VASSA Journal

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**Illustrations**
The photographs and illustrations are by the authors unless noted otherwise.

**Cover picture**
A traditional *mokhoro* (fire house), Lesotho.

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**Cover**
The design, by Alta Stegmann, symbolises architecture in a modern African context.

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An Evaluation of Vernacular Architecture in Lesotho

Matthew Liechti

Introduction

According to Tipnis (2012) vernacular architecture can be defined as the culmination of the creative process of interpretation of building skills and experience that are strongly influenced by factors such as environmental conditions, availability of materials, social structures, belief systems, behavioral patterns, social and cultural practices and economic conditions of an era.

If the term vernacular is understood, etymologically, as something native and unique, created without the help of imported components and processes and possibly built by the individuals who occupy it (Al Sayyad 2006), then how can vernacular architecture evolve to include imported materials and components? Can these components become part of the vernacular architecture that stems from centuries of knowledge systems and heritage, or are they the catalyst that will ultimately lead to the eradication of vernacular architecture? In the twenty-first century, as culture and tradition are becoming less place-rooted and are based more on information and knowledge systems, the term vernacular must evolve with vernacular traditions and be reinterpreted (Al Sayyad 2006).

In a rapidly changing world, many individuals and groups of people in rural areas find themselves facing an influx of contemporary influence into their communities. With this influx comes new cultural ideologies, new technologies and imposition on current systems and beliefs that are in place. Many communities the world over are facing the consequences of contemporary influence, losing touch with what seems to be dwindling ties to their heritage. There is a fine line between positive change, which brings infrastructure and a healthier and safer way of life, and the change that decimates all ties to heritage. Communities which face these predicaments often view something that is new as better than what they currently have. When new technology and building methods are introduced into communities, they are often revered over traditional or local materials and adopted as the new standard, and generally given a symbol of status within the community.

This article evaluates how external influences, such as technological advances in building materials, construction techniques and cultural and social changes, influenced the vernacular architecture in Semonkong, Lesotho. Are these changes beneficial to the local community or are they silently and irreparably eroding their heritage? Are there any elements of historical vernacular architecture being translated into the contemporary vernacular architecture, or is the heritage simply being discarded and external influences favoured and adopted?

A Concise History of Vernacular Architecture in Lesotho

The history of vernacular architecture in Lesotho will be examined with reference to the appearance of the first Western influence that was brought by Eugene Casalis on his mission to Lesotho (Casalis 1861). During his three year stay with the Basotho, Eugene Casalis documented their way of life, their architecture, cultural beliefs, and social structure. The earliest form of vernacular architecture has
therefore been recorded for posterity. According to Casalis (1861), the typical buildings that he encountered were the ‘Barlong Hut’ and the ‘Hut of the Basutos’, which can be associated with the *makhoro* (fire house) and the *mohlongoa-fatše* (a house made of sticks in the ground) respectively.

In his study of Basotho traditional building, Walton (1948) noted that the *mohlongoa-fatše* was a derivation of the smaller *lephephe* hut type which was employed as a small temporary field structure during times of harvest or a large temporary hut used in initiation schools. The hut type consisted of a number of saplings placed in a circle, one end stuck into the ground and the other end bent over to meet at an apex. Smaller, more pliable timber was used to weave in between the saplings to form a frame on which the grass thatch was placed. Walton stated that this building technique was still used during the time of his study (1948), however on recent inspection of the town of Semonkong, it was evident that this building technique is most certainly no longer employed.

According to Coates (1966), upon arrival in Basutoland, the missionaries asked for a piece of land on which to erect buildings and start a farm which, as they explained, would serve as a model to the Basotho, enabling them to learn how to raise their standards of living. This period in history marked the point at which Western culture and influence permeated the Basotho nation. From the 1830s onwards, the evolution of the vernacular architecture towards Western ideologies is evident. In 1839 a deserter from...
the 72nd Seaforth Highlanders, David F. Webber, and an unknown accomplice, built the first rectangular building for Chief Moshesh (Walton 1948).

Walton (1948) described how the Basotho adapted the new rectangular form and the circular form with which they had been accustomed to building, resulting in an oval house. He suggested that this form stemmed from the necessity for more space, and a desire to emulate the rectangular building techniques surrounding them, but not having the knowledge or correct materials to construct right angles. The oval house was the product of two half-rondavels spaced apart, joined by a straight wall.
The Journey

The road from Maseru to Quacha’s Nek was completed in 2014, allowing traffic to flow between these regions as never before. The town of Semonkong is roughly at the midpoint between Maseru and Quacha’s Nek, making it a node for future development. The infrastructural development has brought with it many helpful means to assist the people of Semonkong with daily life. Trucks, taxis and buses are now able to flow freely through Semonkong, bringing new people in and taking local people to new destinations. This brings an influx of external influences, which can be positive for injection of currency into the local community, however it also destabilises the local community with regards to ‘Western’ ideologies.

The traditional way of life in Lesotho is still apparent, and with exception of the capital, Maseru, the traditional way of building is still prevalent throughout the country. The ties of the people to their agrarian culture are indelibly etched into the very fabric that binds these people to this place. The town centres and the immediate areas surrounding them are strongly influenced by external influences (be it European or Asian or other African cultures), however, as you move further away from the town centres the effect of influence dwindles. This can be seen in the mapping of villages along the route.

There is a difference between the influence and the effect of influence. All people in Lesotho are, or have been, influenced by external conditions, however it is the choice of the individual or group of individuals to adopt or reject the changes. As an example, the use of corrugated iron sheets and concrete blocks as building materials has spread to the farthest reaches and down the most remote paths, and can be regarded as simply fulfilling a need. The choice of these materials over traditional materials could be a condition of affluence. The more money people have, the more they can spend on materials for building their houses. People who cannot afford the prices of the imported building materials can build with local materials, as they are sourced from the land, rendering them cost free but more labour intensive.

The relative proximity to hardware stores in the town centres greatly affects the local building technique. People are steered away from vernacular building and towards using materials that can be easily sourced from the hardware stores. It is evident that this is an important consideration, due to the fact that as you move away from the town centres the traditional vernacular way of building becomes more frequent.

There has been considerably more movement between the two towns since the road was finished in 2014, exposing Semonkong to more external / modern influences and connecting it to the rest of the world. A local taxi driver does daily trips between Semonkong and Maseru, with a capacity of 15 people per trip and charging a rate of R70 per person one way.

Maseru

Maseru, the capital of Lesotho, has drastically lost touch with its traditional architectural roots, mimicking the Western rectangular building. On a larger scale, Western town planning schemes have been adopted and the vernacular spatial arrangement has been completely lost. The only tie that Maseru has to the vernacular are a few thatch roof buildings, one in particularly bad taste that draws on the Mokorotlo (traditional Basotho hat) for design inspiration and form.
Maseru is a rapidly developing city, although it is relatively small in relation to South Africa’s cities such as Johannesburg or Cape Town. It is a hive of activity and ever-expanding. The proximity of Maseru to South Africa has greatly increased the exposure to external influences, such as social behaviour, cultures and the built environment. Focusing on the built environment, the influx of building materials and socio-cultural influences from across the border are playing a role in the extinction of the vernacular way of life and with it the vernacular architecture.

In order to experience a form of traditional vernacular architecture, some distance from Maseru must be gained. The route along the main road South towards Roma and Semonkong was travelled in order to study the influence that infrastructure has had on the vernacular architecture of Lesotho.
The route is dotted with small villages, all of which are a mixture of traditional and modern vernacular, from rondavels built from saplings to stone rondavels, from rectangular stone buildings to concrete block buildings. The distance from a town does not seem to deter locals from building with concrete blocks; it is rather the price that is the deterrent. The fact that some people build with concrete blocks and others with stone is assumed to be simply related to the wealth of that individual. In an interview with two young women, they stated that they have no income so building with concrete blocks was simply too expensive.

