

MAGDA MINGUZZI

## The Spirit of Water

*Practices of cultural  
reappropriation.  
Indigenous heritage sites  
along the coast of the  
Eastern Cape-South Africa*

קנין  
PIRENZE  
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PRESS



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The Spirit of Water : practices of cultural reappropriation. Indigenous heritage sites along the coast of the Eastern Cape-South Africa / Magda Minguzzi. - Firenze : Firenze University Press, 2021.

(Ricerche. Architettura, Pianificazione, Paesaggio, Design ; 7)

<https://www.fupress.com/isbn/9788855183161>

ISBN 978-88-5518-315-4 (print)

ISBN 978-88-5518-316-1 (PDF)

ISBN 978-88-5518-317-8 (XML)

DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-316-1

**NELSON MANDELA**  
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“The Spirit of Water” project was realised with the support of:  
Nelson Mandela University-Community Engagement Funds 2017-18,  
AEON- Earth Stewardship Research Institute, Nelson Mandela Bay  
Municipality Department of Arts and Culture, Pine lodge.  
The sites surveys were realized with the support of: Nelson Mandela  
University-Teaching Development & Innovation Fund 2018.

This work is based on the research supported in part by the National Research  
Foundation of South Africa (Grant Numbers: 116254).

Translation from Italian to English by Christopher Fotheringham.

This book has been approved by the KhoiSan Chiefs who are  
acknowledged as co-researchers: Chief Thomas Augustus; Chief  
Jean Burgess; Chief Margaret Coetzee; Chief William Human;  
Chief Daantjie Japhta; Chief Brato Malgas; Chief Xam ≠ Gaob  
Maleiba; Chief Deon Spandiel; Paramount Chief Gert Cornelius  
Steenkamp; Chief Wallace Williams; Chief Michael Williams.

*FUP Best Practice in Scholarly Publishing* (DOI: 10.36253/fup\_best\_practice)

All publications are submitted to an external refereeing process under the responsibility of the FUP Editorial Board and the Scientific Boards of the series. The works published are evaluated and approved by the Editorial Board of the publishing house, and must be compliant with the Peer review policy, the Open Access, Copyright and Licensing policy and the Publication Ethics and Complaint policy.

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Published by Firenze University Press

Firenze University Press  
Università degli Studi di Firenze  
via Cittadella, 7, 50144 Firenze, Italy  
[www.fupress.com](http://www.fupress.com)

*This book is printed on acid-free paper  
Printed in Italy*

*graphic design*

**didacommunicationlab**

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Printed on pure cellulose paper *Fedrigoni Arcoset*



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## **Photo credits**

*cover*

*Underwater map of Southern Africa*

pages 17/37: Smits L. G. A. 1967, "Fishing- scenes from Botsabelo, Lesotho",  
The South African Archaeological Bulletin., 86, pp. 60-67.

p. 69: Copy of a rock painting in the Qacha's Nek area of Lesotho depicting a fishing scene (left half), Patricia Vinnicombe, 1959, poster paint/watercolour and pencil on paper (KZNM object no. A444). Courtesy of the KwaZulu-Natal Museum

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would like to acknowledge the First Indigenous Peoples<sup>1</sup> of Southern Africa, the KhoiSan Peoples, as the traditional owners of the lands on which “The Spirit of Water” and the research project that followed were conducted. With this book I wish to pay respect to their ancestors and elders.

I sincerely thank the KhoiSan Chiefs and their community members of the Metropolitan Area of Mandela Bay that took part in the research project presented in this book:

Chief Thomas Augustus, Gamtobaqua tribe<sup>2</sup>; Chief Margaret Coetzee, Inqua tribe; Chief Vernon Hennings, Nama; Chief William Human, Korana peoples; Chief Daantjie Japhta, Inqua Camdeboo tribe; Chief KhoiSan SA; Chief Brato Malgas, Inqua tribe; Chief Xam ≠ Gaob Maleiba, Damasonqua tribe; Chief Deon Spandiel, Griekwa peoples; Paramount Chief Gert Cornelius Steenkamp, Oeswana tribe; Chief Wallace Williams, Oeswana tribe; Chief Michael Williams, Gamtouters/Gamktwa tribe; Chief Roger C. White, Griekwa peoples.

Head person Jackie Joseph, Gamtobaqua tribe; Head person Nevel Smith; Head person Crawford Fraser; Bosch; Dennis Bruintjies; Doctor Cola; Richmond Gewers; Andre’ Hector; Axum Dan; Khoi Maphomey; George “Donny” November; Alwin Weitz.

In coordination with: Clara Adams, Williams Adams, Serenda Allies, Cynthia Augustus, Elsabe Brandt, Beatrice Coleman, Jacob Deklerk, Jaqueen Gelandt, Belinda Jacobs, Sophie Layers, Dolores MacMaster, Susan Minnies, Johanna NicolaiDaina Pearce, Hilton Prince, Tarra Juliana Steenkamp, Cloritha Swartbooi, Eileen Speelman Varnicker, Memory Zenza.

I would like to acknowledge and sincerely thank Chief Jean Burgess, leader of the Ghonaqua peoples, for her precious and meaningful contributions to this study in key aspects related to the First Indigenous Peoples’ history, heritage and spirituality.

I would like to express my gratitude to my friends, colleagues and students from Nelson Mandela University. In particular: Ernst Struwig (my companion who left this place too soon to be able to see this project completed), Lucy and Hansie Vosloo, Donald Flint for the site survey, Glenn Meyer for the photos of the rituals in Cape Recife.

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<sup>1</sup> Indigenous Peoples: the use of the letter “s” at the end of the word “people” is to acknowledge the collective ownership, by the Indigenous Peoples of the globe, of the Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS), as it has been acknowledged by the United Nations.

<sup>2</sup> There is no general consent among the Chiefs part of this research group around the use of specific terminology that refers to a group of people that belong to the same communities, that share the same language, customs, traditions, and history or united by ties of descent from a common ancestor and with adherence to the same leaders. For this reason, we used the terms tribe and peoples.

Students: Alexandros “Alexis” Tsiotsiopoulos for the drone surveys and filming, Adam Paolo Ball, Isadora Bento De Carvalho, Cari Brundyn, Dylan Burton, Kelsey Rae Cawood, Maretha Davids, Tahrene De Vos, Ruan Du Plessis, Daniel Fouche, Dennis Hoft, Hilke D. Horsthemke, Joey Jacobsz, Kawthar Jeewa, Ross Langtree, Kuda Majonga, Grace Maybery, Daniella Patsalos, Martin Tallie, Julia Thomas, Hymie Yspeert.

Students involved in the site surveys: Yvest Jean-Michel Albest, Rickus Bosch, Sean Burger (Team Leader), Inge Conradie (Team Leader), Michael Dayce, Sanette De Villiers, Johannes De Villiers (Team Leader), Alexandra Edmayr, Sera Falatsi, Sarah Felton (Team Leader), Amore Gerber, Sithe Gwana, Morgan Heuer, Marinda Holdstock, Alma Holm, Chanice Kastoor (Team Leader), Colleen Koegelenberg, Reshoketjo Madileng, Kasonde Makasa, Busang Makhele, Lionel Mangwende, Carmen Manthe, Mmapilane Matabane, Mihle Mlenzana, Hermien Muller, Dai Jean Mzumara, Joslin Nel (Team Leader), Jaryd Olivier, Wayne Parker, Jon-Claude Pheiffer, Kendal Potgieter, Brittney Ritchie, Blake Smit, Sinesipho Stofile, Elri Syfert, Keila Swanepoel (Team Leader), Sarah Weiss, Aletta West, Chemari Van Zyl, Asanda Zitumane.

I would like sincerely to thank all the people that helped us achieve our goals, in particular: Prof. Maarten De Wit, Esti Nieuwoudt Stewart, Neill Hopwood, Elzette Bester from SAN Parks, Emma O'Brian - Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum, Anziske Kayster - Graaff-Reinet - Museum Marco Fabbri (BlueChilly), Lee-Ola Price for the transcriptions of the interviews, Nii K. Botchway.

Immense gratitude goes to Prof. Barend Van Wyk, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, the Built Environment and Technology, that believed in our work and fully supported the printing of this book.

In recent decades, the concept of heritage has moved from covering only major monuments and objects of historical-artistic interest to covering architecture, industry and vernacular objects, anthropized territory and the most diverse cultural manifestations. This broader concept allows us to identify any signs which appear to be a natural part of the landscape but constitute extraordinarily valuable heritage, both tangible and intangible. This holistic approach to heritage provides us with a better understanding of the cultures of individual peoples in all their complexity and of the way in which these relate to the environment. This book examines this exact type of heritage, shifting between nature and its subtle transformation by human hands. Through manipulation, this heritage is adapted for human survival, creating a symbiosis with its natural surroundings: this coast shaped by the sea.

This volume is also of major importance for its examination of a highly valuable and unique primeval culture, which dates back to the origins of humanity. This culture has unfortunately also been mistreated and repressed for a long time, like many other archaic cultures of hunter-gatherers which have been replaced by the prevailing agricultural sedentary cultures. This book paves the way for further study of a topic until now unexplored in South Africa, and also to the recognition of the identity of the KhoiSan peoples who, to date, have not received the attention they deserve.

The fish traps created by the KhoiSan peoples on the coast near Port Elizabeth, as they have been ever since these peoples arrived at the southern point of the African continent, are the subject of study, localization, documentation, cataloguing and valorization. They are not the only fish traps, as there are examples scattered around the world and cited by the author, proving the importance of water as a means of survival in these cultures.

The architectural structures studied in this book are simultaneously tangible heritage, as they are made of rocks, and intangible heritage, able to recount the history of the survival of these peoples from remote antiquity. The cultural landscape of this anthropized coast is in such a gentle and delicate equilibrium with virgin nature that it is almost impossible to distinguish the faint brushstrokes made by the human hand.

However, the author has not limited herself to an aseptic study of these historic structures, but rather has expounded on the KhoiSan culture, working with the community, talking to the chiefs of individual tribes and setting up a participatory project, which even further adds to the value of this research. The greatest contribution of this study is its unusual access to the cultural heritage of the



↑  
**Fig. 2**  
The KhoiSan Chiefs and members of the community who took part in the project "The Spirit of Water" and the research that followed

KhoiSan, revealing their ancient secrets. Most important of all, she was able to gather the tribes, creating a feeling of unity despite their apparent diversity.

The author's multifaceted background as both architect and artist has resulted in this unique approach to the object of study, merging art, architecture, performance and tangible and intangible heritage. As an outsider, not only to the KhoiSan culture but also to South Africa, she has been granted a freedom, perspective, and vision untainted by prejudices or commonplaces greatly benefiting the final result, one we hope readers will enjoy.

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## INTRODUCTION

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This publication was commissioned by the KhoiSan<sup>1</sup>, the First Indigenous Peoples of Southern Africa, resident in the metropolitan area of Nelson Mandela Bay who represent the greater part of the geographical area of the Eastern Cape<sup>2</sup>.

The Chiefs, a group of colleagues and students from Nelson Mandela University, and I formed a research group shortly after my arrival in Port Elizabeth (South Africa) from Italy in 2015. The international art performance and ritual “The Spirit of Water”, which was held on the fifth and sixth of May of 2017 at the site of some precolonial fish traps<sup>3</sup>, was the first project resulting from this collaboration. It gave rise to a travelling exhibition composed of photographs and a short film produced by the Nelson Mandela University, which documented the experience.

While viewing these photographs, the Chiefs asked me if we could go further and produce something tangible, a publication, to represent a sort of milestone of the experiences and the journey along the coast we had shared: something that could remain as an indelible trace of the experience for future generations. It would be a testament, among many others, to their efforts and commitment to the struggle to be recognised as the First Indigenous Peoples of South Africa, including by the South African Government and as a people who survived the colonial encounter, with a unique identity which should be free to express itself as a sense of ownership of important sites of their cultural heritage and precolonial memories. The traces of their history as the First Nation on the land are scattered everywhere and are irrefutable. However, owing to the long history of oppression and territorial marginalisation of

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<sup>1</sup> The decision to use the term “KhoiSan” in this research project was taken after an internal discussion among the Chiefs who are part of the research group. The discussions that took place at the time of the project were based on the need to find an adequate term that could represent the entire group concerned in this research. We settled on the official term used by the South African Government, “Khoisan” but we chose to substitute the “s” in San with a capital letter. The change from a small to a capital letter was proposed on the basis of the word’s visual impact which highlights, in their view, the equal importance of Khoi and San people. The change was positively embraced by everyone. The author of this text did not take part in the above discussion but simply made note of the decision of the working group. The discussion illustrated the controversy and difficulty of defining two groups which, in precolonial times had overlapping subsistence patterns and use of the territory, and which, from the arrival of colonists until the present, have been fighting for the recognition of their identity and heritage. In this regard see: Besten M. 2013, “We are the original inhabitant of this land: Khoe-San identity in post-apartheid South Africa”, in M. Adhaikari, *Burdened by Race: Coloured identities in southern Africa*, UCT Press, Cape Town.

<sup>2</sup> The precolonial subdivision of the land according to the location of the various tribes is a particularly important issue for the KhoiSan because it is closely linked to the political issue of land claims. During discussions with the research team it emerged that while they have an idea of “territories” under the influence of different clans and tribes, and of the natural borders that limited them, they are trying to validate these claims by relying on the written reports of the first Dutch explorers sent on missions in the area. It is also important to note that the territorial control of the various groups was fluid and often overlapped where the borders were not clearly demarcated (De Jongh 2016:7).

<sup>3</sup> These Mesolithic traps were constructed by precolonial hunter-gatherer communities. The Dutch settler colonists called these peoples, whom they thought were a single community, “Strandlopers” which means people who walk on the beach.





**Fig. 3**  
Site visit to Coldstream cave,  
with (from left) Richmond  
Gewers, SAN Parks rangers, the  
NMU Master's student Dukada  
Qhamani, Jackie Joseph



**Fig. 4**  
Site visit to Cape St. Francis  
fish traps with Chief Thomas  
Augustus

Indigenous peoples, which began with settler colonialism, was solidified by the Apartheid regime, and continues to this day - these sites have been stripped of their meaning and ignored by their historical, architectural, cultural, or heritage-related importance. A heavy blanket of indifference fell over them and, with time, these sites have become physically and psychologically unreachable; they have become places that exist on the territorial and social margin at the same time. They are as if suspended in a spatial-temporal dimension which can be reached and kept alive only through the memories, passed down generation after generation through story telling.



However, we can't ignore that fact that in some cases, unfortunately, this link is broken.

Chief Jean Burgess says:

Our people seem to “not to know” about the existence of our heritage. Nevertheless, if someone starts to say something about heritage places, they would say, “Oh!, I remember but it's not important any more”. Our life is such a constant battle that those things are not prioritised in our battle. Things that are ours. Moreover, because of us being severed from the land, from our language, from our identity and from our spirituality, it severed us from everything.

An old man in the Northern Cape always said to me “meisiekind, hulle het ons kaal uitgetrek”, saying that they stripped us from our clothes, and we are standing bare naked. Now it is in that bare nakedness; our heritage does not seem to be part of the clothes that were taken off. What seems to be part of the clothes that were taken off in the understanding, in the minds of our people, is being acknowledged<sup>4</sup>.

Our research project, which came about following the performance/ritual and which continues today, is fuelled by a determination to retrace those threads of memory through direct experiences of the sites.



**Fig. 5**  
Oyster Bay fish traps

<sup>4</sup> Chief Jean Burgess, Ghonaqua, interview with author, 08 November 2019, Port Elizabeth.

