation from apartheid. Those imprisoned on the island succeeded on a psychological and political level in turning the

prison into a symbol of freedom. Ahmed Kathrada¹¹ encapsulates this lucidly when he writes: “While we will not forget the brutality of apartheid, we will not want Robben Island to be a monument to our hardship and suffering. We would want Robben Island to be a monument ... reflecting the triumph of the human spirit against the forces of evil. A triumph of non-racialism over bigotry and intolerance. A triumph of a new South Africa over the old.”

Repackaging the past and re-interpreting sites of political struggle and resistance form the heritage of the country, and this is most evident in the tourism industry in the new South Africa. The Robben Island Museum receives the largest portion of funding from the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology out of all national monuments and museums. Private development money is being solicited to maintain the island as a national heritage site. “It costs a lot to maintain the buildings, to maintain the prison because naturally the place would go down if there is no upgrading taking place. ... It is also the government’s position to get partnerships between business and government to sustain this country and so Robben Island should not be any different. If business people get involved, they would become involved as investors to maintain that national heritage.”¹²

A Millennium Celebration with Mandela and Mbeki.

The millennium celebration on Robben Island, called “the all-African banquet,” was an exclusive and expensive bash with a per head cost of R30,000 (\$2650). An invitation only event, the list was drawn up by an organization called Peace Visions, appointed by Thabo Mbeki. Peace Visions director Naiem Dollie said, “Our approach is to access the notion of memory – we believe it is vitally important that there be a public acknowledgment of the cumulative memory of those who were imprisoned on Robben Island.”¹³ However, this sentiment was not simply about heritage, creating memory, and kindling the new nationalism; it was also informed by a very well-conceived economic and political agenda.

Robben Island was one of ten different locations covered by SABC for local programming. Each of the venues, Cape Town, Johannesburg, The Union Buildings

¹¹ Ahmed Kathrada was a prison-mate of Nelson Mandela, also serving a life sentence for his political activism. He is currently a member of parliament and a loyal and personal friend of Mandela.

¹² Grootboom interview August 20, 1999

¹³ SAPA September 6, 1999

in Pretoria,¹⁴ East London, Port Elizabeth, and Durban had a live-feed to Studio One in Auckland Park, Johannesburg, the headquarters of SABC. However, only the Robben Island coverage was transmitted as the live global feed to the BBC. This decision was made by asking what would interest the world about South Africa, and moreover what are the currently most identifiable features of South Africa. More importantly, *who* would the world want to be watching on New Year's Eve? What the president of South Africa would be doing was the question on local lips. But of course by this time, we were dealing with Mbeki, so the question was re-framed to ask what would Mandela – a free man after 27 years, father of South Africa's freedom, named "man of the century" – would be doing to celebrate the new millennium.

Having identified what the content would include and what aspects of South Africa were strongest in promoting the country, the financial means to make these events possible constituted the next hurdle.

In 1999 the government (Thabo Mbeki) announced¹⁵ that a trust would be formed called the South African Millennium Trust, a multi-million rand consortium of government, business and the SABC to coordinate the country's official millennium celebrations. The official statement by Mbeki called it a banquet in honor of Nelson Mandela and an opportunity to commemorate the five years since his release from Robben Island.¹⁶ Money from the trust would be used to organize events, stage a series of concerts in the major cities (Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal) on the eve of the new year 1999-2000. The trust fund hoped to raise 44 million rands from its sponsors, which were essentially parastatals like Eskom, Transnet, Telkom and corporations, particularly in the hospitality industry. Motivation for sponsors to contribute was summarized in the mission statement presented by the trust's chairperson, Naledi Tsiki : "The trust believes that the celebrations will be an opportunity to put the country on the tourist map."¹⁷

A further plan was to build a 300-seat Amphitheater on Robben Island, overlooking Table Bay to serve as a monument to the country's struggle for democracy.