The journey was along the main south road (A2/A5) through Roma and on towards Semonkong, a town nestled in the Maluti Mountains at an elevation of 2 275m above sea level. Semonkong has a population of 8176 people, according to the Lesotho Bureau of Statistics Population and Housing Census (2006). Semonkong (‘place of smoke’) is well known for having the largest single drop waterfall in Africa, which brings many tourists to the destination. Semonkong is on the route of a new tar road that connects Maseru to Qacha’s Nek, poising the town for a developmental surge due to increased accessibility.

The local people of Semonkong rely heavily on subsistence farming. The winter months are cold and harsh, with crops dying and animals going hungry as grazing is reduced. There is a large amount of unemployment in Semonkong as there is no production of goods or services to support businesses. Many people leave Semonkong to attend university, get jobs, or to seek out a better life in Maseru or South Africa.
Identifying the vernacular

The vernacular style of architecture in Semonkong cannot be pinned to a single typology. There are myriad building typologies in Lesotho, as it seems that the local style is dictated by whatever material is available and easy to build with. There is definitely a progression from early vernacular buildings to a more contemporary, westernised style of construction. The early buildings are stone-crafted rondavels with one door and two windows, one on either side of the door, which have brightly painted reveals around them. The more modern style of building has started to move away from the rondavel. Instead of a round structure, the buildings are now built of concrete blocks and are rectangular or square in shape, with a sheet metal roof, two windows and a door.

The way in which people interact with and use space in the homestead provides more insight into the vernacular style of architecture. The people of Semonkong largely construct their own homes. When they need to expand the homestead, they do not add another room to the existing house, but rather build an entirely separate building. The typical homestead is therefore made up of many small buildings, creating exterior circulation spaces which also act as external meeting and congregation spaces (informal public space).

Figure 10:
A traditional mokhoro (fire house) with the newer additions in the background.
Figure 11:
A rectangular dwelling constructed of stone and corrugated sheeting.

Figure 12:
A contemporary rectangular dwelling constructed of concrete blocks and corrugated sheeting.

Village Ha Nyakosoba

Figure 13:
The huis (house) on the left and mokhoroe (fire house) on the right, that belong to Makwenya. The thatch roof of the huis was burnt down by a fire in 2014.
When approaching a person or a household in Lesotho, it is customary to announce oneself at a distance, clearly articulating who you are and what your business is. It is easier to approach households where people are sitting outside, for instance enjoying the winter sun on an otherwise chilly day.

I approached two women with a young daughter, and they apprehensively watched me walk towards them. I stopped at a fair distance (approximately 20 metres away) and greeted them in very basic Sotho: ‘Dumelang Mme,’ I said, and was greeted back with ‘Dumelang Ntate’. Once I had announced myself, I knew that I could move forward, advancing across the first threshold. As I approached the women, I asked them if they would mind talking to me. They agreed, and we spoke informally.
Figure 16:
*A homestead in the village of Ha Nyakosoba.*

Figure 17:
*A homestead in the village of Ha Nyakosoba.*

Figure 18:
The date of construction of the mokhoro in the village of Nyakosoba.
**Village Ha Matsaba**

The village of Matsaba is a mixture between the traditional vernacular and contemporary vernacular. It is located about half way between Maseru and Semonkong, and the effect of contemporary influence is apparent within the building typologies in the village. The contemporary influence is superficial, however, and only pertains to materiality and form, as the spatial qualities of the traditional and contemporary vernacular buildings remains unchanged.

*Figure 19:*
A homestead in the village of Ha Matsaba.

*Figure 20:*
A homestead in the village of Ha Matsaba.
Figure 21:
A homestead in the village of Ha Matsaba.

Figure 22:
Diagrammatic plan showing the placement of dwellings at Ha Matsaba village and the space that is formed by their arrangement along the gentle north facing slope.
Village Ha Chadwick

Figure 23:
A homestead in the village of Ha Chadwick.

Figure 24:
A homestead in the village of Ha Chadwick.

Figure 25:
Diagrammatic plan showing the placement of dwellings in the village of Ha Chadwick and the space created by their arrangement on the south-facing slope.
**Village Ha Mampho**

I arrived at the village of Ha Mampho and saw some children playing in front of their house, which gave me an opportunity to approach the village without encroaching on personal boundaries. The children and I both advanced towards each other, until they stopped on the edge of where they felt comfortable and I stopped too. Their threshold of safety was about 10 metres. I held out a soccer ball (which I had bought in Maseru as an ice-breaker) and, after their father reassured them, they slowly advanced, breaking through their threshold of safety towards me. I handed the soccer ball to the small children and, with the children in front of me, moved past the first threshold, into the outdoor living space (the ‘sky-space’), where I greeted their father. He spoke no English at all and the only Sotho words I can muster are basic greetings. I pointed to my camera, asking if I may take a photograph. The man nodded and stood at the door of his house, while I stood in the ‘sky-space’ and took some photographs. He then disappeared into his house and reappeared a few seconds later, gesturing to me to follow. He ushered me across the most personal threshold, into his home, where he sat down on a chair and asked me to take another photograph.

The village of Ha Mampho is a mixture of traditional vernacular and contemporary, westernised building styles and imported materials, although the overall spatial layout and use still remains very traditional.

*Figure 26:*

*The village of Ha Mampho.*
Figure 27:
The edge of the ‘sky-space’ threshold.

Figure 28:
A concrete block dwelling and the personal threshold before the built form.

Figure 29:
The interior of a dwelling, the most private of spaces.
The approach to Chief Masselibalo’s homestead was led by Leruo Nkhahle, a fellow researcher, who approached from the top of the rise and down towards the rear of the dwellings. He announced himself as he entered the ‘sky-space’, prompting Chief Maselibalo to leave her private domain, the dwelling, and enter the ‘sky-space’ where introductions were made. We were invited into her house and conversed with her. After the conversations, we were invited to the mokhoro (fire house), which is the oldest and most traditional building that belongs to the Chief. The construction of the dwelling consists of dry-stacked stone, locally sourced from the ridge on which she lives, with a thatch roof. The plastered window surrounds are brightly painted, a celebration of the connection to the ‘sky-space’.

Chief Masselibalo’s dwellings are arranged linearly along a slope, with the ‘sky-space’ framed by a retaining wall, and they represent a timeline of the evolution of vernacular architecture in Lesotho. The dwellings are arranged from right to left: first the most traditional mokhoro, the tie between tradition and contemporary life, then a rectangular house, and finally the contemporary, westernised house.
Figure 31:
The three different housing types that Chief Masselibalo has built. It shows a timeline of the effect of external influence.

Figure 32:
The view from Chief Masselibalo’s ‘sky-space’.

Figure 33:
Diagrammatic plan showing how the placement of dwellings can create engagement with the space around them.
Figure 34:
The mokhoro (fire house), the oldest building in the homestead.

Figure 35:
The second oldest dwelling, the Chief’s bedroom, a rectangular shaped stone building with a corrugated metal sheet roof.

Figure 36:
The badimo, a raised plinth on which valuables are stored, in the interior of the mokhoro (fire house).
Chief Matibede of Semonkong is an elderly Basotho man who conducts his business from atop a hill that overlooks Semonkong. The homestead is arranged hierarchically, vertically down the slope. The chief of the village is located at the top of the slope and the people are arranged according to social status below him.
Individual dwellings are arranged along the ridge, retained by a stone wall that forms the edge of the outdoor living space. The retaining wall is an extension of the built form, and although not completely enclosed it is noticeably a container for a semi-private, ‘sky-space’. The washing line forms an interesting boundary when viewed in conjunction with the retaining wall, as it could be viewed as a vertical extension of the retaining wall, forming a temporary barrier that screens the ‘sky-space’ from the more communal ground. The washing line is also a practical condition of contemporary influence, and a necessity for day-to-day life.
Figure 41:
A built-in seat added to the traditional round dwelling, addressing the ‘sky-space’.

Figure 42:
Image showing human scale at the entrance of a traditional dwelling.

Figure 43:
The view from the hierarchically more important dwellings to the less important below.
Figure 44:

Diagrammatic plan showing the placement of dwellings at Chief Matibede’s compound and the space that is formed by their arrangement along the ridge.

Trading street
Semonkong

Informal traders line the trading street edge, becoming an integral part of the streetscape. The front doors and a top-hinged serving window address the public realm, inviting people to browse and enter the shops as they pass.