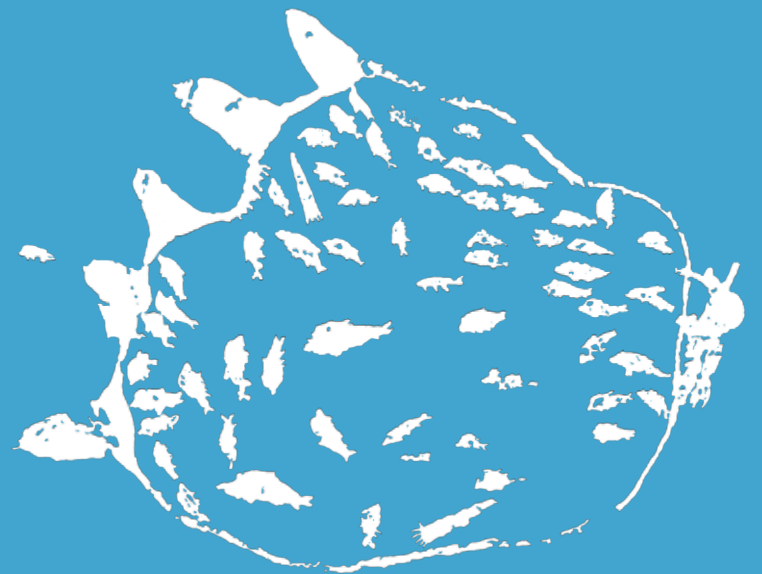
Using a participatory and multidisciplinary methodology we visit and document sites identified by the Chiefs as belonging to their culture. The sites we visit include caves with pictographs, areas of forests with springs that the community recognizes as belonging to their ancestors, sites of fish traps, places where specific events took place or where archaeologists have discovered remains.

These site visits with the Chiefs representing the specific geographical zone of the study, were unique experiences and are unlikely to be repeated any time soon owing to the fact that some of the sites are found on private property. Access is conditional on the permission of the landowners and sometimes this is difficult to obtain because they are fearful of land expropriation should a sure sign of Indigenous heritage be confirmed. This fear is strongly linked to the absence of clear legislation in the realm of cultural heritage.

This is indicative of the sad reality that the KhoiSan peoples have no rights over their sacred sites and cultural heritage.

This publication concerns the greater part of the work that we have been doing for the past few years all along the coast and of which “The Spirit of Water” performance/ritual was only one part. In fact, we concentrated specifically on the mapping, photographic documentation, and the scientific surveying and diagramming in plan view and cross section of sites of fish traps in the Eastern Cape. It is important to understand that our study represents the first time that these sites have been studied and mapped. We hope that this book will not only contribute to deepening our understanding of the value of these sites but also contribute to their protection and conservation in future.

## Part One





### Colonisation of the Landscape

The erosion of the First Indigenous People's connection to the soil happened since the day that the settlers first set foot in this country. And what I am saying is that in the 21st century, today, it is still happening. And it happens in other forms. (...) What the colonisers forgot or did not know is that our knowledge is inside of us. That could not be destroyed, even though they destroyed the tangible, they could not destroy the intangible.<sup>1</sup> Chief Jean Burgess.

Before delving into the details of this study, it is worth casting some light on some of the events that led to the “disconnection” and alienation of the Indigenous peoples from their lands, their sacred sites and from the practices tied to these: their tangible and intangible heritage. We will see how this study and the ritual at Cape Recife are part of a process of cultural re-appropriation that the Indigenous peoples are trying to achieve day after day with strength and determination. This is an act of resistance to a system that continues to negatively shape their lives; it is their peaceful struggle to be legally recognized by the constitution as having rights of access to the land and ownership of their heritage sites.

The arrival of colonisers in South Africa can be traced to the shipwreck of the Dutch ship *Nieuwe Haarlem* in 1497. Surviving members of the crew, having returned to Europe, persuaded the Dutch East India Company (VOC)<sup>2</sup> to set up at the Cape of Good Hope<sup>3</sup> a way station and commercial hub for trade ships on their way to India. The proposal was set in motion in 1652 with the arrival of Van Riebeeck<sup>4</sup> in the Cape.

What was initially envisioned as a trade outpost at the Cape of Good Hope, transformed into a plan for colonial conquest that saw the settlement of the Dutch who were followed by the British<sup>5</sup>. The events that followed led to an escalation of inequality and oppression for the First Indigenous Peoples of South Africa, the KhoiSan. This was a slow and painful process in which they lost their rights, their freedom to express the practices associated with their culture, their way of life and their religion. In other words, their age-old ties with the land were drastically interrupted.

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<sup>1</sup> Chief Jean Burgess, Gonaqua, interview with the author, 08 November 2019.

<sup>2</sup> VOC stands for: Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie, which was one of the major European trading houses sailing the spice route to the East.

<sup>3</sup> Now Cape Town.

<sup>4</sup> Van Riebeeck was Administrator of the Cape from 1652 to 1662. He was charged with building a fort, improving the natural anchorage in Table Bay, planting cereals, fruit, and vegetables, and obtaining livestock from the Indigenous peoples, the KhoiKhoi.

<sup>5</sup> The Cape was under Dutch rule from 1652 to 1795 and again from 1803 to 1806. British sovereignty was recognised at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 with the Dutch accepting a payment of 6 million pounds for the colony. In 1820 the British authorities persuaded about 5,000 middle-class British people to leave Great Britain. They mainly settled in and around Grahamstown and Port Elizabeth in the Eastern Cape.



↑  
**Fig. 7**  
 Cape St. Francis fish traps. Chief Thomas Augustus and Dr Magda Minguzzi during a site visit

Indeed, total harmony with “Mother Earth” is at the heart of the philosophy of life of the Indigenous peoples. Chief Margaret Coetzee explains:

Our ancestors already understood their presence on and their responsibility towards the womb of Mother Earth. Our ancestors believed, Mother Earth is me and I am Mother Earth. That is one of the deep-rooted concepts that no one, and no political party or institution or system can overrule.

Our ancestors didn't even believe in political systems to protect and embrace our country and our land, and we have a lot of landmarks, Indigenous people's footprints and hand prints which are indisputable.<sup>6</sup>

Before the enactment of the colonial policy of settlement, the lifestyle of the Indigenous peoples was moving around, nomadism<sup>7</sup> and transhumance, in search of fresh grazing. They moved according to the seasons and the availability of natural resources such as water sources for people and their domestic animals, wild animals for hunting, and plants and roots for cooking and medicine.

When these primary resources were used up, walking the earth took on a symbolic importance, which allowed the people, regardless of who they were, to find a place to live in the world. It was through walking that humans began to order the natural landscape that surrounded them. We can therefore see the simple act of walking as the very first means of aesthetic expression engaged in by humans (Careri 2003). Penetrating and traversing the land; discovering and coming to understand uncharted places represented the creation of a sense of order and a structuring of the land. This meant that they could later return to specific places and build structures such as fish traps.

As expressed by Francesco Careri, the relationship between architecture and nomadism is deep and can only be understood in terms of walking and travel. Human history begins with the defining of routes that can be understood as the first instance of humans deliberately shaping the land around

<sup>6</sup> Chief Margaret Coetzee, Inqua, interview with author, 29 March 2018.

<sup>7</sup> At a later stage, I discuss how theorists of international law have used the concept of Indigenous “nomadism” to imply “indifference” on the part of the natives regarding the occupation of their territory in order to justify property rights imposed by the European settlers. In this book the term “nomadism” is used according to the definition of Careri F. (2003:48). He states: “It is important to make a distinction between the concept of roaming (errare) and nomadism. While the nomadic journey is linked to cyclical movement of livestock (transhumance), roaming movement is connected to the pursuit of prey of the hunter-gatherers of the Palaeolithic era (...) Nomadism takes place in spaces (...) that are familiar, and a return trip is planned.”

We decided to use the term “nomadism” and “transhumance” (cyclical movement of livestock) instead of “hunter-gatherer, and herder”, to keep the attention on the relationship between movement and landscape instead on the necessary actions to survive and social differences related.



**Fig. 8**  
Site visit at Klasies River Caves  
with the students of the School  
of Architecture, organized by the  
Senior lecturer Ernst Struwig;  
18 February 2017

them. The birth of established paths and routes as conscious elements in peoples' perception of their surroundings led to them associating certain sites and landmarks with particular meanings. Anthropomorphic rock formations became landmarks to help people find their way. Sites along their routes, such as caves and monoliths, were imbued with mystical or sacred importance and they built structures with specific functions like fish traps and shelters and enclosures for animals. Travelling the land was initially done in order to discover and reveal territory that was unknown and essentially "empty" of meaning, from the point of view of humans, but now people were marking the landscape with specific sites, which were useful and well known to the people and which were designed to perform specific functions. In this way, the path itself assumed symbolic importance in the life of a community living in specific territory.

The importance of paths and the relationship between society and land is discussed by Marc Augé' (1992:55) in his definition of anthropological place. He explains that anthropological place is above all geometric, being made up of three simple spatial elements: lines, intersections of lines, and points of intersection. Augé continues by explaining that, in concrete terms, we can speak of routes or paths which lead from one place to another that have been traced by humans (lines); crossroads at which people met up and gathered (intersections between lines), and sites, more or less monumental in character, which satisfied commercial, religious or political needs (centres). These three dimensions in the reality that surrounds us interact to form complex spaces. In other words, this series of linear arrangements – or routes to use Cereri's term – formed a sequence of connected elements which humans animated and imbued with meaning.





↑  
**Fig. 9**  
 Leather bag used by First  
 Indigenous Peoples to carry  
 herbs; Bayworld Museum Port  
 Elizabeth collection

It is easy to imagine how the journey of the KhoiSan along the route, an ideal line, represented by the coast of the Eastern Cape alternating between rocky areas and long beaches allowed them to systematically observe and study the landscape becoming familiar with its natural features: sea currents, tide patterns and lunar cycles, star movements, and winds. They would also have observed the natural seasonal migrations of fish, mammals and other animals that acted as food sources. It was this holistic and integrated knowledge of nature that was the basis of their way of life along the coast. Living in this environment relied on a significant repository of experience and knowledge which was passed on through the generations. With time, the Indigenous peoples erected architectural structures and complex devices, like fish traps, to take advantage of the resources that nature had to offer in order to improve the lives of the members of the community.

These structures started to serve as a sequence of landmarks or “events” (centres to use Augé’s term) along the route delineated by the shore of this vast coastal area.

These places should be understood as forming part of a complex and integrated system along with caves, which were often spiritual sites, and existing shelters, some of which have been studied in great detail, including the artefacts that were found inside, thanks to the work of archaeologists over the years. The spatial density of the land varied greatly, being denser closer to inhabited places or functional sites like fish traps and less dense the further one went from these well known, to a certain extent, domesticated places. The idea of space, elements organized according to specific logics, and of their daily use by a community leads us to the notion of a “mental map” allowing people to orientate themselves and move about. As explained by La Cecla (1995) territoriality seems to be a process of evolution, the continuous growing and shrinking of the mental image of a specific place according to the experiences had there. The idea is one of experiential classifications and personal reference points for orientation (directions and landmarks), topography, and the specific habitat. It also involves one’s physical presence and experience of being in a certain place at a certain time.

However, what happens if these experiences are suddenly disrupted?

The first interference and disruption for the KhoiSan and their way of life, integrated with the land and nature, as discussed above, coincided with the implementation of plans for colonising and settling the region. It was a plan of territorial occupation with the intention of establishing a new society and a sovereign political order with the exploitation of Indigenous peoples as a low-cost workforce at its heart (Wolfe 2006, Veracini 2014, 2017, Cavanagh 2013). Indeed, as noted by Patrick Wolfe (1999:388) “settler colonizers come to stay; invasion is a structure not an event. In its positive aspects, elimination is an organizing principal of settler-colonial society rather than a once-off occurrence. (...) Settler colonialism destroys to replace”.

The application of the principle of *de facto terra nullius* and the promotion of the idea of South Africa as wild, unoccupied land with underexploited natural riches; the founding and spread of mission settlements to control the Indigenous inhabitants; the introduction of racial segregation to free fertile



land for settler farms: these were the control mechanisms put in place by the settlers to destroy what was there in order to replace it with a new narrative based on Western hegemony.

In the following section we explore the apparatus of oppression, which changed form over the years, while in substance continuing to exert a constant and ever greater effect of forceful distancing of the KhoiSan from the land as a source of livelihoods, cultural expression, and identity.

### The implementation of *de facto terra nullius*

The colonization and dispossession of Indigenous territory by the waves of settlers, was founded on the “legal fiction”<sup>8</sup> of *de facto terra nullius* – land belonging to no one.

It is a conception of power over territory that has its roots in land ownership and private property prevalent throughout Europe, starting with the agrarian revolution and continued into the industrial age, which was then imposed by the settler colonialists onto the lands they conquered and settled. It is a phenomenon principally structured by capitalism<sup>9</sup> and characterised by an egocentric view of the territory (Jakob 2009, Rose 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Moreton-Robinson (2003).

<sup>9</sup> Marx, in his analysis of Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations, identifies, in this period, the formation of a group/class from whom every form of “property” was removed, including the means of production and, as a consequence, their roots in a specific piece of land thus rendering them at the mercy of wage labour which becomes their only relationship with the productive means and its living place. This profound separation between labour and property is analysed as a dual form of alienation: first from the land, when the worker is brought from the country to the city, or removed from his natural habitat, and secondly, from his own tools of work, which pass into the hands of a single entrepreneur. Monestiroli A. 1999, *L'architettura della realta*, Umberto Alemanni, Milan, p154.



**Fig. 10**  
Site visit with Chief Maleiba at  
the dunes in Alexandria, SAN  
Parks; 14 November 2019



↑  
**Fig. 11**  
 Human and four dolphins,  
 painted stone found at Klasies  
 River Mouth Cave 5, Iziko  
 Museums collection

The occupation of the land by the settlers was reinforced by the false narrative that the nomadic way of life of the Indigenous population was evidence of their inability to put the land to good use. For this reason the Indigenous peoples could not claim permanent occupation rights and, accordingly, property rights over the settled European colonists (Bartolomei 2014).

The settlers, erecting fences and walls, demarcated the land and created boundaries, which prevented the KhoiSan from accessing natural resources such as spring water or rivers vital to their livelihoods and herds.

The formation of boundaries demarcated by private land also resulted in the KhoiSan being prohibited from using and crossing the land and visiting their sacred sites like caves and shelters and, subsequent to 1800, to move freely on the land at all.

Malherbe (1978:6) describes in detail how, starting in 1787 with Dutch rule already established in large parts of South Africa, “plakkats” were put in place to control what the colonialists viewed as “irregular ways of living” on the part of Indigenous peoples. They were forced to register themselves and inform the authorities of any planned changes of place. Failure to comply resulted in becoming a slave of the VOC for a minimum of 2 months. At the beginning of the 1800s the situation had already degenerated to a point that Henry Lichtenstein<sup>10</sup> – a German doctor who travelled extensively in South Africa – wrote in his diary “The Dutch Government has recently prohibited all...societies of free Hottentots<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Lichtenstein was a German doctor who travelled widely through the Cape, and he wrote *Travels in Southern Africa* in the years 1803, 1804, 1805, 1806 commenting on the landscape, economy and people whom he encountered.

<sup>11</sup> Terms considered derogatory today and used at that time to refer to the First Indigenous Peoples of South Africa: the KhoiSan.

within the boundaries of the colony, unless they can prove that they have some means of gaining their subsistence”. The definitive blow came in 1809 under British authority.

Chief Jean Burgess’s testimony details how the laws that were promulgated not only served to control movement on the land but also to undermine the very identity of their ancestors:

Caledon was the Governor of the Cape that introduced the Vagrancy Act or Caledon Code. The Vagrancy Act stated that every Hottentot – we were called Hottentots at that point – must have a permanent place of abode. So, what that effectively meant was that they introduced a pass system because we had to walk around with proof of our permanent address. Those who did not have a permanent address were then imprisoned. They started to build prisons to imprison the First Indigenous Peoples and to get them off the land. So, alienating us from the land took different forms and imprisonment was one of the forms of alienating us. Three years later Caledon, in 1812, passed the Apprenticeship of Servant Act that said that every Hottentot child, between the age of 8 and 18, became the property of the farm that they lived on. So, the Vagrancy Act forced people to go and live on a farm to have a permanent address, and three years later they passed the Act that children must now become the labourers on the farm that they lived on. Parents had no rights over their children. They became property of the farm owner. Children were not allowed to practise their culture or speak their language and parents had no say over their children. It broke down the family structure when the children became free slaves labour on the farm. The only payment given was a place to stay. Therefore, it is firstly taking the Indigenous peoples from the land and putting them into prisons, secondly, forcing them on to white owned farms, and, thirdly, taking the children and forcing them to become farm labourers. That was all legislation that was passed to control the movement and to take the land, because then nobody would be on the land because everybody would be in prison or stay on a farm. So, the erosion of the First Indigenous People’s connection to the soil happened from the day that the settlers first set foot in this country<sup>12</sup>.