¹⁴ These are the Parliamentary Buildings of South Africa's Legislative capital. This was the biggest outdoor event planned and was called "African Renaissance Millennium Party". The cost of attending the party was R75 per head and R35 for children.

¹⁵ SAPA (South African Press Agency) September 6, 1999

¹⁶ In fact Mandela was released from Victor Verster prison near Paarl in 1990, having being transferred from the Island to Pollsmoor in 1982.

¹⁷ SAPA September 6, 1999

Additional funds would be used to stage events throughout 2000 leading up to 2001. "A portion of the money raised in gate fees and millennium merchandise would go towards charities and supporting children, the disabled, the rural poor and the environment," Tsiki went on to say.¹⁸

Eventually only 27 million rands were raised through the trust, but sponsorship particularly for the Robben Island event came in more immediately. Part of this was a result of the "Robben Island Development" bids which had begun in October 1999. The bidding is for a multi-million rand hospitality development with tenders from Southern Sun Hotels, Protea Hotels, the tour operating companies Tourvest and Asijiki Tours, and the black empowerment groups Vukani and Nyama Leisure. "Development plans will enable management to present the island as a world-class facility when its millennium bash is screened to more than two billion people world-wide in December."¹⁹ These developments are currently underway and completion of the entire program is projected for 2004. Professor Andre Odendaal, director of Robben Island Museum, has designed the future of the island to be multi-faceted, ensuring that its future with hospitality elements maintains the historical, educational, ecological, tourism, and conservation aspects.

The "all-African" banquet was strategically a government-business-corporation networking agenda and the invitations sent to businesses read as such "a weekend of networking with cabinet ministers and our president."²⁰ Companies were invited to send one or more representatives to participate at a cost of R30,000 per person. The privilege of receiving an invitation was "a direct result of your identifiable continued support in the development and planning of our new nation."²¹ In exchange for this hefty price guests were assured "numerous special privileges...and the one highlight will certainly be the personal satisfaction of being part of this historic event. This could only lead to peace and prosperity for all in our country."²² The connections between politics and economics were clearly drawn, with a watchful eye on the global market.

¹⁸ SAPA September 6, 1999

¹⁹ Bezuidenhout 1999

²⁰ Weekly Mail and Guardian, December 27th 1995

²¹ Weekly Mail and Guardian, December 27th 1995

²² Weekly Mail and Guardian, December 27th 1995

What Content?

Based on the guidelines, which encouraged images rather than language-dependent content, it seems South Africa was no different from any of the other participating countries, choosing cultural dance, music, and some display of public revelry. However, the distinguishing feature of South Africa's coverage is that while the guidelines clearly stipulated that no national politicians, heads of state or political propaganda was to be broadcast, SABC chose exactly this to televise: Nelson Mandela on Robben Island with Thabo Mbeki, enjoying a banquet and entertained by a new African musical and, later in the evening, musicians from all over Africa.²³ However, there was also the added political gesture, which I will come to shortly.

The banquet guests were ferried in from Cape Town to the Island and the guest-list an opulent who's who of South African politics and business. Guests were greeted by cameras covering the event and the commentary of TV anchors Shadow Tswala (African female) and Manu Padayachee (Indian male). Their races are extremely important indicators of how South Africa chose to represent itself to the world, but this also had powerful resonances locally. At the SABC studios in Auckland Park the anchors responsible for the segway from the global network to the various local locations were Patricia Glyn (White female) and Lunga Williams (African male). Representing a cross-section of the population was a strong statement in favor of reinscribing the Rainbow Nation motive. Mbeki's African Renaissance would get its plug later that evening.