Figure 45:

A trading street in Semonkong.
Figure 46:
A trading street in Semonkong.

Figure 47:
Diagrammatic plan showing how the placement of dwellings can create engagement with the space around them.
Main trading street
Semonkong

The streetscape becomes the public space into which life spills out. Although this main street in the town centre is one of the main trading spaces in Semonkong, it also reflects the way people deal with and react to buildings and the space around the solid form (the negative space). The entrances to the shopping stalls face onto and open out onto the street, creating a very public street edge. There is a secondary layer of buildings, set behind the shopping stalls, which are formal trading structures that are accessed by passing through the permeable outer layer. These primary and secondary layers exist due to the integration between the formal and informal trading sector, the informal trading stalls being the primary layer and the formal traders being the secondary layer. The informal traders have set up their stalls in front of the formal traders, thereby occupying the prime street-front location.

Figure 48:
The main trading street in the town of Semonkong.

Figure 49:
Diagrammatic plan of the main trading street in Semonkong on the east-west development axis, showing the primary informal traders forming the street edge with the secondary formal traders occupying the space behind.
The isolated dwellings are placed in such a way that the entrances are facing the same ‘sky space’. This area is used as an exterior room and connects the separate dwellings to one another. As can be seen in the image, there is a vegetable patch in the centre of the ‘courtyard’, which is a symbol that the agrarian lifestyle is of great significance and is central to the survival of the local people.

Figure 50:
A cluster of buildings surrounding a central ‘sky-space’.

Figure 51:
A cluster of buildings, some with brightly painted plaster around the windows and door, surrounding a central ‘sky-space’.

Figure 52:
Diagrammatic plan showing the placement of dwellings and the space that is formed by their arrangement.
The arrangement of buildings around a central ‘sky space’ (Kammeyer 2010) allows for the shared use of this common space. Common space or public space brings people from different households together to converse, to share, to help each other, or to dance and celebrate. Men can be seen dancing in the image.

**Figure 53:**
A cluster of dwellings surrounding the ‘sky-space’.

**Figure 54:**
Men dancing to music outside their dwelling. The events of life spill out of the private dwelling space, into the semi-private ‘sky-space’.

**Figure 55:**
Diagrammatic plan showing the placement of dwellings in relation to one another and the space that is formed between.
Shearing Shed
Semonkong

Figure 56:
Taking part in a daily ritual in the shearing shed.

Figure 57:
An oval building, the combination of the local round hut and the Western-influenced rectangular form.

Figure 58:
The threshold at the edge of the ‘sky-space’, where we were instructed to wait before proceeding.
The shearing shed of Semonkong is a vital part of the local economy. Many local people bring their goats and sheep to be sheared and are in turn compensated.

The approach to the shearing shed was led by a woman we met on the street, who was the veterinary nurse and provided basic medical advice to the community. She led us through the gate, the first threshold of privacy, and asked us to wait (as can be seen in the figure) while she discussed the prospect of us proceeding any further with one of the shearers. We were then invited by a gesture to enter the building. We passed the most personal private threshold and entered the built form, after which we were given a tour of the shearing shed and allowed to partake in the act of shearing the goats. We were rather slow and clumsy, much to the amusement of the very skilled shearers.

Figure 59:

Diagrammatic plan showing the shearing shed and surrounding buildings.
**Unknown Village**

**East of Semonkong**

Perched on the side of the mountain, the dwellings and retaining walls bound the ‘sky-space’, creating a framed external living space. The washing line, when clothes are hung to dry, forms a temporary screen, although its use remains firmly as its function is intended; to dry clothes. The retaining wall is also used as a wall from which to build the kraal, allowing a close eye to be kept on the very valuable stock.

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**Figure 60:**

A village perched on a north-facing slope, situated east of Semonkong.

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**Figure 61:**

A village perched on a north-facing slope, situated east of Semonkong.
Figure 62:

Diagrammatic plan showing the layout of an unknown village to the east of Semonkong, perched on a north-facing slope.

Figure 63:

Diagrammatic sketch showing the division of public and private space in relation to the built form and the spaces formed by the built form.
Unknown Village
East of Semonkong

This village, located east of Semonkong, is a mixture of architectural typologies, and much like the majority of villages that were observed on the journey. The ‘sky-space’ in this village is not contained by a retaining wall or washing line, but rather by the wall of the kraal.

Figure 64:
A homestead in a village east of Semonkong.

Figure 65:
Dwellings in a village east of Semonkong.

Figure 66:
Dwellings in a village east of Semonkong.
External influence is clearly visible, however the ties with tradition are still very strong. As can be seen in the image, the contemporary, western-influenced dwelling has a mokhorö built next to it.

Figure 67:
Diagrammatic plan showing the layout of a village to the east of Semonkong, located on a very gentle slope.

Figure 68:
Diagrammatic sketch showing the division of space with regards to built form and ‘sky-space’.
Conclusion

The vernacular architecture in Lesotho is undoubtedly undergoing a process of evolution, adapting along with the ideologies and aspirations of the local people. The development of road infrastructure in the last 70 years has had a definite, rather devastating impact on the traditional vernacular. A new vernacular has emerged, made up of purely imported forms and materials, however the traditional way of space-making is indelibly etched into the fabric of society and place-making. The combination of imported forms and materials, and the traditional way of life, creates a hybridised architecture, a mediation between the overarching modern society and the dwindling traditional society, a truly contemporary vernacular.

Figure 69:
A concluding sketch showing the vernacular architectural and spatial conditions for settlements on flat or gently sloping ground.

Figure 70:
References


Further reading


Newlands Village

Preface

When researching for her master’s dissertation on the gentrification of Newlands Village, Louise van Riet looked for information about the historical development of the area up to present times. She came across a paper written in 1980 by Rob Hill, then a student at UCT, that explored the processes that formed the fabric of the area and changes that took place when families were evicted under Apartheid Group Areas laws. In the process he recorded the memories of the people who once lived in Newlands. Van Riet incorporated his study into her work and has documented what happened to the village since then.

Thus, the two studies overlap. Both of the authors have kindly agreed that their work can be reformulated into a piece that speaks to the theme that VASSA is following in talks and outings for 2019: threatened heritage (such as by gentrification) and heritage conservation options. The section titled Further Reading includes some other relevant studies.

The following article is therefore based on the unpublished observations made nearly 40 years ago by Rob Hill (1980), supplemented with illustrations from various sources. Hill’s text has been lightly edited (e.g. capital R for Road, spelling, and VASSA referencing format) but is otherwise a verbatim version.

It is a vivid description, much of it told in the inhabitants’ own words. It evokes a strong ‘sense of place’, and tells a heart-wrenching story of a stable community where families were driven apart by the Group Areas Act and evictions or decided to go “on the other side”. By publishing this account, we wish to help preserve the full history of Newlands, bear witness to the experiences and memories of previous inhabitants, and acknowledge the pain of indifference and forgetting.

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Figure 71:
Newlands in the late 1940s, with the rugby fields in the foreground and SA Breweries mid-ground (Cape Argus, Late Edition Friday 22 October 2004, “Argus from Above” http://www.viewfromabove.co.za/Argus.htm).

Figure 72:
Left: The study area in its context (Google Maps 2016). Right: The boundaries of the study area (Van Riet 2016).
Some aspects of the history of Newlands Village

Rob Hill

Introduction

In many senses, the processes which formed Newlands village and the experiences of those who lived there, have been irrevocably lost to history. There are however, those who remember Newlands village and it is with their help that I have attempted to reconstruct some aspects of its history.

While this paper cannot offer an in-depth investigation of every aspect of that history, it is hoped that the reader will glean a sense of the processes and experiences that shaped the environment and the individuals who made Newlands village their home.

The life and times of Newlands village

Today, travelling south down Newlands Avenue one might notice an old stone church, further down one would see the Avenue Cafe, and if one were attentive one would notice the beautifully quaint cottages on the left-hand side. If you should ever find yourself in Kildare Road or Palmboom Road, you would again notice these tastefully renovated little cottages. Who would suspect the history that lurks in these quiet streets and tranquil cottages, unnoticed, and uncelebrated?