Bartolomei (2017) indicates that the backbone of the Boer occupation of South Africa relied on the notion of “the chosen people” and “the promised land” strongly rooted in the Old Testament. To these guiding principles, we can add the idea of “national destiny” and “a calling” inspired by Calvinist theology. The Boer people personified the chosen people and South Africa was their promised land to occupy.

With this ideology guiding them, Dutch migrants –Trek Boers with their servants and slaves – using the *Terra Nullius* principle and claiming the right to live in South Africa, moved from the Cape, first into the north of the Country because the coastal forelands of the Eastern Cape were protected by the mountains of the Cape Fold Belt (1720).

These forays into the trackless interior, including difficult river crossings, were made possible by the use of oxen, with their strength and resilience, to haul the wagons but also relied on the exploitation of KhoiSan slaves. The settlers were well aware of their skills in animal husbandry, their deep knowledge of the territory, and their courage in crossing rivers (Malherbe 1987).

By the end of 1760, before the takeover by the British Empire, around 16 000 settlers with the same number of slaves had managed to establish farms and, by that point, they had reached “The rich pasture lands of the south-east coast beyond the Gamtoos River and north-east through the Karoo in the plains of Camdeboo and the mountains known to the KhoiKhoi as *oa gore* – the Snow Mountains or

<sup>12</sup> Chief Jean Burgess, Gonaqua, interview with the author, 08 November 2019.

Sneewbergen in Dutch. These regions and the lands between – Grootte River, the Zuurbergen Zwarte Ruggens, Bruintjes Hoogte and the bank of Sunday River which wound southwards from the Sneewbergen to the coast – had long been occupied by the KhoiKhoi” (Malherbe 1980:3).

The coasts of the Eastern Cape, where the fish traps and other important Indigenous sites like caves were located, were thus only reached by settlers at a later stage. In fact August Frederik Beuter, during an expedition to explore those territories in 1752, notes in his journals the existence of Hagelkraal, near the Attaquas Mountains pass, was the “last place on this east side of Africa inhabited by Christians”. In other words, this was the furthest place along the coast, coming from the Cape of Good Hope, occupied by settlers. However, Forbes (1965) notes that already in 1732, on the occasion of an expedition led by Hubner<sup>13</sup>, two groups of colonists had already gone east reaching the rivers Zwartkops, Sunday and Bushmans that, by Beuter’s time, had already received Dutch names and had, thus, already been reached before him.

The second wave of occupation by settlers led to the creation of a continuous ribbon of private farms parallel to the coast. This became an impassable physical and legal barrier to accessing coastal sites, the ocean, and other resources that up until this point had been freely used by the Indigenous peoples. It is a barrier that, in large part, continues to exist to this day.

To the occupation and demarcation of the land was added the dispossession of the precious livestock raised by the KhoiKhoi which was often traded for tobacco and other low value products. This livestock was fundamental to the survival of the settlers and made possible the settlement and the entrenching of the occupation on these “new” lands possible. At the same time this led to the systematic impoverishment of the Indigenous peoples by depriving them of their principal means of sustaining themselves. This highlights the programme of suppression of Indigenous alterity which Veracini (2015) describes as being, generally speaking, the basis of the colonial settlement policy.

An aspect of the colonial occupation which should not be overlooked concerns the efforts to systematically explore and survey the land starting in the mid-1600s. The aim of this enterprise was to produce precise maps of the resources available in the territory and of the people living there. Enslaved KhoiSan were instrumental to the success of these expeditions owing to their deep acquaintance with the environment.

Between 1705 and 1712, Peter Kolb was the first European to penetrate the interior and produce an accurate description of the flora and fauna present there. More significant were his descriptions of the languages, religions and customs of the KhoiKhoi people including their techniques for fishing the rivers and the sea. These accounts were translated into English in 1731.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Hermanus Hubner led an ivory hunting expedition of thirteen wagons in 1736 and was killed near the Kei River in his returned journey to the Cape. From, Gunn M. and Codd L. E. 1981, *Botanical Exploration Southern Africa*, Botanical Research Institute, Pretoria, p. 56.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Gordon was the first European to reach the mouth of the Orange River and described the San, or Bushmen, in detail. They were a people that had up to this point been overlooked by explorers as they held little interest for researchers at the time (Penn 2013:85).



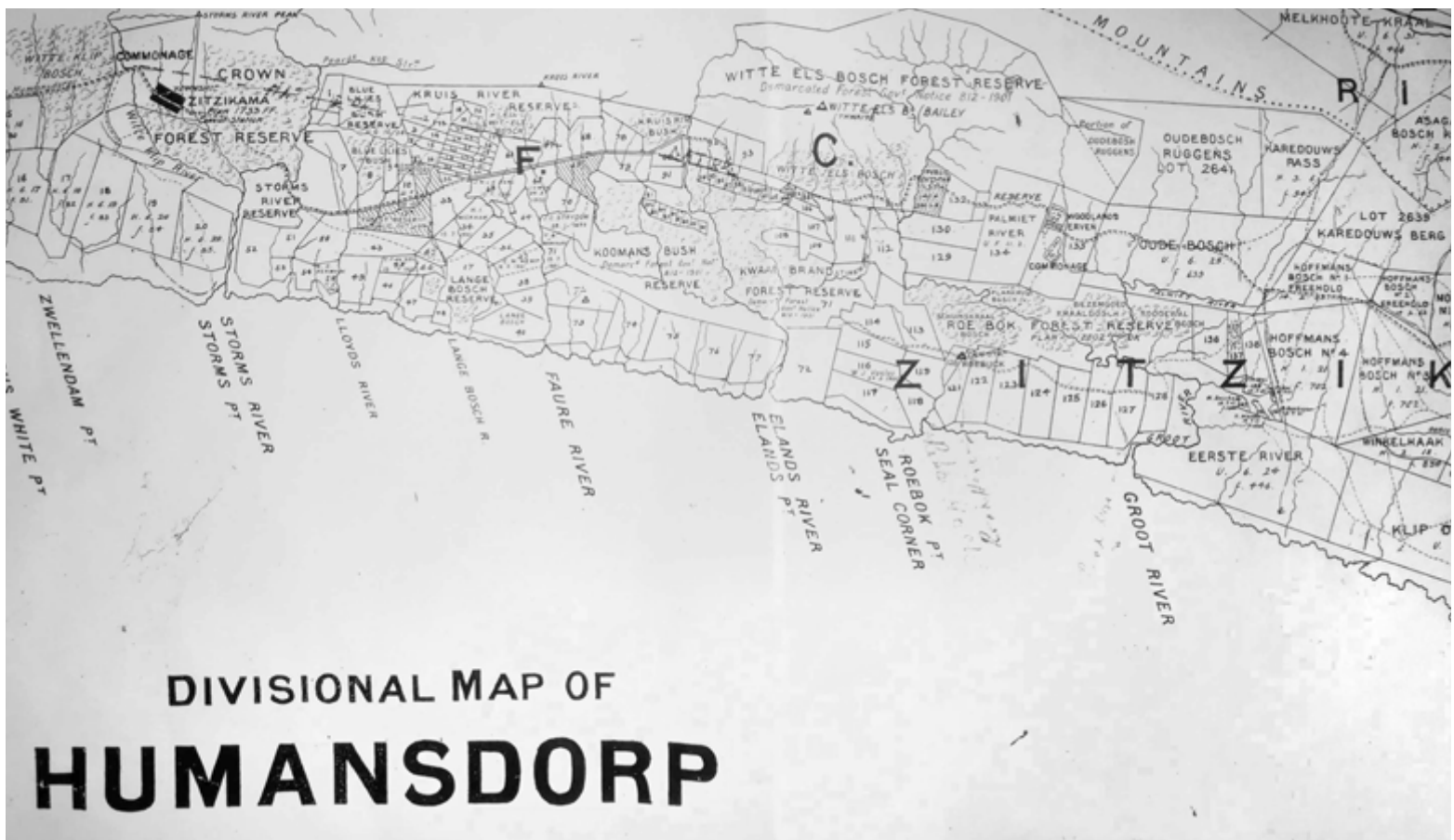
This first expedition was followed by a survey of the Cape harbours together with natural resources like timber and fresh water conducted starting in 1752 for eight months by the German C.D. Wentzel. The survey was commissioned after the VOC opened the ports of Table Bay and Simon's Towns to foreign shipping. We can suppose that the East India Company felt the need to possess a more accurate account of the most hospitable zones likely to attract the interest of other colonial powers.

The maps produced following these expeditions and surveys of the coast sometimes indicate the putative names of the various Indigenous peoples encountered during the course of the survey but they do not mark the fish traps. We can hypothesize that this is due to the fact that these structures posed no risk to shipping, did not represent a significant resource to be exploited, and were unlikely to have represented anything particularly new or exotic to the eyes of the explorers who may well have seen similar structures in other countries. Indeed, fish traps were also common in Europe.

It is clear from the foregoing that at the root of the implementation of *terra nullius* as a colonial strategy is a fundamental philosophical difference between the European and Indigenous conceptions of the relationship between humans and the land, the former believing in possession based on private property, the latter believing in the custodianship of the land and resources that Mother Earth offers. Chief Xam # Gaob Maleiba of the Damasomqua tribe, traditional custodian of the Nelson Mandela Bay and Cape Recife area explains in this regard:



**Fig. 12**  
Example of shell middens along  
the coast of Nelson Mandela Bay



↑  
**Fig. 13**  
 Portion of a “divisional map”  
 showing the partitions of the  
 territory into farms limiting to  
 the ocean

The land was viewed very differently from the people who arrived here from across the waters. They had a different concept and understanding. Our ancient people did not have documentation to prove their ownership, but even so considered themselves the custodians and guardians of the land and the earth that was entrusted to them. They believed, just like we still believe, that wherever the Indigenous peoples lived, and wherever their feet trod was theirs, and they left valuable landmarks and footprints of where they were, and where they lived and what they did and how they did it. In addition, these footprints are all over the country, in the form of caves, remains that were found, artefacts, fish traps, shell middens and so forth. That is their proof and understanding. They had the responsibility, just like we have, to look after the land because we say that we do not possess the land, but we borrow the land for our children and our children’s children that are still to come. And we are only looking after it. And in the years that passed, many people have come from foreign lands and they claimed, and they took, and they grabbed, and the Indigenous owners became dispossessed. And to think that it persists to this day, that people from other lands – I am not saying other countries, I am saying other lands – who came here and when they speak, they become very aggressive, they become assertive about claiming their land. And they use the words “our land”, which is such an exclusive term, that excludes many other people including the original “owners”.

Land is also an emotive issue. We discovered with our land claims that we’re even being paid money as a form of stalling our restitution. It did not take away the pain from those who had been dispossessed. And if we look at the news, you’ll see that people who claimed 20 years ago, are still reclaiming the land. They are claiming it again, because their sense of feeling restored by the land has still not happened, and that is why

I'm saying it's a very emotional subject and a topic perhaps in time to come that can cause some problems in our country. If there is no fairness, no equity, if there is no justice that is being done as far as land is concerned. That is about what I wanted to say at this stage about the land. I mean we can talk about it, but some people are out of the discussion especially the Khoi and San people. They are out of this discussion and we should take part in this discussion and explain to people; how Indigenous peoples feel about the land.<sup>15</sup>

Chief Maleiba's words mirror those spoken in April of 1799 already by Klaas Stuurman and documented by John Barrow (1806:110):

Restore... the country of our fathers which have been despoiled by the Dutch, and we have nothing more to ask... We lived very contently before these Dutch plunderers molested us, and why should we not do so again, if left to ourselves? Has not the Groot Baas... given plenty of grass-roofs, and berries, and grasshoppers for our use, and till the Dutch destroyed them, an abundance of wild animals to hunt? And will they not return and multiply when these destroyers are gone?"

This powerful statement was made at one of the meetings between the clan of Stuurman and the British general Vandeleur and his troops near Nelson Mandela Bay. This is perhaps the oldest written record made by the colonists in which Indigenous peoples clearly express their experience of losing their rights (Malherbe 1997) and their wish to re-establish the equilibrium with the natural environment and access to the resources that had sustained them before the arrival of the settlers. What is more as suggested by Malherbe, the words of Stuurman signal a hope that the British might offer them justice: a vain hope as history would have it.

Returning to the *terra nullius* narrative, it should be noted, in addition, that the colonialists did not take into account the norms governing the use and management of territories known as Commons, which were practised widely throughout Africa. A practice which, in any case, was widespread even in Europe. Okoth-Ogendo (2003) defines Commons as: "ontologically organized land and associated resources available – across generations – exclusively to specific communities or families that operating as corporate entities. The Commons are a creative force in social production and reproduction for those societies which depend on them. These 'properties' are managed and protected by a social hierarchy with the family at its head, the clan and lineage in the middle and a base constituted by the community. Decisions made at each level are not necessarily taken collectively but are based on shared values and principles internalized by the group. And finally the Commons are used in particular ways for specific functions such as cultivation, grazing, hunting transit, fishing and bio-diversity conservation". Relationships between people belonging to the same community managing a territory and its resources were, for this reason, far more important than any individual role.

As we have shown, the colonial settlers substituted the system of community management of the land and resources in South Africa with a new mode based on private property that, along with discriminatory laws, excluded Indigenous peoples from using the land.

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<sup>15</sup> ChiefXam ≠ Gaob Maleiba, Damasonqua, interview with author, 29 March 2018.



Our discussion thus far has only touched on one of the two roots of the *de facto terra nullius* narrative. The term in fact derives from *res nullius* in Roman law “In Romano-centric jurisprudence, these lands were by definition not owned by anyone and were fair game for annexation. In the Roman mind, such lands awaited Romanization, a service the Empire was eager to provide in Gaul, Germania, Britannia, Spain and, not incidentally, in its ‘granary’ of North Africa” (Geisler 2012).

The other root of the ideology is Judeo-Christian in origin. “From this perspective, *terra nullius* faithfully re-enacted the Euro-Christian dogma of creation: something providential arising from nothing (*ex nihilo*). It was a short and convenient step to equate a lack of private ownership with emptiness (*terra nullius*) a void awaiting the dominion of monotheists and their laws” (Geisler 2012). This speaks of the European misconception that these lands were spiritually and culturally void. This idea formed the basis of another arm of the colonial project justifying, in the eyes of the world, the cultural and religious imposition represented by mission settlements.

### Mission Settlements

Evangelical occupation is fundamentally linked to the colonial project; under the pretence of educating and Christianizing uncivilized and heathen populations which, in the eyes of Europeans at the time, lacked an appropriate form of spirituality. This deprecatory view of Indigenous peoples was consolidated and shaped by most of the writings and representations produced by the explorers.

Nigel Penn (2013), in *Written Culture and the Cape Khoikhoi*, eloquently highlights this notion noting that, prior to Peter Kolb’s (1719) accurate work based on observation, representations of Indigenous peoples in South Africa were based on classical or biblical iconography rather than direct observation. These representations were structured by the belief that the further one moved from the “known” world and the centre of Western “civilization” the more one risked encountering the “wilderness” and “savagery”. “The Bible taught that the world’s centre was the Holy Land and the further from this centre one strayed the closer one came to savagery. Classical writers of Greece and Rome also drew a distinction between the civilised and barbaric, the latter category of person being, obviously, the people beyond the boundary of Greece and Rome” (Penn 2013:168).