The opening act to be broadcast was part of a world premiere of a new musical called "The African Footprint." Produced locally by former street children who had come together in a shelter, the staging was of "high production value" with innovative choreography and complex sound and light design. Given this background story, on a local level it would reflect positively on the reform programs for street kids, while internationally the skills displayed would highlight the natural talents and resourcefulness of the urban black youth in South Africa. Traditional African dance and song describing the birth of Africa was the section chosen; a celebration of the natural resources, its peoples and the wildlife inhabiting the land were evoked

²³ It is interesting to note that neither of these men was accompanied by his partner, in Mbeki's case his wife. Mandela was not accompanied by Garca Marchel (widow of Semora Marchel), although their relationship at this point was common knowledge and was accepted by the majority of the population.

through the lyrics and choreography.²⁴ Mandela and Mbeki arrived at the event much later than scheduled, making for some interesting live TV such as impromptu shots of the helicopter circling the banquet marquee trying to find an appropriate place to land so that Mandela could alight. Locally audiences were then shown the prerecorded New Year's messages of Mandela and Mbeki (in that order). By the time global transmission resumed the focus was back on Mandela, this time with him at the prison building entrance of section B, with extra-diagetic voice-over from Mandela's speech at the eve of the first democratic elections: "Never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land shall ever experience oppression of one by another. The sun shall never set on such glorious an achievement. Let freedom reign – God bless Africa."

The sounds of drumming with sticks on the ground greets his arrival as he walks down a long corridor in the prison towards his cell, the famous cell number five. He is accompanied by a group (including Mbeki)²⁵ of his fellow ex-prison mates, most notably Ahmed Kathrada. The sounds of the dance and drumming fade out to make room for the humming of the National Anthem ("Nkosi sikeli Afrika"). Mandela enters the cell, stares out into the distance from the cell window, turns to a small table which bears a white candle on a stand, and lights the candle. Turning briefly towards the camera, he then proceeds out of the cell. The camera trains in on the candle flame. The outside camera picks up from the close-up of the flame. Mandela greets Mbeki, ceremoniously handing over the flame. Mandela says: "Mr. President, I hand over the flame of freedom to you. You are the only person in this country who should receive this flame and keep it burning and pass it to younger generations." The men shake hands, and Mbeki accepts the flame. Mbeki responds: "I am honored to pass it on to the leadership of the future." Following these words, Mbeki then turns to a young child (African boy) and hands the candle over to the child. A voice-over from Mbeki's oft-quoted "I am an African" speech follows: "I am an African. Born of the peoples of the continent of Africa. Today it feels good to be an African. Whatever the setbacks of the present nothing can stop us now. Whatever the difficulties Africa shall be at peace. However improbable it may sound to the skeptics Africa will prosper." Candle flames carried by young children

²⁴ Part of the reason for programming their musical at the Robben Island celebration was to provide them with the exposure and publicity to enable them to secure an overseas touring contract. This was before the musical even opened to the local public.

²⁵ Mbeki was not a political prisoner. He spent most of his youth in exile, affording him the opportunity to be educated in the United Kingdom.

form an outline of the African continent. An overhead shot with the lights darkened emphasizes this outline. There is a slow fade out to fireworks against the night sky. Mbeki's voice-over ends with the explosion of fireworks and color. The transmission cuts to the 2000 South African SABC Millennium logo and then after 30 seconds returns to the Johannesburg studio to continue with the local broadcast.

Clearly, the guidelines from the consortium were violated and with little subtlety. It seems a political agenda was smuggled in under the guise of a celebration of South Africa's freedom and new democracy. Using Mandela lent the project international cache, since he has become for the world a symbol of non-violent solutions, compromise politics, and an African leadership with a radical new vision. The appeal of Robben Island, besides the breath-taking view of Cape Town which was brilliantly exploited to appeal to international viewers, conveys the strong political message of a reconciled new nation. Mbeki's continued African renaissance rhetoric is the scene on which the curtain falls, in word and form.