On the slopes of Table Mountain, District Six scars the landscape as a monument to the degree to which the socio-political manipulation of Cape Town reflects the priorities of Apartheid. In contrast to District Six, Newlands Village has retained many of its original features. It is still occupied. However, like District Six, the texture and fabric of life in the Newlands village before the evictions, has been erased from history. There are no official files which tell us of the ways in which the people of Newlands village occupied their space and shaped their environment. Similarly, there are no accessible files which adequately tell us why Newlands village was declared a White Group Area.

The first part of this paper has as its focus, the way in which the contours and character of Newlands village have developed and been shaped by changing residential patterns; as well as segregationist and Apartheid ideology. The second part, perhaps the most important part, aims to reconstruct a sense of Newlands village and the ways in which the residents made and occupied their environment. The third section, deals with the nature of resistance to, as well as the experience of, eviction in Newlands village.

As Bill Nasson (1990: 47) has written of District Six: "We have, if not a duty, then a need, deeply engraved within a democratic human culture, to help preserve that history and to burn it for many years to come. Only in this way can the rich and varied experience of common people begin to penetrate 'the enormous condescension of posterity', to use Edward Thompson’s memorable phrase”.

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2 [Ed.] Racially-based, and very objectionable, terms were used to describe what were known as ‘population groups’, including ‘coloured’, ‘white’, ‘European’ and ‘non-white’ or ‘non-European’. A ‘mixed’ or ‘grey’ area (or pocket) was where ‘Black’, ‘Indian’, ‘Coloured’ and ‘White’ groups lived. ‘Passing for White’ was sometimes an option taken by people with pale skin. For ease of reading, we have not used inverted commas for those terms.
Figure 7.3: Plot patterns in 1852 and 1883, collected from various survey diagrams. Remnants of the Newlands House outbuildings are indicated on the southwest corner of the 1852 plan. By 1883 the plots had been further reconfigured and subdivided; the larger central properties that were to become the St Andrews’ Church and Glamorgan House have begun to manifest themselves (Van Riet 2016).

Ideology and environment

As a first step, the terrain, etched in the memory of past residents of Newlands, must be sketched.

Miss A. remembers:

"Palmboom Road, that was a real mixed area, there were a number of coloureds with nice big houses there, like the Dudleys\(^3\) and the Hermanus’s. Then there was the dairy, the university dairy, then came the school, St. Andrews school, then on the opposite side, was the first old church which was part of St. Andrews school. All those people had lovely big gardens. Whites and so forth. There was also a shop. Duke’s shop. Owned by a coloured in Palmboom Road. At the bottom of Main Street, that was mixed, you know the better class white and non-white. They all had their own houses, then came the river and the spring. Everybody used to go and drink water there and fetch water in the old days. It was a landmark. Then there were open spaces and then came the Cardiff Castle, Mr Brown owned that, that was a meeting place, you know, the better class used to come there and play billiards and drink there and so forth. Around there, there were a couple of shops, Indian shops and other shops, where Main Street crossed Kildare Road. Then across Kildare Road there was again a mixed area called Irish Town. I think, because a number of old inhabitants, sort of, when they came over and they were settled, they settled in that area.

\(^3\) [Ed.] Richard Owen Dudley was born in 1924 in Palmboom Road, and after 39 years of teaching became President of the New Unity Movement in 1984. He committed himself to fighting for the cause of non-racialism and non-collaboration. See https://www.sahistory.org.za/dated-event/richard-owen-dudley-born-newlands-cape-town.
White and non-white intermarried. A lot of our families intermarried and that was before my time and that’s how it became Irish Town. Then afterwards the fair ones went on the other side. There are still some staying in Main Street today, across Kildare Road, the descendants of the original ones and they sort of went on the other side. In Kildare Road there, up towards the church, all mixed families, quite nice people, small houses and bigger houses. At the bottom end of Kildare Road towards Protea Road, that’s where the whites stayed. That was all whites that stayed there but a number of them were at St. Andrews Church.”

**Figure 74:**

*Left: Sketch of the Newlands Spring, 1894. Right: City of Cape Town plaque indicating the significance of the spring.*

In many senses, the Newlands which Miss A. recalls is the Newlands which we recognise today. The street names are the same, many of the original houses stand (although much renovated) and many of the landmarks are still visible. There is no visible scar on the landscape to be a testimony to the heart-breaking departure of many people from their homes. There is not even a general awareness of the ominous history of this quiet suburban nook.

Perhaps a first step toward understanding the complex history of change in Newlands village, is to see it not in isolation but as part of a city, whose constituents have been reshuffled, at the cost of much human suffering, to comply with the Group Areas Act. "There is no city whose morphology has evolved at random ...To a greater or lesser extent, human intent, past and present, permeates every city’s constructed form"(Western 1981: 3).

“The Group Areas Act of 1950, provides perhaps one of the most infamous examples of the degree to which an ideology can shape an environment. However, prior to 1950, a definite pattern of residential settlement had developed. As from about the 1860s Cape Town began to spread itself out into the Southern Suburbs. The more affluent whites found that they were able to settle in the more restful suburban villages along the Wynberg railway line. The existing rural villages were incorporated into the developing suburbia"(Western 1981: 39).

Newlands, originally the ‘Nieuwe Landen’, had been laid out by the Dutch East India Company in the rain shadow of Table Mountain (*Cape Argus*, 18 August 1952). Newlands had also become the country residence of the Dutch governors. Newlands House, as it became known, was taken over by the British and eventually sold.
Importantly, Newlands has been associated with beer brewing since the seventeenth century. The Cannon brewery, the Van Reenen brewery, the Mariendal brewery and Ohlsson’s brewery have all had their home in Newlands. The origins of the Newlands village are inextricably linked to the breweries. Many of the houses in Newlands village were originally built for Irish immigrants who found employment in the breweries (Scott 1955: 151). Hence the name ‘Irish Town’ and the Irish street names.

Figure 75:

By 1888, Anders Ohlsson had established himself as an icon in the brewery business. He leased, with an option to purchase, Mariendahl Brewery and Josephine’s Mill and received the rights to access the water from Newlands Spring. He also purchased Newlands Brewery and the Foresters Arms. In 1889, Mr Ohlsson received the leases of all canteens and public houses from Dr Michael Hiddingh, who had decided to shut down Cannon Breweries, and formed Ohlssons Cape Breweries Limited. (Text and images from ‘The History of Foresters Arms’: www.forries.co.za).

By the turn of the century, Newlands village had become a predominantly ‘Coloured’ area. An interview with a Claremont Town Councillor, conducted by the Cape Peninsula Commission in 1902 (pages 90-91, para 2159), bears witness to the relatively large pocket of Coloured people in the area. Newlands formed part of the Claremont municipality at the time.

"Can you give us the number of Europeans and also the number of coloured people in your area?"
"The proportion is about half; there is a large coloured population."
"And the occupations of the people generally are?"
"Their occupations are varied. About an average of two thousand people go to the city per day. The bulk of the others remain. There are builders, shopkeepers, and of course all the trades such as bakers and butchers, etc. Then a large number are employed in the Mineral Water Factories, and also in the Breweries, which have been considerably augmented of late."
"And the occupations of the coloured people?"
"They are mostly labourers, although there are some carpenters and masons amongst them."
"Can you give us the number of houses in Claremont? Have you the respective number of those occupied by European and coloured people?"
"No. I might say that the coloured people are confined for their dwellings to a certain congested area; and if we went on the basis of calculating the European population by taking six or seven per house, that of the coloured people would work out to about twelve per house.”
Newlands village had been enclosed by the southern suburbia by the first quarter of the present century. Although predominantly Coloured, there were White residents interspersed throughout the area. In Cape Town as a whole, Batson’s Social Survey conducted in 1939 shows that 32% of all Europeans and 34% of all non-Europeans, lived in mixed areas (Western 1981: 42).