Artists were no less prejudiced, producing works that were significantly derogatory of the First Nation. A classic example is Charles Bell’s painting<sup>16</sup> “The Landing of van Riebeeck at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652” Table Bay, Cape Town, on 6 April 1652. This 1850 painting, representing a historical event, was produced in response to an appeal by the conveners of the first Fine Arts Exhibition at the Cape in

<sup>16</sup> “Charles Davidson Bell was born in Scotland, and arrived in the Cape in 1830, at the invitation of his uncle, Colonel John Bell, who was then Colonial Secretary. At the age of twenty-one, he joined Dr Andrew Smith’s “Expedition for Exploring Central Africa” with the task of keeping a visual diary of the expedition by sketching the landscapes and the Indigenous peoples they encountered. After his return from this expedition, Bell worked in various government departments and in 1838 he started working in the survey department, becoming, in 1848, Surveyor-General of the Cape. Bell won a gold medal for the “Best original history painting” entitled “The Landing of van Riebeeck at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652”, now held in the SA Library, Cape Townz, <<https://digitalcollections.lib.uct.ac.za/bell/charles-davidson-bell>> (05/03/2019).

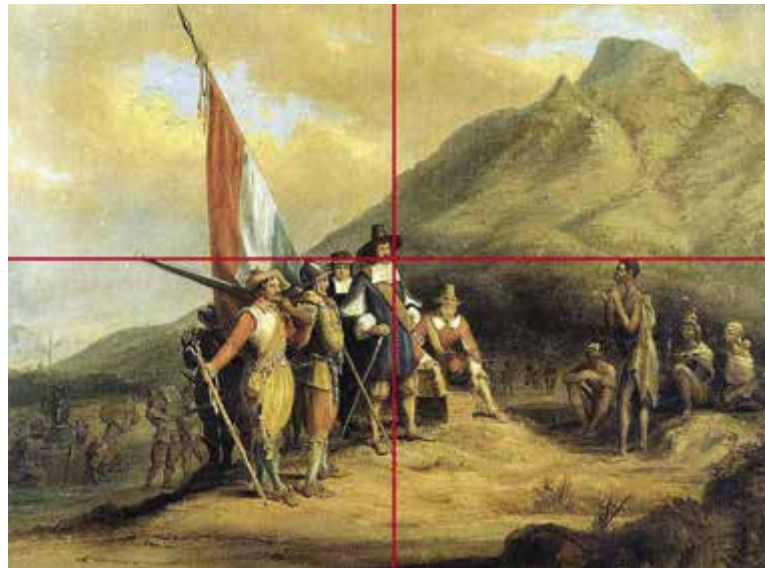


Fig. 14  
The painting of Charles Davidson Bell, "Landing of van Riebeeck at the Cape of Good Hope in 1652", with the compositional axis

1851 to introduce the academic category of "history painting" to the Cape. Bell decided to take inspiration from events described in the journal of Van Riebeeck.

What is interesting about this painting, for our purposes, is the implicit message contained in its mode of representation and composition. Observing the positions of the figures, one immediately notices a marked favouring of the group of arriving Europeans. Van Riebeeck, figured in the centre, is the focal point of the painting dominating the vertical axis while the group of KhoiSan take up less than a third of the space. The implicit message of European superiority inscribed in the artwork is reinforced by the composition on the horizontal axis where we see that the Dutch Captain towers over all the other figures in the painting. The inferior position of the KhoiSan from the point of view of the colonists is highlighted by their posture. They are figured as crouching on the ground in an attitude not only of physical, but also cultural, inferiority.

The following words of Chief Maleiba underscore how dramatic the arrival of the colonists was for the Indigenous peoples. His words contain a distinct note of suffering and powerlessness:

When a Khoi man looks into the eyes and the face of another man he sees himself, because the meaning of "Khoi" is "man". Therefore, the other person, or any other persons, is just a reflection of that Khoi man. And to draw you back to the ancient people. You know, the people that came from Europe to our land; our Khoi forefathers looked at them and they just saw another person, maybe different in a way, but it was just another person, it was just another man. And there already, their good hearts treated that man like they would treat their own brother. In doing that, they opened themselves up for a situation which they could never have anticipated. Where, at first, they were very welcoming and very embracing, with time, they realized that these people who came here with their Christianity and their Bible that they brought with them, were the bad guys. And they were robbed, they were dispossessed, killed, and genocide was committed against them, rape was committed, murder was committed, and theft was committed against the Indigenous peoples, Khoi people. Because they saw a person in another person. All through the same universal spirit. Because we are one, yet different. We are one spiritual being.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> ChiefXam ≠ Gaob Maleiba, Damasonqua, interview with author, 29 March 2018.



**Fig. 15**  
Example of “pass” used by Black people during the apartheid regime. Courtesy of Lindinxiwa Mahlasela

The first attempt at evangelizing the Indigenous peoples was in 1658 and was linked to the school that Van Riebeeck founded at the Cape of Good Hope principally for slaves and KhoiSan living nearby. The arrival of George Schmidt in 1737, affiliated to the Moravian Missionary Society, was a decisive moment for the Missions. The first mission was founded at Baviaanskloof (later named Genadendal) in 1792. As recounted by Du Plessis (1911), the community was founded in 1799 by 464 converts and the mission was made up of about “two hundred cottages (...) the Hottentots possessed few sheep and cattle, the pasturage being limited in quantity and poor in quality. (...) From time to time Hottentots would leave the station for prolonged periods, in order to enter the service of the farmers as herdsmen, wood-cutters ox wagon-drivers, or even the service of the Government as soldiers” (Du Plessis, 1911:85). The second wave of expansion for the missions was connected to the London Missionary Society, the first British missionaries to arrive in the country. One of the first missions that the LMS founded was at Bethelsdorp (near Port Elizabeth) in 1803 by Van der Kemp<sup>18</sup>, which would become the district of Uitenhage. It was aimed at the KhoiKhoi active on the frontier and was dedicated to the development of individuals who were judged “useful and industrious” (Malherbe, 1978:158). It was thus, essentially, a place specifically designed for the training of a cheap labour force for the farms but also for the processing of raw materials like the salt extracted at Port Elizabeth-Bethelsdorp and timber from the Tzitzikamma forests. These were raw materials essential for the extension of colonial state power but which were previously used by the local Indigenous population. Chief Maleiba gives us details about the role of the missionaries in the Port Elizabeth area and their controversial legacy among today’s KhoiSan:

<sup>18</sup>J.T. van der Kemp was the first London Missionary Society President of African Missions.

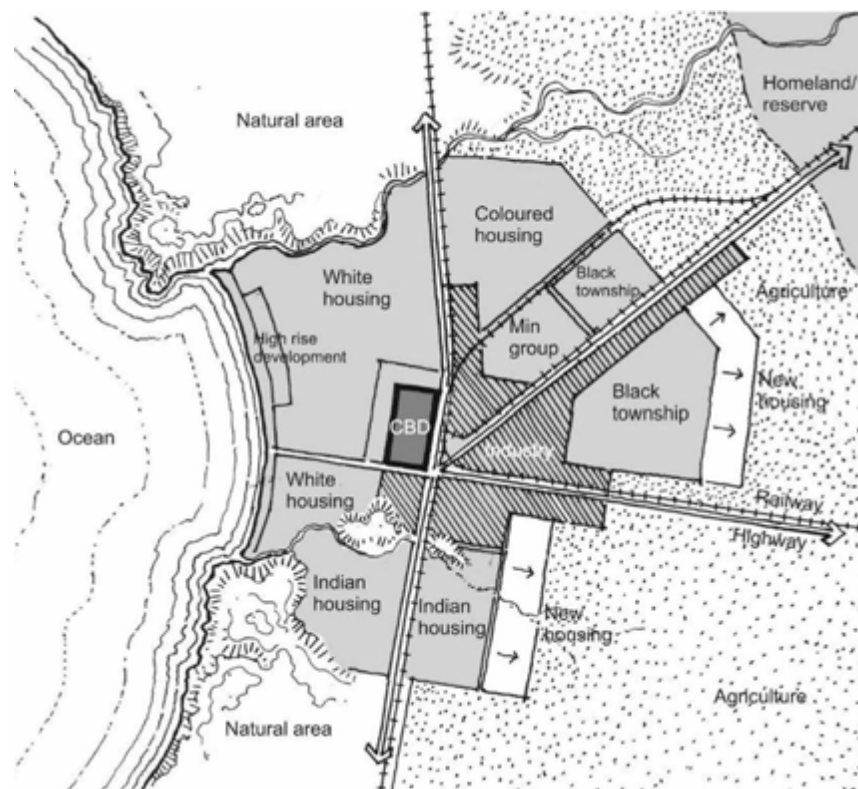


Fig. 16  
Diagram of the Apartheid City,  
by D. Schoulund, 2010, adapted  
from Beavon, 1992:233 in  
Bremner, 2007:20

The missionaries were here, in most of the places in Southern Africa, in early 1800s. They captured the minds and the thinking of the people and this is the general understanding among KhoiSan peoples. Some of the people would say that the missionaries did good work, but they had a double role: they collaborated with the “land boss” and supplied cheap labour to the government. For instance, like in Bethelsdorp or in Uitenhage where we can find the names of the Indigenous peoples that built the Drostdy house. And if you take Van der Kemp for example, who was one of the prominent missionaries in Southern Africa, he is seen as a person in high esteem. But as well as others he hired workers to work for the “land boss”.

On a deep level, the missionaries came, and they changed the religion that the people already had and they taught them a religion called Christianity. The original occupants of this land already had a religion which was not dissimilar to the religion that was brought here.

Missionaries also played a role in changing people’s names. Because you had a better status only if you converted to Christianity. Only then, after baptism in the river – such as the Kobo or Sunday River –, your name changed from whatever your Indigenous Khoi name was, to a biblical name, like David or Abram.<sup>19</sup>

In this way the mission settlements became not only sites for Christian evangelism among the Indigenous peoples who were considered savage but also, at the same time, they were places which bolstered the exploitation of the Indigenous labour force and centres which monitored and controlled the movements of people settled at the mission stations. Furthermore, when Indigenous peoples settled at the missions, land was suddenly freed up for the establishment of new farms. Finally, limiting the movements of the Indigenous peoples by means of occupying and privatising land that, as described above, also deprived the people of access to natural resources. This forced Indigenous peoples into a relationship of dependence on the missions for their very survival.

<sup>19</sup> ChiefXam ≠ Gaob Maleiba, Damasonqua, interview with the author, 09 October 2019.

### Racial laws

The next step in the process of Indigenous oppression was the application of the racial laws of the Apartheid regime, in place from the 1948 until 1990. These laws served to formalize a mechanism of repression that, as we have seen, was already in place.

With the Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950, the South African population was divided into three main racial groups: Black, White, and Coloured. The government made these classifications according to a person's skin colour, habits, education, appearance, and social norms. Rules were applied according to this classification.

The KhoiSan were mostly classified "coloured" together with the Malay, Javanese, Sumatran, Indian and Chinese people. Only later would a fourth category for people of Indian descent be adopted. From this moment on, the Indigenous peoples could not identify themselves as "San"<sup>20</sup> or "KhoiKhoi" or more specifically, among others, as Griekwa, Damasonqua, Inqua, Nama, Korana. From that moment onwards, the KhoiSan as a distinct ethnic group ceased to exist.<sup>21</sup>

The term "coloured" however, had been used before in common parlance to refer to people born of the miscegenation between slaves or low cost workers, mostly Africans and Asians, with the European colonials (Adhikari 2013:2). In this way, those who were classified in this category were judged as being of "mixed race". The notion of a "pure race" or "chosen people" essentially links to aspects of the Old Testament into the fertile ideological soil of which colonialism planted its roots.

Chief Jean Burgess explains:

We were taught it was wrong to be you, strive to be white. White is right, strive towards whiteness. That was inculcated into us. My grandmother refused to speak our mother tongue with us. She taught us how to use a knife and a fork, how to starch pure white serviettes, and how to starch our pillowcases, because we had to strive towards Western culture. We were taught it was wrong to be you; strive to be white. White is right, strive towards whiteness. That was inculcated into us. And the reason was related to the fact that my grandmother used to do the laundry of a British woman.

She starched the white linen, the white serviettes, she starched all the white cotton stuff. But she did not starch at their house, she brought the laundry home where all the daughters, including my aunt, and the children had to participate doing the laundry of that British woman's cotton linen. It had to be white to perfection. Because of colonization my grandmother came to think that striving towards British whiteness was right.

I live in a town where in 1820, British settlers formally landed: Grahamstown. So, lots of those British families that came to South Africa came to this town. When the first British family arrived in Grahamstown, the process of the colonization of the First Indigenous Peoples was already on going.

My grandmother used to do the washing of the linen of those British women; and they referred to them as British "ladies". There was the notion of striving towards that British "ladieness". Part of this process was also to become confident in the English language. English was prioritised in order to communicate but also to become equal. Because white was seen as better.

<sup>20</sup> San was a term coined by the colonists to indicate populations that were nomadic but lacked domesticated animals unlike the KhoiKhoi who were herdsmen.

<sup>21</sup> The racial group classifications "Black, White, Coloured, Indian or Other" remain officially in place today. For example, when applying for a job or registering as a student at university, the applicant is obliged to fill in a form declaring to what racial group he or she "belongs".



But my aunt, my grandmother's daughter, did not conform to that. When my grandmother was not present, she carried on speaking our mother tongue. My grandmother as well, sometimes forget about "striving toward whiteness" and some KhoiKhoi words slipped out. My aunt used to say, "you cannot change who you are, no matter how much you are striving toward something, you cannot change".

That striving to whiteness was part of colonization, to colonize our mind and identity.

And it is this destruction of who we are from which South Africa can never heal. This country has never gone through a healing process. The pain of the First Indigenous Peoples is not acknowledged. The destruction of our identities, our spirituality, our ancestry, our knowledge, nobody talks about it. (...) And only if you understand your language, if you understand the relationship with the spirituality of the water, if you understand the relationship with the soil, if you understand the relationship to the sacred herbs that we offer, if you understand everything that entails, that makes us as a Peoples; us. And if one element of that is missing, then we are a broken people. And I will say it until I die: South African will not heal until the First Indigenous Peoples of this country receive justice. (...) In South Africa we, as the First Indigenous Peoples, are not acknowledged or accepted. We are just Coloureds.<sup>22</sup>

Collectively then, it is clear that these strategies, among others, were used by the settler colonisers to twist the narrative to their advantage while at the same time firmly delegitimising Indigenous peoples. Since the end of the Apartheid regime, the First Indigenous Peoples have been taking a stand in a systematic way and with increasing intensity are seeking legal recognition in the South African constitution.<sup>23</sup> This is demonstrated by a commitment to raising awareness not only by lobbying the government but also by galvanising public opinion in the quest to be acknowledged as the First Indigenous Peoples of South Africa and not under the false ethnic category of coloured.

Chief Jean Burgess continues:

Our country is not acknowledging and not accepting our existence in a postapartheid South Africa, this is a priority in people's minds. And in asserting our existence, the other things will fall into place.<sup>24</sup>

Chief Maleiba adds with a bitter note:

If we are not acknowledged, we do not "exist" so there is no responsibility towards us".<sup>25</sup>



**Fig. 17**  
Screenshot of eNCA news: 18 July 2018 – Chief Khoisan SA walked from Port Elizabeth to Pretoria to meet the South African President. This was a march with the intent to bring awareness towards the acknowledgement of the First Indigenous Peoples of Southern Africa

**Fig. 18**  
Residents of Woodstock (Cape Town) protest against evictions and "spatial apartheid". Photograph: Ashraf Hendricks/ GroundUp, 2017

<sup>22</sup> Chief Jean Burgess, Gonaqua, opening talk at the IK21 symposium, Nelson Mandela University, 08 November 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Although on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019 President Cyril Ramaphosa signed the Traditional KhoiSan Leadership Bill into law, some leaders and members of the KhoiSan community have been perplexed by the contents of the signed document and with the methodology with which it was produced: namely a lack of consultation with the relevant community members.

<sup>24</sup> Chief Jean Burgess, Gonaqua, interview with the author, 08 November 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Chief Xam = Gaob Maleiba, Damasonqua, interview with the author, 23 October 2019.

Chief KhoiSan SA in a 2017 interview discusses the process of self-recognition and belonging to the Indigenous identity that is currently seen as a priority:

Our children are confused. They long for their own identity; they don't know where they belong. (...) We would like to have workshop that informs people about the history of the term coloured. We want the people themselves to come out and say, "I am not coloured". We do not want to tell them; we want them to make the decision themselves. Informed people make informed decisions.<sup>26</sup>

The system of racial segregation was also applied to spatial organization and the use of the landscape and build environment.