The person given the mammoth task of producing this entire event was Mark West. His credentials affirm that he was the best man for the task. West produced many Miss South Africa Pageants and Miss World pageants, and had been contracted to Sun City, which meant global coverage from South Africa and the coordination of many disparate network and sponsorship interests. However, it seems that very specific instructions were given to West for the coverage of the Robben Island event. West was irate: "No cameras will be focused on the audience on the island except for Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki – those are the orders from the government. Audience shots make boring TV." (Padayachee 2000). Evidently, these instructions were carried out. Whenever the camera was not on the performers or the anchors it was directed at Mandela or Mbeki, and everyone in South Africa and abroad watched. Interesting too is that on the "highlights compilation tape" made available from the BBC and WGBH, no other political leader is allotted time, nor is any other country portrayed with such strong political images as the passing of the flame and the outlined African continent.²⁶

Predictably, the event met domestic criticism. Suspicious because of the lack of audience shots, viewers asked questions about exactly who had attended the function. The harshest criticism originated from the Democratic Party (DP – the

²⁶ Significantly, on the highlights compilation tape, no other political or world leader is represented except for the Pope (Italian Coverage). It is food for thought that the charisma of Mandela would overshadow the political resonances of his appearance with Thabo Mbeki.

ANC's official opposition). Janet Semple of the DP called the Robben Island celebration a waste of money, and said that instead of using the international coverage (broadcast to 800 million viewers) to market South Africa as a valuable tourist destination, the government managed to waste an estimated 40 million rands (3.5 million USD) on symbolic gestures. Semple said: "we need to start using every opportunity we get to tell the world about this country, its beauty and its people. The jobs of many thousands of South Africans depend on it." (SAPA January 4, 2000)

The Big Picture: Tourism, Economy, Ideology.

The global transmission of the Robben Island celebrations raises much suspicion about the use of cultural tourism and its relation to political and economic imperatives. While on the one hand the global consortium (BBC and WGBH) were clear in their remarks about not promoting tourism, it is clear that any representation of regional or national culture in the forms of music, dance, and display of customs on a global network does inadvertently become a promotion for cultural tourism. In the initial part of this analysis I addressed in detail the political and economic agendas that helped make the Robben Island an event for local and international consumption. Now I would like to address the criticisms made by the opposition to reflect on some possible reasons why SABC and the Millennium Trust did not choose a more conventional route of marketing South Africa to foreigners.

From the earliest colonial times the African experience has been couched in the 'primitive, primal' experience of jungle adventures. Home of the "big five" (lion, cheetah, buffalo, elephant, and rhino), South Africa has attracted big-game lovers seeking the authentic rustic experience. During its cultural isolation and even with international sanctions the Kruger National Park (the largest and most famous game park in Southern Africa) attracted a lucrative foreign clientele. Comparatively speaking (based on other available safari packages) the Kruger Park remains the most expensive resort, clearly catering to a foreign tourist market. National reserves frequented by local South African travelers have smaller packages at more affordable rates (based on the local currency rather than U.S. dollars or German marks). Touting the beauty of the South African landscape, the natural flora and fauna, and the indigenous culture was the strategy throughout the apartheid era. It was easy to deflect attention from the perverse political climate and redirect the traveler's eye to the country's natural and cultural wonders. National heritage and cultural tourism were "after the fact" elements open for exploration once one arrived in South Africa. Afrikaner national monuments exist throughout the country and, interestingly,

were designed to reflect the history of this particular people in the country without addressing its social and political impact.

A popular feature was and continues to be the “cultural village” experience, which serves as a snapshot of the ethnic past. An excursion promises the traveler a journey to an authentic native tribal setting. “Each village reproduces a specific ethnic stereotype that has its genealogy in colonial encounters, the creation of administrative tribal units, and imperial exhibitions across Europe in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Zulu thus appear as a distinct ‘warrior nation,’ the Xhosa as ‘proud’ and the Pedi as ‘warm-hearted.’ Visitors are allowed to witness distinctive tribal ceremonies and to participate en masse in daily programs of secret, ancient rituals.” (Witz, Rassool, Minkley 2001:280) To return to this form of representation would restate, to use Mbeki’s term, the “backwardness” associated with Africa. Presenting the modern, urbane, and forward thinking vision ties strongly into the African Renaissance program, and choosing to show national heritage and stressing the symbols of struggle against oppression serves to promote democracy rather than the traditional imperialistic stereotypes. In contrast to the rural “cultural village,” “township tours” and “routes of struggle tours” tours are presented as a “living culture, a place of political resistance and the modern.” (Witz, Rassool, Minkley 2001:284)