Mrs B., now of Grassy Park, recalls the following:

“There were Whites, there were quite a few Whites, but what I mean is that, from Kildare Road going towards Wheelan Street, that area was predominantly Coloured ... In Palmboom Road, up the top end, there was quite a lot of Coloured people but you would get the Whites staying in between, you know.”

The nature of pre-Apartheid relations has often been subject to glamorization:

"When the superordinate and subordinate share the same space, status is underscored by ritualized behaviour, or etiquette, with the subordinates continually expressing their submission to their betters; thus, the desired social distance is maintained" (R. Sommer, cited by Western 1981: 60).

Mrs B., again, recalls this aspect of life in Newlands which, in a way, summarizes the nature of pre-Apartheid relations:

“The Whites would never worry with the Coloureds. I mean, we would never get a white person coming to sit in my house. They never socialised with us, if one can put it that way, and if someone saw you playing with me, it would be a terrible thing ‘cause how could you allow your child to
play with a Coloured person. The White people would bid you the time of day and that’s about it really. You go your way, I go mine. That was the whole thing."

It must however, be stressed that in Newlands, there were the Whites who owned or lived in the large estates and country houses in the area and there were those of ambiguous race who lived in the village alongside the Coloured residents. Ritualized superiority was accorded to landed White gentry while relations with the White or ‘pass-for-White’ neighbours depended far more on class and/or skin tone proximity. It must be remembered that in Newlands, many of the residents were first or second generation Coloured.

According to Mrs C.:

"The play-Whites were almost a separate group. First, they became sort of quasi-White, and then slowly they edged over. There was a whole group of them that lived in Newlands."

Residential segregation is often seen as a post-Apartheid development. However, as early as the 1920s, residential areas like Maitland Garden Village were being set aside for Coloureds only, while other areas like Good Hope Village and Epping Garden Village were set aside exclusively for white residents (Western 1981: 55).

The pattern of residential segregation was an increasing trend in pre-Apartheid Cape Town. Although the attempt to legislate a degree of residential segregation in 1939 was resisted by mass demonstrations, it, never the less, shows the extent of contemporary segregationist doctrine. By 1948, the mixed Newlands village had been hemmed in by predominantly white areas, preventing its expansion. In the early 1950s, Scott (1955: 151) wrote that Newlands village: "is now almost wholly inhabited by Coloureds. It is noteworthy, however, that this Coloured quarter, like most ethnic quarters, is compact and well defined”.

In the spatial sense, Newlands village had become extremely well defined. The western edge of the area was Newlands Avenue, beyond which there was relatively little development. Eastwards, across Main Street, was white Claremont. The northern edge, bounded on the Ohlssons estate and Palmboom Road, seems to have been a ‘grey’ area. To the South, Newlands village initially petered out into the Hiddingh Estates woodland. In the mid-1950s, however, a wall was built from the bottom of Governors Lane to the Liesbeek River, cutting Newlands village off from Hiddingh Estate. The red brick wall, known by ex-Newlands village residents as the ‘Apartheid line’ and later the ‘Berlin wall’, was built by the development company McCarthy & Flegg, apparently so as to cut Hiddingh Estate off from the “noise and drunkenness” in Newlands village. While this might have been partially true, it in no way characterises Newlands village.

Mrs C. remembers the wall:

"We used to walk right across into Hiddingh Estate and then they built the wall. People were partly amused and partly resentful. I don’t know why they built it, the people around us thought they were highly respectable."

Although the wall probably helped the developing company to market and sell the new houses in Hiddingh Estate, it also serves as physical evidence of the contemporary white fear of interracial penetration. The expression of this fear at a political level underscored the election victory of the

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4 Telephonic conversation with City Council building plans department.
Nationalist Party in 1948. Two years later the Group Areas Act, in its original form, was passed by Parliament. Dr Donges, the then Minister of the Interior, had this to say:

"The Bill will bring racial peace. It is a charter for the Coloured people, protecting them against those on a lower scale of civilization. It is a tragedy that this measure was not placed on the statute books many years ago, in view of the present state of tension between the races" (Cape Times, 20 June 1950).

In the subsequent years up to the present day, the Group Areas Act has been `holy ground' for the Nationalist Party. Reform does not really include scrapping the Group areas; and even if it did, legislated residential segregation has re-sculptured the city and re-formed its citizens. Today, the nature of our society is graphically broadcast by the form of the city.

At present, Newlands has a white upper-middle class character, while many of the ex-residents now live on the Cape Flats. Social relations and relations of domination have been reinforced and perpetuated by the spatial arrangement of the city (Western 1981: 6-7).

Mr D., who lived in Palmboom Road, recalls the following plan for the Newlands area:

"You had an explosion in the civil service where the Government was preparing to racialize just about everything and, in order to provide for all the top level civil servants, they produced a plan to complete the building up of that area between the Groote Schuur Estate which is on Klipper Road in Rondebosch and which ran right through from Klipper Road to Dean Street, to Palmboom Road, to Kildare Road, Wheelan Street, Patterson Street, and across to the Boschoff Estate. They intended, actually, to expropriate all the non-whites in that area and to convert it into a pukka area for the housing of the top Government servants."

While this plan was not realized, it is not inconceivable, noting the positioning of the parliamentary recreation club in Boshoff Estate. The first Group Areas in Cape Town were proclaimed on the 5th of July 1957 (SAIRR 1960, subsection 2).

In 1960 the South African Institute of Race Relations reported that: "Apart from the central city, it is in the Southern suburbs that the greatest intermingling of the residential areas of Whites and Non-Whites has occurred, and where the largest number will be displaced if any attempt is made to allocate group areas" (SAIRR 1980, subsection 8).

The residents of Newlands village did not have long to wait.

On the 10th of February 1961, the following was Gazetted:

"That the area, beginning at a point where the middle (sic) of Newlands Avenue is intersected by the middle of Palmboom Road; thence south-westward along the middle of Palmboom Road ... to Liesbeek River ... along ... ; thence north-westward to the middle of Oak Avenue; thence south-westwards along the middle of Oak Avenue, Governors Lane and Newlands Avenue to the point first-named, shall, as from the date of publication hereof, be for the ownership by members of the white group" (Government Gazette, 10 February 1961).

[Ed.] The Act was repealed in 1990 and abolished in 1991.
By 1964, the last of the disqualified residents had moved out. Houses which had been owned by the ex-residents of Newlands village, were bought either by individual whites or the Group Areas Board. In many cases, two adjacent cottages were bought and altered to form single residences. Whisson and Khan (1969) noted that:
“Smaller houses in particular have been restored and made into expensive homes for Whites in the more attractive areas of the Peninsula. ‘Little Chelseas’ now mark the area in which Coloured people formerly lived in close proximity to their work, their Churches and their schools, but from which they have now been expelled. The developers often bought the properties at very low prices, re-faced and re-decorated them, and sold them at anything up to ten times the price at which they were originally bought. We heard of cottages in Newlands which would have been rented for not more than R10 per month in 1959, being let at R100 per month in 1969, following their restoration and the construction of a bathing pool in the communal garden”.

The Cape Argus records the following interview with Mr Ellie, a contemporary building contractor, who renovated cottages in Newlands village: “The demand for new houses is so great that we work overtime and the new tenants have pantechnicons standing by to move in the furniture as our tradesmen move out” (Cape Argus, 1 June 1965).

The same report states, in words that sum up the extent of the change in Newlands village, that: "A new population of car-borne, electrically-warmed, small families is being built up among the old oak trees to the east of Newlands Avenue to replace the big Coloured families" (Cape Argus, 1 June 1965).

Newlands village had entered a new era.

To an extent, changing residential patterns had shaped the contours of the new village. Importantly, ideology had stamped its authority on the development of, as well as the shape, nature and character of the village. This is, however, only half the story. People inhabited Newlands and people shape their environment in many important ways. It is to them that we must return to reconstruct the life and times in Newlands village.

Some aspects of the life and times in Newlands village

Engraved into the popular mythology which surrounds Cape Town’s history, is the image of the undifferentiated, colourful, Coloured people, who lived in higgledy-piggledy areas. Newlands village, itself, has not escaped these generalisations. The Cape Argus, for example, describes Newlands village in the following way: "Walking up a short lane shaded by ancient oaks, it is not unusual to find ... a conglomeration of races in playing-card houses ... hens, children and cats squabbling happily together in a corner" (Cape Argus, 1962).