In fact under the Apartheid regime the cities were essentially divided, into three major areas: the business district where everyone without ethnic distinctions could work together during the day, the suburbs where the whites lived, and the township, on the outskirts, where Black, Coloured and Indian people were sent after the working day, forced to commute long distances to extremely overpopulated shanty towns, single-sex hostel accommodation or "matchbox" estates.

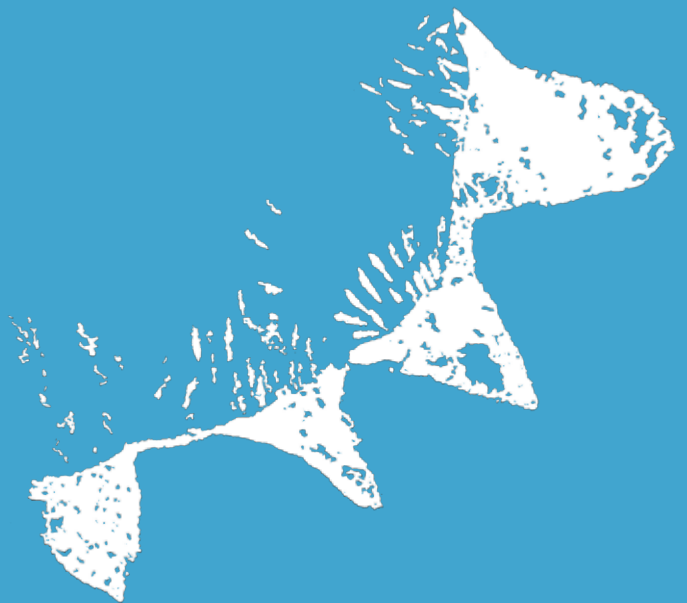
Regrettably, after 25 years of democracy the situation has not changed much. In fact, most of the representatives of this research group and the KhoiSan community still live their lives governed by territorial marginalisation and the legacy of historic relocation policies.

It is clear that the systematic territorial erasures implemented by the colonising project that aimed at establishing an alternative narrative suppressing Indigenous people's signs and symbols, still holds sway.

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<sup>26</sup> Chief KhoiSan SA, "We are Khoi, not coloured, chief says", «The Herald EC», 17 March 2017, p. 5.

## Part Two







### The international art performance

The art project “The Spirit of Water” performed at the Cape Recife Nature Reserve, in Nelson Mandela Bay, South Africa on the 5th and 6th of May 2017, was part of an international event entitled “The Way of Water” that took place simultaneously in the coastal cities of Brooklyn (USA), Ouidah (Benin), San Luis Potosí (Mexico), Venice (Italy) and Zadar (Croatia).

Artists<sup>1</sup>, in collaboration with local communities from various cities, developed different performances under the same exploratory theme encapsulated in the following question: “What is our role in maintaining the essential conditions for life on our planet: specifically, with respect to water as our principal source of life?”

The scope of this international creative project was to draw attention to fragile marine environments threatened by pollution, excessive fishing and encroachment by human development and industry.

The message which Indigenous peoples, not only in South Africa but globally, offer is based on principles of respect and safeguarding resources made available by Mother Earth as well as promoting a sustainable and holistic lifestyle. For this reason, participating in the art project was immediately recognized by our research group as being of fundamental importance and in adherence with Indigenous principles.

Chief Maleiba describes the power connected with the management of and access to resources, the abuses that have occurred, and natural system of redress that the earth naturally puts into action to restore the natural balance:

When talking about custodianship, sustainability and sustainable living, and exploitation of resources, we see the land as having been given to us by God. The earth holds the resources that have been put there for us. It holds the resources not only for Indigenous peoples but for all people on earth and Indigenous peoples themselves. One of our major quests and struggles is to have access to the resources of the earth that other people have access to. These resources are actually supposed to benefit the people. They are instead used to discard, push away or isolate people who are entitled to access to those resources. The earth has a wonderful way of managing itself, of healing itself, and of restoring itself. We talk about the earth, we talk about the land and we talk about the sea. The earth has a way of responding and reacting, especially to things like disrespect and injustice of one person to the next person, for irreverence, in other words, where there is no reverence for life, any form of life, then the earth has a way of responding and reacting. When we think about the damage

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<sup>1</sup> Participating artists : Benin, Ouidah: Flavia Vaccher; from Zara, Croatia: Josip Zanki, Matija Zduni ; from Venice, Italy: Davide Skerlj; from San Luis Potosí, Mexico: Manolo Cocho with the DRY Collective Group; from Brooklyn, United States: Ethan Cornell, Justin Frankel, Megan Suttles, Jimi Pantalon, Extll; from Port Elizabeth, South Africa: Magda Minguzzi, Ernst Struwig, KhoiSan Chiefs and community members of the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality

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**Fig. 19**

The sky with the “cloud shaped like Africa” seen during the first site visit at Cape Recife Nature Reserve with the KhoiSan Chiefs, community members, staff and students of the Nelson Mandela University, 12/04/2017




**Fig. 20**  
 Cape Recife Natural Reserve  
 (aerial view) with some fish  
 traps visible

that is being done to the oceans. People in the past used to harvest from the ocean and from the land. They used to harvest in a sustainable way. They farmed with respect and with reverence, and a high regard for the earth that they were using. Therefore, what comes is a natural system of reward and a natural system of punishment. And it is sad for us to think that punishment is perhaps not going to come in our time, but punishment is going to come to the generations to come. Where we hear on a regular basis about certain disasters that are unexplainable, climate change, mudslides and flooding to extreme droughts. That is how the earth is responding to the way that we are treating it. Very, very sad.<sup>2</sup>

Equally important is a sense of responsibility that should be linked to the use of resources and of providing a system of education to the younger generations. Chief Margaret Coetzee has had direct experience with this and speaks of this below, demonstrating also how, in the spirit of environmental sustainability, the international art performance adhered to Indigenous values:

Traditional practices were not just traditional activities, but were part and parcel of the greater broader spiritual conception of our existence. This starts with respect for myself, and respect for Mother Earth, who provides for me, as an individual but also for us, as a broader community. This sense of responsibility is entrusted to the Indigenous peoples through their ancestors. It is respect for every resource that Mother Earth provides for us. To live a healthy and sustainable life. And our ancestors have taught us...there are many stories which I can tell through my grandmother, grandfather, great aunties, and uncles. There were certain rules which we had to follow when we go to the river and the spring to collect water. There were certain principles and rules which we had to obey. We were never to mess around there, we had to keep that

<sup>2</sup> Chief Xam ≠ Gaob Maleiba, Damasonqua, interview with author, 29 March 2018.



part of our living space clean in order to protect that resource for generations to come. That's a principle: a day-to-day practice in our community. That is where I grew up, in Joubertina in the Langkloof (...).

In this era of political governance, the different nations have robbed the Indigenous peoples who were the custodians of the resources. But you cannot claim rights if you are not willing to take the responsibility which goes with the rights. So that's also another paradox between political governance and spiritual governance. Indigenous people's governance systems vs. political governance systems.

It was never God's plan for nations to have wars to gain and to steal and to rob other nations of their custodianships, which are God-given gifts. That's why the systems of how to use resources like the oceans or the rivers, which we believe are the veins of the womb of Mother Earth, were very different in the past.

Our ancestors taught us that we need to take only what we need, not to become rich or to harm the natural systems which are there to provide for the long-term purposes of the different nations. And that is our struggle. Our ancient fish traps may be looked at as ancient lifestyle but that also enhanced the protection of the womb of Mother Earth in a natural way and not in a destructive way, that was part and parcel of our constructive management of the resources. (...) The only way for all nations to restore themselves is to reconnect with their spirit.<sup>3</sup>

In Nelson Mandela Bay, as a work group, we decided to add the theme of cultural re-appropriation to the globally important theme of public awareness around environmental sustainability and, in so doing, to take the opportunity to create a new sense of belonging for the First Indigenous Peoples through the performance.



**Fig. 21**  
Chief Maleiba and Chief  
Coetzee observing one of the  
fish traps located at Cape  
Recife Nature Reserve

<sup>3</sup> Chief Margaret Coetzee, Inqua, interview with author, 29 March 2018.



Fig. 22  
 General plan of Cape Recife  
 Nature Reserve with built  
 elements indicated: preferential  
 paths and waiting points  
 required for the performance/  
 rituals "The Spirit of Water"

For this reason, the ritual performance took place at the fish traps in the Cape Recife Nature Reserve, which is a heritage site to the KhoiSan. These are the most ancient man-made stone structures present in the area, dating back to precolonial times<sup>4</sup>, and constructed by hunter-gatherer communities living on the coast of Southern Africa at that time. These stone structures, the existence of which most local people are unaware, are not listed as National Heritage sites and are not officially recognised as being related to the Indigenous Peoples of Southern Africa.

Going to Cape Recife represented an act of reconnection, not only with a place of significant cultural heritage, but, also, with a point in history when human beings lived in harmony with nature.

The representatives of the KhoiSan peoples performed their ancient rituals, referred to as *!NAU*. Ceremonial cleansing and sprinkling of the site was performed before anyone was permitted to walk on it.

<sup>4</sup>The exact dating of fish traps is still under debate among archaeologists. As indicated by Gribble (2015) "A means of dating the fish traps absolutely has yet to be found and thus the dating of these sites remains tenuous and open to question. It is possible that the technology of building fish traps is older than the postulated dates (last 2000, 3000 years) and that earlier evidence of their use was inundated as sea levels rose from their late Pleistocene lows about 15,000 years ago."

This was followed by a cleansing ceremony for the soul of the people. These rituals were performed using a smudge made of Indigenous local herbs, burned in the *piri //nab* (kudu horn), carried by the horn bearer. The Sprinkling Ceremony was done using buchu<sup>5</sup> water sprinkled over the participants using the *goma//hab*.

Part of the ritual was also the building of a sacred fire inside the hut on May 5th and in front of the fish traps on May 6th. Both events re-embodied the highly symbolic ancestral practice of gathering as a community: a feature of every culture. The “central”<sup>6</sup> part of the performance was in fact the positioning of a wooden stick on the fire by the Chiefs, calling the names of the different continents, followed by the participants, and the subsequent sitting in circle in front of the fire and in proximity of the fish traps. Sitting around the fire, everyone repeated a mantra in the form of “we are here”. This phrase seeks to mark the importance of being, as individuals who have become – thanks to the performance – part of a community, at that specific place and time, together expressing collective strength while at the same time being connected via water to the other assemblies performing it elsewhere across the oceans.

The fire also performs a specific function in Indigenous conflict resolution as explained by Paramount Chief Steenkamp.<sup>7</sup> When disagreements or conflicts arose in the community, chiefs presiding over the fire ritual and the involved parties used to sit around the fire to discuss and dissect the aspects of the conflict. After the discussion, the name of the person involved in the disagreement would be written on a piece of wood and burned in the fire and reduced to ashes. This symbolised that specific discussion is part of the past and that the future could then be embraced without reservations. For this reason it is significant that the public fire ceremony (06 May) started with five Chiefs who each in turn placed a piece of wood on the fire loudly pronouncing the name of each of the six continents.

When the last participant completed the circling of the fire, the horn (*piri //nab*) was sounded seven times, calling everyone together. The horn bearer called the names of the Indigenous Ancestors in four cardinal directions, while honouring them by raising the horn high.

At the end of the ceremony, the participants were encouraged to express themselves concerning the significance of their relationship to the ocean.

The event was organized in such a way that Indigenous rituals alternated with “actions” forming part of the international art performance. Therefore, there were sections with performers and spectators and sections where everyone present was actively involved. The participants were representatives of the KhoiSan communities, staff and students of Nelson Mandela University as well as people with a commitment to the ocean, its preservation and restoration, seeking to reconnect with Mother Earth.



**Fig. 23**  
The fire ritual with Nelson Mandela University staff, students and general public

<sup>5</sup> Indigenous plant.

<sup>6</sup> Central because it was the highlight of the entire two days but also because it involved many more of the attendees of the event. In fact, during the cleansing ceremonies that preceded this phase, the Chiefs were active but the “general public” were passive spectators.

<sup>7</sup> See in this book the section “The opinion of the KhoiSan Chiefs: impact of the project”.



**Fig. 24**  
One of the weekly meetings at Erica House Primary School with the KhoiSan Chiefs, their head persons and community members; Ernst Struwig and Dr Magda Minguzzi

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**Fig. 25**  
Site visit of 12/04/2017 at Cape Recife with the KhoiSan Chiefs, their community members, staff and students of the Nelson Mandela University. The Chiefs are tracing in the sand the positions of the elements to be built for the performance-rituals

**Fig. 26**  
Two KhoiSan community members. On the right of the picture is the elderly person mentioned by Paramount Chief Steenkamp in the section of the book "The opinions of the KhoiSan Chiefs"

On the one hand, the performance was a metaphorical act connecting our contemporary reality, characterised by the pollution and exploitation of the sea, with a time in the past when human beings were in harmony with Mother Earth and the oceans. Another meaning of the event concerned the collective expression of the need to investigate ways of decolonising our approach to land and resource use and heritage management.

The following words of Chief Maleiba are an eloquent testament to the current situation experienced by the KhoiSan with respect to their sites and to the land of which they have been the custodians for centuries:

What is sad for me, is that I represent Cape Recife...It is not only my Cape Recife, but I represent the idealised position of the leader of the Khoikhoi in the Nelson Mandela Metro and also in the Eastern Cape. But if I want to go in there, I have to go and knock on somebody's door. And I've got to ask permission, I've got to pay money. I'm told that I have to behave myself in a certain way, even though I would know how to behave myself, but there are certain preconditions for me going in there.

But I don't think it will always stay the same (...) I was invited by somebody, whom I guided there at the fish traps. We became friends and I was hopeful that he would do what he promised to do, which was to introduce me to the Port Elizabeth Cultural and Heritage Society, which consists totally of white people. I was trusting him to come back to me to tell me that I would be invited to attend the meetings, that I would be accepted as a member there, also as a cultural person and a person of KhoiSan heritage. But that was the end of the story. You see, so what do we have to do now? We have to take ourselves to one side as KhoiSan and say no: culture and heritage will be a separate thing done by the KhoiSan somewhere else. These are people of white cultural heritage and those are Nguni heritage people and these are KhoiSan but we never came together.

But yes, that is my feeling about Cape Recife but a time will come, when we are going to go there and do certain rituals, at those footprints of our forefathers, and maybe in that way they will understand what we are about. Without burning tyres.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Chief Xam ≠ Gaob Maleiba, Damasonqua, interview with author, 29 March 2018. Chief Maleiba is the custodian of the coast of Cape Recife.







### Phase 1: the international project

My involvement with the “The Way of Water” international project began in December 2016 following an invitation to take part from Davide Skerlj, the artist who conceptualised the broad strokes of the project. It was to be a project which concerned the seas and oceans, and the urgent need to safeguard them, to which artists could contribute independent works responding to the theme in the places identified for involvement in the project. The medium selected for the project was performance art.

The first months were fundamental because they were spent identifying the participating artists for the international project. These included: Benin, Ouidah; Flavia Vaccher; from Zara, Croatia; Josip Zanki, Matija Zdunić; from Venice, Italy; Davide Skerlj; from San Luis Potosí, Mexico; Manolo Cocho with the DRY Collective Group; from Brooklyn, United States; Ethan Cornell, Justin Frankel, Megan Suttles, Jimi Pantalón, Extl.

We began to exchange emails with suggestions and opinions to open a dialogue about the content and modalities that the shared international project should take. Initially, some members of the group preferred leaving the format of the contributions completely free but, after a series of discussions, it was decided that it would be very difficult to disseminate material, including the travelling exhibitions, if they were not in digital format.

The common aspects of the project that were defined from the outset were:

1. Participants in the various international locations were required to be physically present on 6 May in front of the ocean, which conceptually created a fluid link between the participants in other parts of the world where they could express in different ways the urgency of collective action for the protection and conservation of the seas and oceans;
2. art, performance art in particular, was the medium chosen for this collective act of expression;
3. the output would be video and photographic documentation of the performance to be displayed internationally in art galleries and universities in the cities involved in the project.