In terms of memorializing traces of resistance to apartheid, Robben Island is the single most eminent symbol. Its location and isolation from the rest of the country generated an enigma not just of place but of the political activists who inhabited the island. Making Robben Island visible to the world and demythologizing it for South Africans while creating a new reverence for it in the national history seems to have been the larger agenda. The millennium celebration therefore becomes a sparkling example of creating national identity and promoting nationalism in the new democratic South Africa.

It would be extremely myopic to assume that the Robben Island celebrations did not inspire tourist interest. Tours to Robben Island have been fully and successfully operative since the opening of the museum and research center in 1997. The round-trip ferry ride to the island, including a guided tour of the prison holdings, limestone quarries, and other facilities takes three and a half hours. Ex-prisoners and ex-wardens now function as guides, authenticating the experience for the traveler with personal stories, reflections, and impressions. Access to such first-hand knowledge assures tourists that they are “buying” a genuine experience and participating in South Africa’s liberation history. Ferry fare (for adults) will set a traveler back R100 (\$9), not including the tour. Cost of the entire tour with an authentic

guide is R400 (\$35) for adults. These prices are not affordable for an average South African; pilgrimage to the island would consume a third of their monthly wage. It is estimated that over 80% of the visitors who have passed through the gates since its opening have been overseas foreign travelers.²⁷ The scenic surroundings of Robben Island, with a spectacular view of Cape Town flanked by the twin peaks of Table Mountain veiled with wisps of mist as the sun sets, provided the postcard image in a single long shot. This establishing shot opened the coverage from Robben Island and was sufficient to promote the scenic, rustic tourist experience.

Access for the local population to this heritage and national culture appears to be the more pressing issue. Evidently the foreign tourist industry is booming, and if there is any cause for concern it is the negative press about South Africa's soaring crime rates and violence which need to be addressed if tourism is to develop.²⁸ "Our experience at the moment is that black kids cannot afford a trip to Robben Island because the prices are too expensive. In the early part of this year we mainly took white kids over and we realized we need to get funding for black kids to have the chance to come over." (Grootboom 1999, interview)

Like many aspects of post-apartheid South Africa, economic privilege facilitates access. Those who were historically most disenfranchised under apartheid continue to forfeit opportunities for cultural and historical experiences. Therefore, if racial divides have been blurred, they are now strengthened by economic boundaries. Financial wealth is still in the hands of white South Africans but the growing black middle class is widening the gap between rich and poor. Monuments like Robben Island which have come to enshrine the triumph over oppression should be accessible to all South Africans since they signify a heritage which belongs to every citizen. If the televising of the Millennium celebration on Robben Island made its heritage accessible to the nation and the world, then the SABC's efforts are to be applauded. But it came at a price: a mediated representation served to meet the ideological aims of a very specific political program. Access to the place, a trip to Robben Island with the luxury of a walkabout, the possibility to experience the "aura" of its authenticity are all factors which enable one to connect with this history and heritage. Why should it be the privilege of a few gawking tourists who wave their cameras at

²⁷ Wittman, Veronika, "Gender Empowerment in the Social Transformation of post-apartheid South Africa," a dissertation prepared for the University of Linz, Austria (2001)

²⁸ See Shaw, Mark and Gastrow, Peter, "Stealing the Show? Crime and its Impact in Post-Apartheid South Africa" in "Why South Africa Matters" *Daedalus: Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, Winter 2001

South African scars of suffering and pacify their moral sense before they go off to shop at the Victoria and Albert Waterfront in Cape Town or ride into the sunset to spy on the big game, relieved that their interaction with the locals is over?

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