To reconstruct the life and times in Newlands village requires that we deconstruct that mythology. Only through an investigation which neither simplifies nor irons out ambiguity can a realistic history of Newlands village emerge. While this is realistically beyond the scope of the present paper, it is only in this way that we can begin to understand the ways in which the people of Newlands imparted meaning to their environment.

By virtue of its name, Newlands village conjures up the impression of being a consolidated community. In many senses, the residents of Newlands village had much in common. They shared the same space, they went to the same schools, they shopped together and they were evicted together. In many other senses, however, their experiences of life in Newlands village differ.

In the field of employment, for example, some of the residents were teachers, others were labourers at the local breweries or domestic workers for the ‘landed gentry’, while others were established in the trades.
Mrs E. Recalls:

"Now look in the road where we stayed, there was five cottages. Now in the first cottage, a Mr Kingsel, he was a postman, and we stayed in the next one, my husband was a printer, he worked for Mutual printers in Town, and the next person was a baker, he worked for Attwells bakery, and the next person was a tailor and the person in the next one used to work for Ohlssens. So, each one had a different area completely."

In Wheelan Street for example, Mrs C., an assistant occupational therapist, remembers:

"The Isaacs were teachers, Mr Walters was a boiler maker, next to him was Husky, the Moslem lady, who used to sell things and next to her was Mrs Carcs, her husband used to drive a van. Then at the top, we had a play-White family and they used to keep chickens."

The residents of Newlands village had no common experience of the workplace. Likewise, wages differed considerably.

In a way, what set Newlands village apart from other working-class communities, was the marked absence of a collective working-class consciousness.

As Miss A. remembers: "They were the better working class that stayed there."

Although this assertion glosses over individual and class differences in the community, it is valuable, not only as a way in which to characterize the village but also as it documents the perceived consciousness of those who lived in Newlands village. Without doubt, the class consciousness in Newlands village was very different to an area like District Six. The area was integrated into a suburban economy and as a result, the type of work available, the nature of work and the experience of the workplace, were very different when compared to those who live closer to, and were employed in, the industrial factories.

Even those Newlands residents who worked in the city centre, were generally able to secure employment in the trades rather than in the factories. The fact that those who worked in Town could afford to commute, points to the nature of the class composition in the village.

In many senses, the most important characteristic of life in Newlands village was that Newlands was essentially suburban. The pattern of employment reflects suburban diversity. The suburban residents of Newlands rigidly made and upheld a class distinction between themselves and those who lived and worked in the inner city. It was, in almost every sense, very remote from the urban, cosmopolitan culture, evident in District Six.

Housing was central to the experience of life in Newlands village. As with employment, the housing in Newlands village reflected a range of socio-economic standing. In Palmboom Road, for example, large extensive properties bordered on the tiny dwellings built for the immigrant Irish labourers. Miss A., for instance, remembers that: "our house was like a manor house with the small houses all around."

However, from Kildare Road southwards the houses were, in the most part, small and compact. Many of the houses in this area were semi-detached.
Figure 79:
Typical late 19th century cottages; drawings reproduced and reconfigured from Todeschini and Japha (Van Riet 2016).

Mrs C. recalls the appearance of the houses in and around the Wheelan Street area in the following way:

“They weren’t actually slums. There were houses that looked poor because the people didn’t have much money to renovate. I mean they did the necessary but it was quaint and nice and lots of people had rambling roses growing and it was really so pretty. Inside, the rooms were well furnished. You came in and there were normally two bedrooms, a sort of front room that you came into and a kitchen, no bathroom. When we came to Newlands we enclosed the back stoep as a bathroom. We had an outside toilet.”

Mrs E. spent twenty years living in a small semi-detached cottage in the area. While her experience might not have been identical to others in the area, it certainly documents the way in which many of the ex-residents of Newlands village shaped their domestic arrangements.

“You had no bathroom, we used to have big galvanized iron baths. You used to warm your water on the coal stove and carry your water into your bath and when you finish, your husband help you carry the bath out and you empty it there. We were always very clean. I would bath first and then I would bath the children in the same water and then my husband used to bath in a new lot of water that we heated. We had sizeable bedrooms and we used to bath in the bedrooms in the iron baths ...”

“... as far as washing is concerned, we got barrels, big barrels and we used to saw them in half and then we used to put them outside in the yard and have a piece of hose pipe from the tap into the barrels. Now we wash in this one and rinse in the other one and we had a small thing for the blue. We used to take the cones you get from the fir trees and wash with them. We used to bleach
in the lane and go and sprinkle it once it was dry and then wash it again and hang it up in the lane ...

“I suppose I did most of the housework; we had coal stoves which you had to clean every week. You used to take the chimney out and clean the soot out and polish it up and we were very proud when you see that stove shining. Black, black stoves and whatever.”

For Mrs E. the domestic division of labour afforded her a measure of direct control over and responsibility for her environment. But some of the women in Newlands were forced to work to make ends meet. Wages were either ploughed into the household economy or saved. Saving was part of general housekeeping and as such, the responsibility for saving money was often left to the principal women in the household. Mrs E. clearly recalls this responsibility:

"I used to save two and six a week, that was called a half-a-crown. I would save that for a year; end of the year I would have six pounds. Later the girl who stayed down the road, she worked in Woodstock and they had a savings club and she used to save two and six for me every week.”

Another aspect of housing in Newlands village which is distinctive is that quite a large proportion of the residents owned their own houses. Mrs C. recalls that in Wheelan Street:

"Those people had lived there for years and struggled and paid off. In Wheelan Street alone, Gavoor, the shop owner owned his own place and the place we lived in. Higher up, the Walters owned their own place. We had a Moslem lady, we used to call her Husky, and she owned her place, and then the Thompsons, well they owned their place and the Nortons owned their place. So, in Wheelan Street, only about two or three people were renting houses.”

For those that did rent, their landlords were in the most part local Whites who lived in Claremont or on the Estates which dotted the area. Rents were moderate. Mrs E., for example, used to pay three pounds a month and remembers that nobody in Newlands paid more than five or six pounds in rent.

Although many of the houses were small, fundamental to an appreciation of life in Newlands village is that, in contrast to an area like District Six, Newlands was never entirely built up. The residents of Newlands always had access to vacant land and open spaces.

Utilization of this space certainly shaped the particular experience of life in Newlands village. This aspect of life was critically important to children, growing up in Newlands village. Informal games congregated on the open tracts and children spent their early childhood exploring rivers and building tree huts. Acorn season heralded frantic activity for many of the younger residents of Newlands. A paraffin tin of acorns fetched fourpence from the farmers and the dairies, and many children were able to secure an almost regular income from this activity.

Mrs E. had eight children and remembers the experience of childbirth in Newlands:

"I had all my babies at home. The mid-wife used to come around to the house ... Nurse Mule, she was my first mid-wife. My first baby, I paid one pound and five. I had a lump in my breast and there was no breast pump so she made my husband go out and buy a pipe that cost tuppence, and my husband had to express the milk out of my breast."
Central to children’s experience of Newlands were the schools. Initially, St. Andrews mission school was the only school in the area. Since 1909, St. Andrews had been segregated. Whites were taught in the upper school and Coloureds in the lower school. Later, after the Dean Street school for Whites had been built, St. Andrews became exclusively Coloured and spread itself out into both the upper and lower schools. Miss A. remembers the schools well:

"St. Andrews was the only one for a long time, and then much later came the Newlands Primary school, behind where the Blue Cross is now, then St. Andrews moved down below the church and then there was Dean Street school but that was for Whites only. That later became part of S.A.C.S. school."

Since St. Andrews school and Newlands Primary school only taught up to standard six level, many of the children of Newlands were denied higher education. Through necessity, many entered the labour market at an early age.