### Phase 2: The Port Elizabeth Project, definition of the participatory model

#### January to April 2017

After the international team had identified the theme of the project as described above, I made contact with Chief Margaret Coetzee of the Inqua tribe and Chief Xam ≠ Gaob Maleiba of the Damasonqua

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**Fig. 27**  
The horn (*piri/nab*) blown at  
the end of site visit in Cape  
Recife of the 12/04/2017

tribe who is the traditional custodian of the area that includes the coast and ocean of Nelson Mandela Bay. I had been working with them for a year already visiting precolonial sites and they had introduced me to the Cape Recife fish traps.

The two Chiefs subsequently made contact with the other KhoiSan Chiefs resident in the metropolitan area, organized meetings and, in general, took on the role of coordinators for this project. This aspect, connected to the coordination of the project, was questioned more than once by the other Chiefs representing groups like the Korana and San who are not part of the Cape Khoi and who did not always take a positive view on the matter.

The definition of the project saw the active participation of the Chiefs, Headpersons and some members of the KhoiSan community at every stage. This participation was crucial for the success of the various phases of the project. A key aspect, the participatory art project method, which I chose as our approach to realising the project and producing the outputs was designed to ensure that they represented a vision and a message internal to the community and shared by the Indigenous Peoples of South Africa as opposed to an external reading. The KhoiSan culture has, in fact, been passed down orally to the present day despite all the challenges resulting from the oppression they have suffered. Like many other oral cultures, this too has been interpreted by external observers and rarely by members of the group. Avoiding this as much as possible obviously meant that sharing every aspect of the process was as important as sharing the product itself. In general the participatory art project method is aimed at improving community cohesion, promoting socio-cultural empowerment and, if possible, creating a positive impact on participants. In this approach, the role of the artist is to create a product in collaboration with a work group that is representative of the process carried out together (Goldbard 2006).

Goldbard (2006) recognizes that, at the international level, the participatory method was central to the work of educator Paulo Freire and theatre director Augusto Boal in Brazil. In particular Boal, with his “theatre of the oppressed” recognized dialogue as the communicative mode most important in terms of expression while defining monologue, in contrast, as a site where oppression can reign. Thus, theatre is a tool for transforming monologue into dialogue and a famous saying of his was: “While some people make theatre, we all are theatre”. The quote reminds me of the many times during meetings with Chief Margaret Coetzee when she would describe her lifelong commitment to the freedom of her people as a sort of performance.

Work group meetings occurred every week on Wednesday afternoons and were mostly held at Erica House Primary School in Bethelsdorp where Chief Margaret Coetzee had been teaching for years. A few meetings were held at the home of Chief Maleiba. The choice of location was made by the Chiefs and was selected because it was easily reachable for everyone. In fact, the Chiefs and community members involved in the project had suffered forced removals under the Apartheid regime and since then have lived in the northern part of Port Elizabeth, far from the city centre and from the campus where the Department of Architecture is housed and, consequently, transport is often prohibitively costly.

The purpose of the meetings, which sometimes lasted up to five hours, was to define in as much detail as possible the conceptual aspects of the message that the work group hoped to transmit with the art performance as well hashing out administrative and organizational aspects of the project. The discussions revolved around the concept at the core of the international project and around refining the broad structure for the event that I suggested to the group. The structure allowed for half of the performance to be dedicated to KhoiSan rituals while the other half would be devoted to active public engagement.

These meetings were extremely important but at the same time were exhausting. There were moments of tough negotiation concerning the ratio of KhoiSan ritual to international art performance. Ernst Struwig's participation was critical at this stage because, speaking both Afrikaans and Italian, he was an excellent mediator.

For our work group, basing the project on universal values that are part of cultural heritage was seen as the best route to follow for reconnecting, ideally, the present and the past: a past in which the KhoiSan and Indigenous peoples in general practised a sustainable way of life insofar as the resources put at our disposal by nature are concerned. The approach is rooted in the concept of "custodianship" rather than "ownership" of the earth and its resources in the face of a present characterized by the urgent imperative to change the current capitalist and imperialist economic model that has shown itself to be a failure. A possible path towards changing the status quo is, as demonstrated by this project, the model of Indigenous peoples. For this reason, it was decided to hold the art performance in front of the fish traps. During the meetings with the Chiefs, it was decided that the programme should be split over two days. The first day, 5 May, was reserved for the work group and was necessary to prepare the site spiritually through cleansing ceremonies and slaughtering and for positioning and building the key elements for the events: two huts, fire pits, and the wood stack. These had to be positioned in conversation with the fish traps (see image 22). The second day, 6 May, was dedicated to the performance and involved the public.

The performance of 6 May was seen as an opportunity for encounter and exchange between the Indigenous KhoiSan culture and the public in which each person was required to actively participate to create a sense of cohesion around the theme and the place. For this reason we discussed the various phases of the performance in detail to make sure the development of an audience/performer dynamic did not develop and to ensure that everyone would be active participants in a unique experience. This objective was only partly accomplished.

It was essential to visit the site where the performance would be taking place with the work group beforehand in order to organize the project design. The visit was particularly meaningful and emotive (see the testimony of the Chiefs) because something extraordinary happened. We were standing in a circle discussing the design and planning the position of the huts, the sacred fire and other elements necessary for the ritual by drawing them in the sand when, suddenly, one of the Chiefs, without saying a word,



**Fig. 28-32**  
Phases of the preparation of the site by the KhoiSan Chiefs and their community members. 05/05/2017

touched me on the arm and pointed to the sky. There was a cloud that looked unmistakably like the African continent (see image 19). This was a very special moment for everyone involved and a sure sign that we were headed in the right direction.

Once we had defined the various phases of the project in detail, we proceeded by issuing an open call with the programme and the crucial phases of the ritual that external participants would have to follow. We considered it important to proceed in this way because the site was quite large and we wanted to ensure that those present would not be disoriented.

Putting the programme together was greatly helped by the coordination and support provided by the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality and the representatives of the various sectors under the command of Roelf Basson; of the Department of Sport, Recreation, Arts and Culture, and Nico Smith of Pine Lodge. The support of the Municipality was of key importance because the Chiefs had expressly requested permission to spend the night of 5 May at Cape Recife, to make a fire, to ritually slaughter two sheep in order to cook them in the traditional fashion along with some game meat (kudu and springbok) which Chief Wallace Williams generously made time to hunt and donated for the occasion, and to meet there after the conclusion of the two day event to have a meal together. These requests were generously accommodated and further support was offered in the form of the use of public infrastructure required for the success of the event.

Once all the phases of the programme and the call were finished, Chief Maleiba and Chief Margaret Coetzee were invited to present it to a class of my students enrolled in the course, Representation of Architecture and History of Art and Architecture 3, at the Department of Architecture.



The project was seen as an occasion to expose the younger generation to the values associated with Indigenous culture and to a site, very close to the university campus, of great cultural heritage importance. From this point students became active participants in the project. It was decided that they would act as “welcomers” at the entrance on 6 May, the day open to the public, explaining to them the ethical spirit behind the project. Their participation would help solve the problem of crowd management at the site with each student acting as a guide for a group of 10 people.

The call was distributed a month before the performance in the form of an invitation and was made into a poster positioned at the entrance of the Cape Recife Nature Reserve on 06 May. The call detailed the ethical considerations and noted that filming and photography were prohibited. This was of fundamental importance in creating an atmosphere of complete peace and to immerse the participants in a shared, spiritual experience.

### **Phase 3: The performance and the production of the outputs of the project May 2017 to September 2017.**

From the morning of 05 May at Cape Recife, Chiefs and members of the KhoiSan community began preparing the site and building the two reed huts which would house us that night. This phase represented a unique learning opportunity for some members of the community because the structures are only built by the KhoiSan for the special occasions and celebrations like !NAU. When the two structures were finished, the first fire was lit in the middle of the hut and the group came together at the end of the day to prepare for the next day.

*next page*  
**Fig. 33-34**  
The KhoiSan Chiefs and Headpersons performing ancient rituals, referred to as !NAU: the cleansing ceremony of the site and of the people with the kudu horn. Early morning of 06/05/2017

At the same time, at an adjoining site put at our disposal by the Municipality, KhoiSan women began preparing the traditional dishes that would be served to all the participants following the public ritual on 6 May.

Filming and photographic documentation also began on the first day. This was a delicate issue because it was important to prevent the cameras and video cameras from becoming a distraction for the participants and in turn risking compromising the event by turning it into a sort of “spectacle” as opposed to an immersive communal experience.

Very early on the morning of 6 May, the students involved in the project arrived and we completed the final preparations before the “public” phase of the performance began. At 8:30 a.m. two buses, carrying members of the KhoiSan community from the north of Port Elizabeth – Bethelsdorp and Uitenhage – and shuttles from the main parking at main entrance to the nature reserve arrived. The arrival time was coordinated with the tide. In addition to the students and the members of the KhoiSan community, the event was attended by many members of the Nelson Mandela University, artists, and members of the public.

A brief note is necessary regarding the execution of the rituals in which a number of people not forming part of the KhoiSan community participated. What became clear was the Chiefs were carefully trying to ensure that the “correct” movements and gestures were made in perfect unison. The fragility of the moment was palpable, mirroring the delicate relationship of these people with their past and traditions. These gestures are inscribed in their DNA having been repeated for centuries and are at the same time waiting to be reactivated, once again revealed through a “pact” with time, an accord with tradition. Perhaps, on that occasion, through the strong wind that was blowing on Cape Recife, those ancient words reawakened: words spoken by parents and grandparents, silently so as not to be overheard<sup>1</sup>, but firm in the knowledge, the hope perhaps, that one day they would take on new meaning. They are words that speak of rituals, ceremonies and customs. In this way, their uttering at Cape Recife was like seeing a child discovering her own hands, for the first time. Her hands were always there but, in that specific moment, she becomes fully conscious of them.

When the performance was finished, we moved to another location, called Happy Valley, put at our disposal by the Municipality where two long tables had been set up so that all the participants could share a meal.

The next phase concerned the processing and production of the outputs: editing the footage with Marco Fabbri and selecting the photographs to be used in the exhibition with Glenn Meyer. After this initial preparatory phase, dialogue was once again opened with the representatives of the KhoiSan to get their input, impressions, and suggestions and to secure their approval.

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<sup>1</sup>The Indigenous peoples were prevented by the colonizers from speaking their language and expressing their culture.





#### Phase 4: Dissemination of the outputs after September 2017

From September 2017, the exhibitions and screenings began at the local and international level. For our work group the dissemination of the outputs took on the decisive role of further spreading the message of the Indigenous peoples with the community and with the younger generation.

The first exhibition was held in Port Elizabeth at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Art Museum for Heritage month with the support of Director Emma O'Brien and the Director of the Department of Arts, Culture, Heritage and Libraries Veliswa Gwintsa. Emma O'Brien had suggested during the organizing stage for this exhibition that we entitled our work "The Spirit of Water" in order to differentiate it from the international iteration "The Way of Water". The suggestion was received positively because it seemed to better represent the nature of our project.

The organization of the Port Elizabeth exhibition also presented an opportunity to collaborate with the Bayworld Museum which gave us permission to include, never before exhibited, precolonial KhoiSan artefacts related to Indigenous life along the coast.

Part of the exhibition was dedicated to selected videos and photos from the international artists involved in the project in order to give the visitors a clear sense of the global context of project. The other exhibition held in South Africa was at Graaff-Reinet thanks to the support of artist Cleone Cull, who was in attendance at the ritual and generously put us in contact with Anziske Kayster, Head of the Graaff-Reinet Museum.

For the KhoiSan Chiefs the two exhibitions were occasions for further sharing their culture. At the openings of the exhibitions, rituals for purification and success were performed along with traditional dances.



next page  
Fig. 35  
The KhoiSan Chiefs returning to the  
huts after the cleansing ceremony







**Fig. 36**  
Paramount Chief Steenkamp  
positioning the wooden stick on the  
fire, 06/05/2016



**Fig. 37**  
The participants around the fire  
repeating "we are here"

An important aspect linked to the dissemination of the project's pedagogical imperative were school visits to the exhibitions guided by the Chiefs and largely organized by Chief Gert Cornelius Steenkamp in Port Elizabeth and Chief Daantjie Japhta in Graaff-Reinet.

These two exhibitions were followed by screenings of short films and conferences in South Africa and abroad. Our work was given important recognition nationally (see outcomes list in the appendix).

During the execution phases of the project, thanks to Prof. Maarten de Wit (AEON), a group of researchers from the University of Southampton visiting Port Elizabeth interviewed me at the fish traps and the interview became part of a MOOC offered by that University which contributed to international academic awareness about our work.



### Phase 5: Site survey of the fish traps January to June 2018.

In 2018, the project along the Eastern Cape coast continued with greater involvement from my students at the School of Architecture in the form of a scientific survey of the fish traps utilising drones and theodolites. From the beginning of the research project, thanks to the collaboration of my colleagues and friends from the School of Architecture, Lucy and Hansie Vosloo, we were able to identify other sites with fish traps besides Cape Recife, which we added as case studies. These sites are at Oyster Bay and Klipt Drift.

The survey was organised as a year-long exercise for History of Architecture and Art 3 students in collaboration with Donald Flint, senior lecturer of Topography and Geometry at the School of Architecture, Prof. Phillips Russell from the Mechanical Engineering School, in co-ordination with the KhoiSan Chiefs and local guides.

The exercise had the objective of increasing student awareness and knowledge of South African heritage and precolonial history as well as building a better understanding of Indigenous culture and sustainable principles as applied to the ocean. This aided the development of the students' ability to employ different disciplines as research instruments.



**Fig. 38**  
Chief Maleiba calling the names of the KhoiSan heroes and ancestors in the direction of the cardinal points



Fig. 39-40  
Different moments of the ceremonies



Fig. 41  
Chief Maleiba at the end of the art  
performance-rituals

The scientific site survey produced a clear indication of the state and condition of the fish traps and was a unique experience because nothing like this had been done before. We hope that our efforts will contribute towards a better understanding of these traps.

The survey was conducted on the ground with theodolites and the results were cross-referenced with the data from aerial drone surveys. Donald Flint developed a specific technique to ensure that the cross-referencing on the data was done in a scientific manner using white paper plates and cups positioned at surveyed points on the ground. When all the points were marked by the paper plates which were placed and held in place with sand or pebbles on the exact points surveyed by the students with theodolites, the drone took a series of aerial shots which were subsequently merged using software. In this way it was possible to clearly see and measure the dimensions of the traps using the software. Following this, the students diagrammed the traps surveyed at the Cape Recife and Oyster Bay sites using CAD software. The presentation of the diagrams representing the structures immediately led to discussions in class about how these sites might have been used, their interaction with the surrounding territory and the geometry of the structures.

The Klip Drift site was surveyed by drone only and was subsequently diagrammed by one of the students, Joslin Nel, who continued to participate in the research above and beyond the requirements of her history course.

### **Phase 6: From July 2019**

Following the production of the representations of the traps, we began processing and interpreting the data with a particular focus on investigating how the site may have interacted with the surrounding territory. This phase of our research was supported by the close study of analogous sites located in the Western Cape in South Africa; Brewarrina, the Gulf of Carpentaria and the Wellesley Islands in Australia; Mull in Scotland, and the Peghu Archipelago in Taiwan.

## The opinions of the KhoiSan chiefs: impact of the project

### Chief Margaret Coetzee, Inqua

CMC: «For me it was a privilege to be part of our KhoiKhoi community and leadership during the Way of the Water Project at Cape Recife along the Nelson Mandela Bay coastline».

«My personal experience was the reconnection of our people to our ancestral spiritual practices during the sacred ceremony rituals at the ancient fish traps at Cape Recife. It was an experience of cleansing and reconnection to the water which is so significant to the lives of our Indigenous KhoiKhoi peoples».

«Various ritual actions such as the procession by the chiefs, raising of the horn with burning incense was a way of honoring our KhoiKhoi ancestors and those forefathers who built the fish traps. «The presence of the sacred fire and the blowing of the horn was a symbolic drawing together of our people including those Indigenous peoples from the four corners of the world».