Mr F., for example, recalls the process of leaving school and going to work in about 1920:

"I went to St. Andrews school, it belongs to the Church, near the top of Palmboom Road. There were about 50 in the whole school at the most. The school only went up to about standard five or six, it didn’t go up very high. People never worried much with education those days. When I left school, I went to work at Spilhaus in Town, I was a feather sorter ... I was thirteen when I went there."

Some of the children from the more prosperous families were sent to Trafalgar High school to complete their education. Miss A., for example, remembers,

"I went to Trafalgar High school. It was one of the only non-white high schools at the time. A number of us, people from Kildare Road, all over that area, used to go there. First by tram and then by bus. Then we would walk right up from the main road. There was no Livingstone School, that only came later."

The only organized school sport in Newlands village was gym. The St. Andrews gym used to compete on a regular basis with the Gordons gym in Mowbray. Gym exhibitions were regarded as a major event, especially the annual trip to Robben Island where the St. Andrews gymnasts used to entertain the hospital patients. The local choir practices were also a feature of the social life enjoyed by many of the younger residents. The choir travelled to give performances at the garden parties hosted by the ‘landed gentry’ in and around Newlands.

St. Andrews church, apart from providing many of the residents of Newlands village with a place of worship, was the only exclusively Newlands establishment and as such, it was the centre of a whole range of social activities. The local Lads Brigade and the Ladies Club, for example, met in the Church hall. St. Andrews was not the only place of worship frequented by residents of Newlands. Some residents worshipped at the Mosque in Claremont, while others supported St. Bernards Catholic Church in Protea Road. A significant number also worshipped at the Dutch Reformed Mission Church in Claremont. At one stage, a Dutch Reformed Chapel was built in Newlands Avenue, opposite Kildare Road.
St. Andrews was not the only social magnet in Newlands village. The Cardiff Castle bar was equally as important. In many senses, the bar provided an arena for social interaction in the area. Mr D. Recalls the bar:

"The pub there, the Cardiff Castle, was the meeting place of the men predominantly, in those days I don’t think they allowed women into pubs. The people who frequented the billiard room, ‘cause that was actually the hub of activity, were a united nations crew, apart from the local non-whites, there were English immigrants, German immigrants, Irish immigrants, who frequented the place. The person who ran the Cardiff Castle, Mr Brown, didn’t observe the colour bar ... All that he insisted was that his patrons observed the rules he laid down."

Other bars in the area were also patronized by the residents of Newlands village. In particular, a small bar in Protea Street near the Vineyard hotel. Besides the bars, the residents of Newlands village also found social relief in the bioscopes. Mrs E. recalls this ambit of entertainment:

"We had the Star bioscope in Claremont, after they enlarged it they called it the Orphem. In Rondebosch, there was the Premier bioscope and the Coloured people could sit upstairs in the first two rows. You used to pay one and six to go to the bioscope. A lot of people used to go to the bioscope. First there were the silent films where the man used to play the piano when the films come on the screen. We never had talkies for a long time. The first talkie that I went to see was Al Jolsen in the Singing Fool (1928)."

Besides the bioscopes, dances were always very popular. An animated Miss A. recalls:

"Oh, we loved dancing, they used to have them in Rondebosch and Claremont town halls, and then there was the Foresters Court and those smaller halls."

Foresters Court, at the bottom of Klipper Road, was not only the venue for many of the local dances, it also hosted a bridge club for men and a rings club for women. Recreation also included excursions. Many
of the ex-residents of Newlands remember the trips up the mountain. Closer to home, the zoo provided many of the younger residents of Newlands village with hours of entertainment.

Figure 81: 
Left: The lion’s den at Groote Schuur Zoo. Right: Visitors flocked to the zoo at weekends in the 1960s ('Back in the Day' at Newlands Zoo, UCT Libraries).

Miss A., a resident in Newlands until 1963, loved drama and recalls this aspect of social life in Newlands:

"We used to have our own little concerts, we had a group out our way, when I was much younger. I liked to act and I loved training children on the stoep there in Newlands. Our house had a very big stoep and we had a group called the Newlands Party, and then all the younger people belonged to the St. Andrews choir ... They had such beautiful voices, and we acted in the St. Andrews school, there was the stage, and we used to do one-act plays."

Organised sport also played a part of the social life in Newlands. The Ohlssens breweries owned a sports field in Van Holdt Street right in the middle of the village. On Sundays, the field was taken over by the locals and games of cricket or rugby were organised. Challenge matches between St. Andrews and nearby parishes were also organised.

The centrality of the Church to social life is misleading. While the extent of crime in the area is difficult to ascertain due to its suburban character, it nevertheless could not have been too far removed from the experience of life in Newlands. Ironic evidence for this is the fact that the church itself was burgled in 1945 (Langham-Carter nd: 15).

Close to this time, a reformatory for Coloured youth was established opposite St. Andrews Church in the old Glamorgan House. While there is no indication that this was specifically for youths from Newlands, it provided a concrete and constant reminder of this aspect of life.

Shops too, played a vital and social function in the lives of the residents of Newlands village. Immediate needs like bread, milk and rice were provided for by the small cafes and grocery shops that had sprung

4 [Ed.] Groote Schuur Zoo, alongside the University of Cape Town.
up in the area. Baba’s Avenue Café on Newlands Avenue, Duke’s shop in Palmboom Road, the Motjie in Cardiff Street and Bawa’s and Gavoor’s grocery shops on Main Road, provided everyday necessities, as well as serving as a forum for local discussion. More specialised needs were met by the small business centre on the corner of Kildare Road and Main Street. The butcher, the tailor, and the shoemaker all had their establishments on that corner.

As a housewife, Mrs E. took responsibility for most of the shopping:

"At the smaller shops you could buy on tick and then pay on Fridays. Sometimes I would say, ‘Bobby, I haven’t got enough this week’, and then he would leave a balance and you could pay the next week."

For the bigger items and lower prices, the shopping centre in Claremont was not far away. Informal business was also very evident in Newlands village. Owing in part to the semi-rural environment, businesses like dairies flourished. There were in fact two dairies in Palmboom Road, both of which grazed their cattle on the fields owned by Ohlssens breweries. Other families supplemented their diet and their income by keeping chickens. Many of the residents with gardens were able to grow their own vegetables, some of which were sold for additional income. Another enterprise which documents the way in which the residents of Newlands were able to use the environment to their advantage, were the nurseries. At least two flower nurseries were kept by residents in Palmboom Road.

While many of the activities described, mesh to form a collective experience of life in Newlands village, it must be recognized that they are only extracts from the personal experience of individuals. Nevertheless, the residents of Newlands village developed a distinctive collective consciousness based on shared experience.

While the residents of Newlands projected a collective better working-class consciousness, there were fierce class divisions in the community. Income and profession served to differentiate families from one another.

Mrs E., for instance, warned that:

"You must also remember, there was Coloured people that thought that they were better than what you were. If you didn’t earn as much as what they did, then they didn’t class you with them."

Housing too, provided a means for differentiation both within the community and between Newlands and other areas in the City.

"We never had District Six in Newlands, we didn’t have slums in Newlands. The only time Newlands came down a bit was when in Cardiff Road, some flats was built and the maids that worked up in Hiddingh Estate stayed there, and they had African boyfriends. That was the only snag we had in Newlands, but we never had slums in Newlands. Everybody was upset about the flats in Cardiff Street. Amongst ourselves we used to complain that that place was a disgrace. Otherwise, it was the average wage earner that stayed in Newlands."

‘Passing for White’ was another dimension to differentiation. Being ‘white’ held many advantages especially in the field of employment. Many of those with the resources to secure a good lawyer could prove that they associated with Whites and this resulted in fierce divisions in the community.
Mrs C., for example, recalls that:

"They were known as quasi-Whites, they didn’t look it but they had their noses in the air. In Afrikaans we used to call them venstertjies, you know, people who are very interested in the shop windows when you walk by, so they didn’t have to greet you."

Sometimes, indeed frequently, families were divided in this way.

"You had a strange type of attitude in families where some of them had been declared white. The others were half proud and half resentful. Proud, I suppose because it improved them ... and resentful because they hadn’t made it themselves."