«The participation of the broader community was very important and valuable. It has highlighted the interconnectedness between the ocean and humanity as a whole. Important emphasis was placed on the responsibility of humanity to use all the resources of mother earth in a responsible manner, to ensure the needs and well-being of the future generations».

### Chief William Human, Korana

CWH: «My personal experience was one of disapproval at first because it was a ritual beyond our boundaries which we had to perform. I felt a little used there for other people's gains. I felt unhappy at first but seeing the whole picture, I really understand why you did it. I was born in South Africa. South Africa is my land. So, I'm KhoiSan. Yes Magda, that's how I felt».

MM: «I would like to understand this better to be able to address this in future».

CWH: «But Magda I wasn't in those meetings you see. I was maybe in the last meeting, Chief Maleiba and Chief Margaret were there. And they actually led the process. As you could see there at the beach, they were also in control there».

«I was a mere follower there. So, that's why I felt the way I did. And then there is another point that I want to raise. I'm glad that I met a guy like Ernst. Ernst was a very good guy, a pity he passed away now, but he and I smoked together. And I'm still smoking strong » (laughing).

«I think The Spirit of Water was worthwhile. I think the world now knows about the existence of the KhoiSan here. It's for them to love us, to assist us in our struggle with South African Government. Anyhow, the Bill has been passed and signed by the President, but it has not been implemented. And we are still sitting in the same position. So, I think that film of yours, of ours, is a great picture of our needs in Southern Africa».

«I would just want to say, I would take part in another act like this in the future because it was worthwhile. And we get a worldwide name for our studies and struggles here in South Africa and I think it's a marvellous idea, if you can roll out this map more frequently worldwide to other researchers worldwide. Then I think the KhoiSan would participate more eagerly in the research».

### Chief Daantjie Japhta, Inqua Camdeboo

CDJ: «I was very proud and glad to be part of The Spirit of Water activity. It showed unity between the different KhoiKhoi groupings in Nelson Mandela Metro. And also, when you took it to



**Fig. 42**  
Chief Jean Burgess, Ghonaqua



**Fig. 43**  
Chief Thomas Augustus, Gamtobaqua



**Fig. 44**  
Chief Margaret Coetzee, Inqua

Graaff-Reinet, working together with the other groups and communities there. I mean the meetings that were held, the interaction with nature conservation and the people from the university and everybody that was involved».

«During the time I had the opportunity to meet a man that I didn't know, it was Professor Maarten De Wit. And during that time, you could see how the KhoiKhoi Chiefs and Headpersons and the normal foot soldiers, were all excited to make this a success. And everybody was attending the meetings and giving all and everything to make this a success from the very first meeting».

«In the past, we only heard about the fish traps on the coastline of South Africa that were built by our ancestors, but during that time I had a real opportunity to see it for myself. And one could imagine the intelligence that our people had to build the fish traps to enable them to catch fish and have food or fish on the table. It was quite amazing to realise their intelligence and how they used science and the scientific issues around them to do these things. In my opinion, they weren't taught these things by anybody, but it was built into them by their maker and maybe their ancestors taught them how you can go about fishing».

«I also had an experience besides this Way of the Water. I was once visiting people from the San and they want to be called Boesman (Bushmen) and not San. There, where the Great River runs. And while we were there, one maybe came from the river because he had fish in his one hand. And I asked him, where have you come from? He said, "I caught this fish down in the river". How did you

do it? You don't have fishing tackle. He said he did it the ancient way by using a harpoon. They throw it through the fishes' body and catch it in that manner. So, you could see this was an example of how the Khoi and the San could survive and it really left a long-lasting impression on me».

«During this Spirit of the Water, we used the water ritual to connect us with the water and with the ocean and with the fish traps, and with our ancestors, and it was really great to experience this. And even you Magda, on the first site visit, when we gathered there on the beach, while we were busy discussing where to build the kraal to do the !NAU of the water... the almighty and the power that surrounds us created above us a cloud in the form of Africa and that showed that the almighty was with us and he agreed that we are the First People of Africa».

«I think it stands out in our memory and it will last and stay there for as long as we live. And we have been able to make a video. And our children and children's children will also be able to see what was done in that specific year and how we as the Khoi and the San are connected with nature and especially how we are connected with the water. Even when we took the project to the Nelson Mandela Museum and Graaff-Reinet the people were also impressed and they were also glad to see what the ancestors did and how they built fish traps to sustain their living».

«As the KhoiSan community, we look forward to more of these activities in the future so that we can play our part to allow and leave a legacy for our children and our children's children. So, we as the





**Fig. 45**  
Chief Wallace Williams,  
Oeswana



**Fig. 46**  
Paramount Chief Gert Cornelius  
Steenkamp, Oeswana

KhoiSan community thank you Dr. Magda Minguzzi for being the activist to make it possible».

After *The Spirit of Water* more people were interested, coming to realise their KhoiSan heritage. Like in Graaf-Reinet a new dance group was formed and they performed that night the Real Dance. Lot of other functions came to the fore and people participated and people were so excited... Greater awareness took place in the KhoiSan community so that they could participate in, and they could identify themselves with all the things that was taking place». «And I think there was a more positive movement between the community and the university. I think we should keep the momentum and not stop it».

#### **Chief Xam ≠ Gaob Maleiba, Damasonqua**

CGM: «The Way of the Water project of which we were part served as an illustration of the dependency of man on nature, and their sensitive interrelationship. The still visible traces of fish traps that were seen is a testimony to the ingenuity of our ancient ancestors. They manipulated the environment for their own survival.

They naturally possessed the engineering skills to build the fish traps from which they could harvest the resource of fish in a sustainable way, and without polluting the ocean».

«Their knowledge of the ocean, the seasons, the tides and the influence of the moon must undoubtedly have been phenomenal. Through the project our people could observe and appreciate all these things. For the community and especially the KhoiSan, the fish traps and the shell middens are an unmistakable footprint of their ancient existence as the first people along our coast and especially the inter tidal zone».

«We have learnt that the ocean is a resource of immense undiscovered possibilities, and that it should be protected, respected and appreciated as a sustainer of life itself».

#### **Chief Deon Spandiel, Griekwa**

CDS: «I would like to thank you Doctor Magda, for this opportunity that you gave us or gave me and my tribe. I am Chief Deon Spandiel, from the Griekwa tribe. I'm the leader here in the Nelson Mandela Metro».



**Fig. 47**  
Chief Xam ̄ Gaob Maleiba,  
Damasonqua



**Fig.48**  
Chief Michael Williams,  
Gamtoursers/Gamktwa



**Fig. 49**  
Chief William Human,  
Korana



**Fig. 50**  
Chief Brato Malgas,  
Inqua



**Fig. 51**  
Chief Deon Spandiel,  
Griekwa



**Fig. 52**  
Chief Daantjie Japhta,  
Inqua Camdeboo

«First of all, Doctor Magda I must give especially to Chief Maleiba and Chief Human the honour. Give them praise for what they've done in my life as a Khoi. They taught me the way of the Khoi and also where I come from. I am grateful to them first of all».

«Secondly, it was a tremendous feeling being part of the Way of the Water ritual. I learned a lot during that time because I had little knowledge about the Khoi. Although, I was tested, and I found out my DNA is KhoiSan. That is why when that ritual took place, I felt I must be part of that ritual. I gave my everything for that ritual then I felt, now I am Khoi. Because I went through the rituals I am not just a Khoi with words, but in my being, in my blood I feel I am Khoi».

«It was a tremendous feeling. It was an experience, an adventure because it was the first time that we did that, because I'm still young and I had to learn a lot».

«We actually went through a transformation. Our whole being has been transformed becoming a real Khoi. And like I said not just in words, but in our whole system, our blood».

**MM:** «Do you think that that experience also opened other opportunities positive or negative».

**CDS:** «I took some of my friends and my family to that ritual. And they were astounded when they saw how the Khoi operated, how important the water was for our culture. And after that, all they could talk about was the Khoi and our culture and they don't want hear about the term Coloured anymore because they felt that they are Khoi. And that inspired me, to go into our communities, to my other family members and friends and talk about the Khoi culture and tell them that they are Khoi».

«We are and not just Coloureds with no culture. Because a Coloured doesn't have a culture; a Coloured is just something that the White man called us because of our skin colour. It's dark, its brown, its golden brown, its light in complexion, its dark in complexion. Even our hair string, its curly, its short, its long. All that kind of stuff is why the Whites gave us that name of Coloured because they couldn't figure out if this a Black man, a White man or Khoi because we had so many skin colours or pigments that changed over

the years but we can assure at least our people that we are Khoi».

«You see, and that is what happened here when we left Cape Recife and came home. And we could with joy in our heart talk about the Khoi and the San and that was very, very important for me. We don't have to be shy anymore and say who we are and what we are».

«Especially in places like Graaf-Reinet: all those small places. They say they are Khoi but never did the rituals so that is why it was so important to go there so that the people can also own their being as Khoi and the people couldn't stop talking about the Khoi and the San. Even the here in Port Elizabeth».

«You know we were so colonised, not the whole Khoi, but a lot of them, tried to practice the customs, our Khoi customs and culture but even the Griekwa tribe was so colonised they actually forgot about their past and practiced a westernised culture. They left their own culture behind and tried to do things the westernised way. But after the Way of the Water when I got home, I did some more research and called my leaders. And I said to them that I'm going to practice our customs, our culture, to bring it back to our tribe. I'm gonna bring it back and I'm gonna practice that and they gave me actually their blessing».

### **Paramount Chief Gert Cornelius Steenkamp, Oeswana**

**PGCS:** «It was not easy to take us into that journey».

«During the meetings, there was a lot of talk and sometimes talk was on the table, favourable and not favourable, but there was no winner and no loser. There is always a compromise and based on the compromise, it brings us where we had better understanding of each other and better understanding for what was in front of us».

«What was very difficult for me, during the first day of the rituals at Cape Recife, was the fact that the weather had become so dramatic. I could not understand what the main reason was. I remember very well that experience of sleeping in the place, in front of the sea. I'm still wondering in my mind the reason that the sea became so rough. Nature is a very, very difficult things in life but it teaches you a lot of lessons. And to me, that weather was binding us. I remember there were some of us who were standing that evening

of that day... It didn't look to us with a genuine spirit. There was a feeling of disrespect and that weather during that night taught me that no, you need each other... forget about who is more senior. We have to work hand and glove to make a success of life».

«The next morning the weather condition was opposite. Where we could stand, talk, listen and the programme could continue. Eye opening... You must have respect for Mother Nature, respect, appreciate and look after Nature».

«There was a holy fire and you know that fire has a very magnificent cultural value. For example, fire brings us to those parts in our lives where things went wrong. You must not remain on the wrong path but have to move forward. You have to burn it. And that fire is telling me that the world needs each other. No one can be an island by yourself».

«During the site visit there was also a cloud in form of Africa. Now I'm asking myself, how is it possible that the sky took the form of Africa in front of us. And then I said "we are the real son and daughters of Africa". And the fact that your passion and excitement about the programme boiled over onto us made it a success».

«There was an old man, I don't know if you can remember, who was very, very sick that day, when we did the first site visit. And I was worried about this old man (photo p.48). Two days before the event he passed on. That was one of the deep secrets of how people force themselves that extra mile, to be part of something, and that extra mile is taking a lot of energy».

«Many of us were sure where they belong, but there were still those who were still thinking "am I a real Khoi, am I a real San?". When you listen to what they said, after the experience in Cape Recife, they told me that they'd once again realized that they are First Nation».

«I also remember Prof. De Wit. He was tired after the ritual. He came straight to me and asked me: "Where is the next generation? There's only leadership, but no young people involved". And since that time, I said to myself that we need to bring young people with us so that they can learn. Although sometimes young people are not willing to learn».



**Fig. 53**  
The springboks hunted by Chief Wallace Williams for the ceremony

«Every time when I look at that video I notice something new. Sometimes I have the correct word to describe it and sometimes I don't have the correct words. It makes me speechless what every time comes up in its own secret form, own secret ways. And then I said for myself, I cannot explain everything but the experience I have to keep it for myself and work it for myself out».

«That is my honest and my open opinion».

«There was something that we could learn, and there was also something that you have to keep it for yourself. The happiness still boils deep down in me. It is just indescribable words of happiness. Yeah».

#### **Chief Wallace Williams, Oeswana**

CWW: «Starting out Magda when I met you and Ernst it was nice and the more you talked about the project, the more I got interested in it. And I felt that I needed to make time and make myself available to make this project successful. And when the request was granted that we could shoot the Springbok, I felt it would only be proper that we eat the wild animal; the way they did many,

many years ago. And the night that we shot him we prayed and said thank you for the animals for giving their lives and we brought it down to Cape Recife».

«I remember the day of the actual ceremony. I felt very calm, there was sort of a huge calmness that came over me. And then, when we were at the waterfront as we progressed through the ceremony, when the fire was made, I remember Chief Maleiba calling out the different names of the Chiefs that were present before us, our ancestors. Even some of them they were not from this region, but I could feel the spirits of our people and at that time... I didn't want anybody to notice, I'm not a person who cries, it's not in me you understand. I just felt... My tears just started flowing from that point. And it was a combination of sadness, of what the people went through. And it was also a combination of joy. There was no regret or hatred feelings, you know».

«And I could feel in my spirit hundreds of years ago, our people were walking here, they were living here, they were fishing here and that is where the tears came from. I could see...I couldn't see



**Fig. 54**  
Graaff-Reinet, Old Library Museum, 22  
February 2018. Opening of the exhibition "The  
Spirit of Water": traditional dances performed  
by a local group



**Fig 55**  
Graaff-Reinet, Old Library Museum: KhoiSan  
community members attending the screening of  
the short film "The Spirit of Water", Nelson Mandela  
University production, part of the exhibition

the Khoi children's faces, but I could see them playing, screaming to one another and just having a wonderful time at the beach. And for me, to be connected to their spirits at that time, gave me that emotional feeling. And I think we... Yes, we are KhoiSan and I'm not speaking on anybody's behalf. I'm speaking on my behalf, my upbringing, and my thoughts».

«Everything is connected. You know, I connected with spirits at that point. If you look at the video you will see it, because I came right after a while. I think after I threw that stick in the fire it started leaving me and then I started to mingle with the people».

«If you look at the Biblical story creation on which I was brought up... In the first three verses it says that the spirit of God hovered over the waters. So, we are connected to the water; our spirits are connected to the water. Our spirits are connected to God, and people will say yeah, it's a coincidence. And I believe God also speaks to us as human being, probably through numbers as well. And I didn't try to find meaning in it. You know, the things just

came to me. If you look at the date... We had the Spirit of Water on the fifth and sixth of May. Now five represents a number of grace, Biblically So, by God's grace my ancestors, myself, my family we were put here. That was on the fifth, the Friday. The six represents man, you know. We are man, we've been put here by God. We were his last creation. He created man and he created woman, that was his last creation. So, we were put on this earth to look after this earth and to look after the oceans, and not to go overfish the oceans and desecrate what was left by our forebears here, you know, and just do what we want. Even in the year 2017 when the rituals happened. There's significance in it because the number seven... Everything that weekend has got a connection and has got a meaning. The number seven is perfection from 2017. The number one is God, you understand. The zero in it is the wholeness, you see, and two is man and woman, a family, is unity. We should live in unity. You know we should protect one another. We should protect our elders. We should protect our women. We should



**Fig. 56**  
Graaff-Reinet, Old Library Museum, 22 February 2018, opening of the exhibition:  
cleansing ceremony performed by the KhoiSan Chiefs

protect our sea, we should protect the resources that are in the sea. The number two, the unity, there were five tribes there, but that whole weekend we were there. There were absolutely no mishaps, we lived in unity. We ate in unity. We had a storm, but we still stuck there, we still slept there. Even in adverse conditions, we stayed. We overcame that, we still worked together. So, if we want to, we can work together. We just need to find our way and put certain things that don't carry the same meaning, that don't carry any goodness in them aside and work forward».