For the residents of Newlands village, the experience of life was broad and complex. Differentiated and individual experience co-existed with a common experience of the environment. Similarly, on the one hand, a common identity was projected, while on the other, there were expressed differences in the community. Nevertheless, the experience of life in Newlands village was entirely distinctive from that of those that lived in other parts of the city.

By 1964, they had been evicted.

**The nature of resistance and the experience of eviction**

Fundamental to an appreciation of the resistance to and the experience of eviction is the fact that Newlands village was one of the first large areas in the Cape Town municipality to be cleared of Coloured residents.

As the Cape Town City Council offered no assistance in drawing up plans for the group areas, officials from the Land Tenure Advisory Board and later the Group Areas Board toured the Newlands village in order to draw up the plans for the proposed group area.

Mrs C. remembers this visit:

"I remember I had had an operation and I was staying in the front room and this gentleman came along, an official wanting to ask me questions, and I was rude because I knew why. He asked me where my husband worked and I said I didn’t know and then he asked me how much he earned and I said I didn’t know. Then he sort of smiled and said: “Never mind, you’ll still be here by the time you die”.

The plans drawn up by the Board were advertised and debated when a committee of the Board sat in Cape Town. The first organisational reaction to the plan for Newlands village came from the Dutch Reformed Mission Church. The Mission church did a survey of the area which showed that 281 Coloured families lived in Newlands village (SAIRR 1960).

In addition, the Mission Church presented evidence to the Group Areas Board, suggesting that the Cape Peninsula should be regarded as a special case.

Many organisations were involved in protest against the Group Areas declarations. Significantly, the Coordinating Committee on Group Areas had been established in 1955 as a front organisation for protest
against the proposed evictions in Cape Town. The Civil Rights League also played a part in the organisational resistance to the Group Areas evictions.

Significant however, is that there was no organisational resistance that focused particularly on, or originated in, Newlands village. Organisational resistance that included Newlands village originated outside the village. Mr D., for example, remembers that:

"The Unity Movement did a lot propagandising in the area, pointing out the destructive effects of Group Areas."

The absence of organisational resistance in Newlands village is no doubt linked to the relatively small population in the area. Added to this is that, as Newlands village was one of the first areas to be affected by Group Areas evictions, the residents had no real knowledge of experience in previous evictions to act as a standard for them. There was also no common knowledge of what life on the Cape Flats would be like. In many senses, the experiences of the people in the areas first affected by the Group Areas, informed subsequent resistance to removal.

Mrs C. recalls her experience of eviction:

"They started moving people in about 1962. Every single week, there would be somebody going. They had allocated houses in Bonteheuvel for the people who didn’t own houses. Others, they offered to buy their houses. We said that we were building, so we were one of the last to go. They would come every week and say, “How far is your house?”, and I would say, “Go have a look, I don’t know”. “Can’t you hurry up?”, and I said, “Go and see the builder”. Our house was bought by a doctor, our house and the one next to it, they were semi-detached and they made one big house. There was a lot of resentment, but no resistance ... people felt, I think, that it was useless."

The experiences and reactions of people in Newlands were not uniform. Divisions in the community were reflected by different responses and experiences. The experience of those that owned their own houses was fundamentally different to those that rented accommodation.

Miss A., a homeowner, recalls, for example, this experience:

"Our house wasn’t big, but it was comfortable and it had a lovely big garden. It was the centre of a number of activities. It was terrible, it was awful. I stayed on as long as I could and then, I’ll never
forget, I sold the place and it went for about three hundred rand more than the price that they (i.e. Group Areas Board) put the price at, that it should be sold at, and you know, I had to give that money to them. The extra money that I got. Oh, I was very bitter about the whole affair. It was a terrible time."

Many of those people who had owned their own houses were able to buy into home ownership schemes in Crawford and Landsdowne. Those without ready resources, were allocated housing in Bonteheuvel. Others chose to move to Steenberg. As with the experience of eviction, expectations for the future were diverse.

Mrs C., for example, remembers:

"There was this family, who lived in a very small house at the bottom of Wheelan Street. They really looked forward to their new house. They even bought new furniture. A new house needs new furniture. They threw out all their old furniture. I took some, I've still got it."

The eviction of the residents of Newlands village was not completely successful. The Bhahatka’s Avenue Café has managed to continue to serve local residents to the present day. Mr Khalfey, the proprietor of Bawa’s Café on the corner of Kildare Road and Main Street, survived for many years.

Nineteen years after the first removals in Newlands village, Mr Khalfey was evicted to make space for a pizza restaurant.

For some residents, the prospect of moving into less ‘respectable’ areas, moulded their reaction to eviction.

Again, Mrs C. remembers:

"Our very great friends opposite, went to Wynberg. They had to wait for a white man to vacate in Wynberg and every time they came around, he would just say that those people hadn’t moved out yet. So they said, in the meantime, we’ve got a house in Elsies River for you. He was very upset because he was a very respectable man and he said, “Me, live in Elsies River, can you see me living in Elsies River?”.”

Other residents of Newlands village found different forms of resistance. One example of this is that a significant number of the ex-residents of Newlands village emigrated after the 1961 Group Areas declaration. Miss A., for example, remembers that:

"Quite a few people, like my cousin who stayed next to us, emigrated rather than be thrown out. Quite a few people left."

Another avenue of resistance was open to the play-white families in Newlands village.

Mr D. recalls:

"The legislation that was put on the statute book after the Nats came to power accelerated a process that was taking place all the time. If one went through the whole of the road there (Palmboom Road), I would say that there was a transmigration of at least thirty percent of the families ... I think that it was very pronounced in the Church community."
Although the experiences of, as well as the reactions to, eviction differed from individual to individual, the projected common consciousness of the residents of Newlands village also played a significant part in shaping the experience of eviction.

Mrs C. recalls as follows:

"In District Six, people were hurt because they were being broken up. They were a group that was proud of themselves and their area, proud of what they were doing and the way they spoke. In Newlands we had this aspiring group who wanted to leave behind the past. It was a deeper, different kind of hurt from the District Six, which was a hurt because their whole life-style was being broken up. In Newlands, you were being told that you are Coloured now. You have to get out! You were part of a group that you would rather not have belonged to. It really hurt the dignity because while you lived in areas that weren’t absolutely Coloured, there was always hope that you could escape, I suppose."

Conclusion

A comprehensive history of Newlands village is far beyond the scope of this paper.

Many questions remain unanswered.

Detailed investigation must, for example, be directed at the way in which the individual experience of life in Newlands village changed over time. The patterns in the city and local economies, must also be discerned and investigated.

Similarly, the type of resistance to the Group Areas declaration in Newlands village and the fact that Newlands village was among the first areas in Cape Town to be affected, raises some interesting questions.

Why was Newlands village, for example, cleared before District Six?

Was the State simply not strong enough to deal with District Six until the mid-sixties or did the State perceive a particular threat from an area like Newlands village, where the projected class consciousness was not that of the working class?

Could this type of threat have been more immediate to the Nationalist Party in 1960?

Much work remains to be done on the history of Newlands village, equally, a vast quantity of work remains to be done on the nature of resistance to, as well as the experience of, the Group Areas declarations in many other areas in Cape Town.

"There is no one history to be told but rather many histories" (Nasson 1985: 8).

The story of Newlands village and the histories of the individuals who lived there, bring us one step closer to an understanding of Cape Town’s complex nature and history.
**Acknowledgements**

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*Cape Times* Street Directories.
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7 [Ed.] Interviewees’ initials have been further changed to an anonymous alphabetical sequence for publishing in this journal.


**Further Reading**


Townsend, S. 2014. A report … motivating the establishment of an overlay zone to be known as the Newlands Village Local Area Overlay Zone. Submitted to the City of Cape Town.


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**Figure 83:**

*Densification of Newlands village between 1960 and 2015 (Van Riet 2016).*
Figure 84:

Figure 85:
Terrace houses in Newlands village as documented by Baumann & Crewe-Brown in 2008.

Figure 86:
Figure 87:
Houses in Newlands village as documented by Van Riet in 2016. A previous corner shop, renovations in Kings Street, terrace in Oak Avenue and views of Kildare Road.