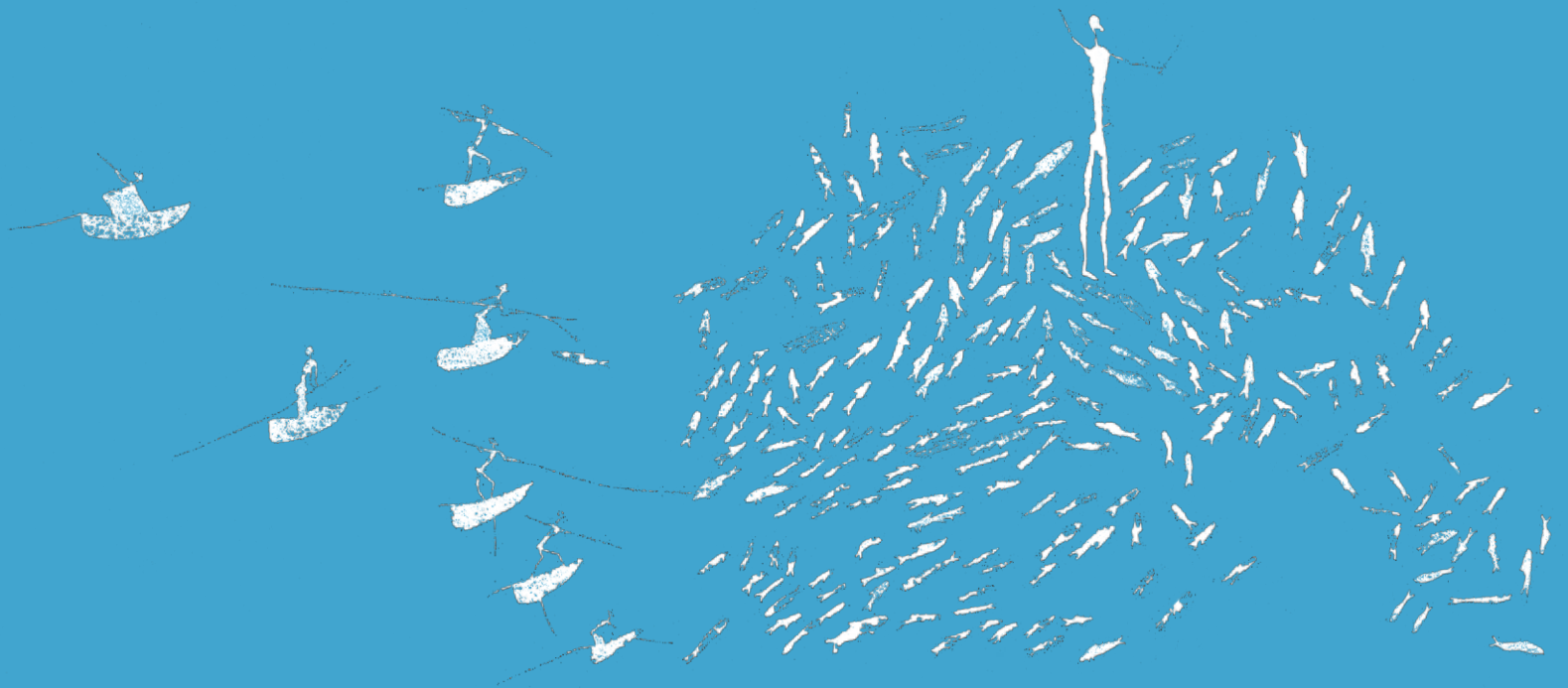
«So, yeah people will say we had it on the fifth and the sixth of May 2017, but for me in that God is telling me the date that was picked by whoever, there was a reason for it. We've been given this ocean, we've been given this land, but what are we doing to sustain this? To sustain our culture, to sustain the oceans and to sustain our livelihood?»

MM: «Do you think that this project had an impact on the community?»

CWW: «It made people who didn't know realise that there are actually still Khoi and San people around. And I invited Xhosa people, and I invited white people, and some people call them Coloured. I invited them too and they said it made an impact on them to see us. How we respect the land. How we respect the ocean. How we respect one another. And just to see that there is actually a culture within the people. And it is not just people that is roaming around without a culture, without a history, without actually knowing who are their forebears».



## Part Three







Hermanus

Still Bay

Cape St Francis

Cape Recife

0 10 100km

### Introduction and historical background

Andre' Corboz (1983) notes that land can be seen as a palimpsest because traces of past processes are left behind with the passage of time. While the land changes owing to natural processes like the erosion of beaches, the creation of valleys by flowing rivers, and earthquakes, it is also modified by human interventions like buildings and infrastructure. The inhabitants of a territory constantly erase and modify the appearance of the land. These interventions turn the land into a man-made artefact to an extent. The process starts to resemble some sort of collective project between the topography and the peoples inhabiting its folds.

In our case we can clearly see that the land in South Africa was originally shaped by the Indigenous populations and, in the Eastern Cape, the fish traps are the most prominent precolonial examples of infrastructure. They were planned and built along the coast, positioned in highly strategic points in the intertidal<sup>1</sup> zone with the specific objective of meeting the needs of the community in a systematic and continuous fashion. As explained by John Parkington (2006):

Coastlines are the most obvious, the most dramatic and in many ways, the most productive of ecotones, regions lying at the interface between major ecosystems. Terrestrial marine ecosystems are juxtaposed over an extraordinary long ribbon of shoreline, providing a unique set of opportunities for early people to exploit. (...) In that strip of land that is regularly washed by tides lives a set of intertidal organisms of great nutritional potential, regularly exposed by low tide and well within reach of anyone prepared to wade or swim in shallow water.

However, the communities that lived along the coast mostly sustained themselves on fish which they were able to catch using traps. This represented a great forward leap because sourcing food was no longer reliant on “chance” but, as explained by Parkington above, on systematic and regular production. A fish trap is defined by Memmott, Robins, Stock (2008:75) as a “constructed rock wall enclosing a space for the purposes of trapping fish and other marine animals through the action of tidal movement. The enclosed space can be termed the ‘pen’. A ‘fish-trap site’ was then defined as a cluster of fish-traps and/or associated rock wall features in close proximity”.

As we will see below, some of the traps were not only designed to capture fish but, thanks to the constant level of water they could contain, became ideal pools for aquaculture. This technique was used

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**Fig. 57**

Map of Southern Africa: in red the sites with fish traps and the dotted rectangle indicates the area of study of this research

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<sup>1</sup> The coastal intertidal zone is the area between the low and high tide zones.



**Fig. 58-59-60**  
Photos of the three case studies,  
starting from left: Klip Drift, Oyster  
Bay, Cape Recife

in many other parts of the world. In Egypt a bas relief in the tomb of Aktihetep dating to 2500 BCE figures a man fishing for tilapia in a pond while in Italy, Phoenicians, Etruscans and Romans used purpose built tanks on the coast of Latium, on the islands of the Tuscan archipelago (Isola del Giglio and Ponza) and on the coast of Monte Conero.

Archival material from the time when the first European explorers reached what would become South Africa describe the customs and habits of the Indigenous peoples as well as precolonial fishing techniques. They describe how fish, which was often dried, was an essential food source for the Indigenous population. Thom (1954:11,83) mentions a document from 1657 indicating that the Dutch bought ten oxen loads of white Steenbras (type of fish) “they (the local indigenes) had killed ... with assegais in a lake (or vlei at the Bay False)”; and in 1660, the Dutch East India Company’s Ensign Jan Danckaert was exploring the Olifants River valley and he sent a letter to Van Riebeeck in Cape Town, informing him that they had come across a poverty stricken band of tiny people, who helped them cross the first range of mountains and who gave them some dried fish and honey.

The diaries of the explorers indicate fishing techniques which do not imply the use of permanent structures. For example, in 1652 in Van Riebeeck’s journal, fishing methods in the Cape using rod and line are mentioned: “fishermen (...) who subsist by fishing, without boats, from the rocks with little fishing lines. On this they are very keen” (Thom 1954:11, 83).

Peter Kolb, in 1731, writes:

They use the spear or pointed rod only in creeks and rivers. They fish both in the sea and in rivers. Many of them are fishermen by profession and maintain their families by the trade. (...) They are likewise very expert at taking of fish by groping. This they do in brooks, and on the tops of rocks in the sea; upon which rocks (lying near the shore) when the tide falls, remain several sorts of small fish in several holes and natural basins. (...) The Hottentots often lay lines, from those rocks in the sea. The lines are made of the guts or sinews of beef; the hooks are European, and the baits generally mussels. Where the Hottentots, upon these rocks, discover a valuable fish in the sea they toss one of those lines towards him; and, to allure him to a bait they fall a whistling. Whatever the reader may think of whistling to fish, it has a very good effect if the noise of the sea breaking against the rocks drowns the whistling, the Hottentots, set up a hideous roaring and shouting and this has a very good effect too.

Thomson (1913:34) describes the KhoiSan as fishermen who exploited both the shore and rivers with different fishing equipment. “They take fish by angle, the net, the spear or pointed rod”.

References to stone fishing structures are made by General Janssens and Schapera. The former describes the Bosjemans living in the Orange River area:

(...) Nor are those people less subtle in ensnaring fish, for the sake of which they haunt very much the neighbourhood of the larger river. They make a sort of pointed baskets of the twigs of trees, which have very much the form of our eel-baskets, and are used in the same manner; or if they expect a swelling of the stream, while the water still low, they make upon the strand a large cistern, as it were, enclosed by a wall of stone, which serve as a reservoir, where, if fortune be favourable, a quantity of fish are deposited at the subsiding of the water (Lichtenstein 1812:44).

Schapera (1930:138) in his famous *The KhoiSan Peoples of South Africa* also describes fishing techniques.

Fishing (...) among the tribes living in the Okavango swamps it is even more important as a mode of subsistence than hunting. It is also the work of the man. Among the Cape Bushmen, especially those living along the banks of the Orange River, the principal method employed lay in the use of funnel-shaped traps of closely woven reeds, about 3 feet long and 18 inches to 2 feet wide, narrowing towards the mouth. These traps were stretched across the stream in a shallow part, and while some men stood waiting behind them, others waded upstream from a point below and drove the fish before them to the reed traps, where they were then caught and thrown on shore.

He goes on to describe that in the Okavango basin

Sometimes the fish in the lakes and rivers are speared from flat-bottomed boats (...). Sometimes again, small stone dams are built from each bank (of rivers) so as to run out into the river in a slanting direction, leaving a narrow opening in which is placed the reed trap. The fish are either swept into these traps by the force of the current or are driven in by the "Bushmen" themselves. Or again (...) the stone dams are built straight across the beds of the dry courses into which the river overflow at times of flood. When the flood has reached its highest level, and the water begins to sink, the retreat of the fish carried along into these courses is cut off, so that they are easily caught.

Clark (1959: 230) also refers to weirs of stones and reed fences used with basket traps by the present-day Bushman-Hottentot peoples (Smits L. G. A. 1967).

The most interesting depictions of the fish traps are precolonial pictographic representations produced by the KhoiSan themselves on the walls of caves and shelters. For example, Smits (1967:1) notes that fishing with boats or floating objects using spears were figured in: Mpongaweni-Natal (Battiss 1945), Kenegha Poort-East Griqualand (Goodwin 1949), Tsoelike River in South East Lesotho (Vinnicombe 1960). Fishing with spears in rivers is figured in representations found in: Uysberg-Ladybrand (Battiss 1945), Rampai-North Lesotho (Carter 1965). Hand lines and fishing-rods are illustrated in: Maclear District-Eastern Cape (Schoonraad 1962); baskets with barriers are seen at: Bamboo Mountain-Natal (Vinnicombe 1961), Botsabelo-Lesotho.

During the visits to the research area we too came upon a fishing scene in the Baviaans Kloof area. The image is not particularly clear but several hypotheses can be put forward particularly if compared to other pictographs (images 62, 64). The narrative is composed of two scenes. The first, below, shows two figures whose lower bodies are in the form of fish and whose upper bodies have long arms that resemble wings. These are sacred figures whom the KhoiKhoi call "Water people" or Watermeide, and which live in the water in rivers or springs. The shamans and healers are in contact with the Water People from whom they receive knowledge and specific instructions about plants with healing powers that can be collected. Local people we met while doing research in the area described how healers immerse themselves in the aquatic world guided by the Water People to select and collect herbs which are then used to heal local people. These scenes are therefore significant symbols of Indigenous spirituality which is, in general, closely tied to water as the essential element of life.




**Fig. 61**  
 Drawings entitled "The Hottentot  
 manner of fishing", in Peter Kolbe,  
 the *Present state of Cape of Good  
 Hope*

The other scene, on the upper part of the rock formation, shows similarities with fishing scenes discovered in Lesotho (KwaZulu-Natal Museum – after Vinnicombe 1976). It seems to represent a fish trap in the form of a basket made out of reeds gathered locally and woven to prevent fish from escaping. The scene shows a series of parallel lines which might represent the use of mobile barriers used to herd the fish into the main net. We can confidently say it is a net because of the pattern of crossed horizontal and vertical lines (image 64).

The scene seems to represent fishing that probably took place in rivers using a technique for catching fresh water fish.

The colour white was used which is usually associated with the spiritual dimension and links to the spirit world and, in this case, the line could symbolise the separation between the world of the Water People – with whom the healers were in contact – and that of fishing as a source of sustenance. It is worthwhile mentioning that during the site visits we were frequently told about the presence of Water People in that area and about the contradiction inherent in the practice of catching fish, which like them, are creatures of the water. This adds weight to the idea that the representation of the Water People and the fishing scene separated by a line is a sort of declaration that the two activities represent two separate spheres: the spiritual sphere concerned with healing and the material sphere concerned with sustenance.

The ocean and rivers represented, as they still do today, an essential source of sustenance for human beings and examples of stone built fish traps like the ones in our study can be found all over the world. What is fascinating is that these fish traps from all over the world are strikingly similar in design.

Stone wall fish traps can be found, among other places, in: Scotland at Ayrshire, Moray Firth, Blackwater estuary and Culross; Southern California at Coachella Valley (on the ancient lake of Cahuilla modern Salton Sea); Taiwan in Penghu; Yap-Maap island; Australia – among others – in Queensland, Gulf of Carpentaria, Brewarrina (on the Barwon River).



**Fig.62**  
Pictograph with fishing scene in Baviaanskloof

**Fig.63**  
Smits I. G. A. 1967, "Fishing-scenes from Botsabelo, Lesotho", «The South African Archaeological Bulletin», n. 86, pp. 60-67

In Australia, Aboriginal people have maintained a spiritual link with their fish traps which has been passed down through the generations. The Brewarrina Aboriginal Fish Traps on the Barwon River, in New South Wales, also known as Baiame's Ngunnhu, is one such a site. Families belonging to different clans regularly visit the site to maintain their connection to the collective memory that resides there as well as continuing to use the traps to catch fish.

Bradly Hardy from the Brewarrina cultural Centre says:

I live my entire life in this river, it means everything to me (...) means everything to our people, like a spiritual contact that we have with these ponds. I like to come here every day and look at it...you know I am just working up here and live just across the river, and it's very important ye. Because they are old and our ancestors built them, and still very important to us, ye. (...) Back then it was like a shopping center, they had all the food from around here, if they did not have fish they could have kangaroo, and a place along the river would also provided medicine for our people. It's a main food source, you know naturally people need water to live, and naturally all people around this area love fish. (...) Always people shared the river, and the fish traps. Lot of them told me that basically none owns them, they are there for the different tribes that are coming there. We treasure these rocks, we love them, with the spirit that connect us with our land. (...) This area it means everything to me, it's like a marriage type of things, it's probably better, I love my place, and I love this, I am passionate about my people and my fish traps<sup>2</sup>.

As described by Chief Human, the situation in South Africa is, unfortunately, very different owing to the fact that the use of the fish traps was drastically interrupted by colonialism. In August 1893 the Fish

<sup>2</sup> Bradly Hardy from the Brewarrina cultural Centre online resource (15/09/2019) from "Fish traps – with Dr. Dave" by Dr. David Watson from Charles Sturt University.



Protection Act was promulgated which stated that “it shall not be lawful for any person or persons to construct or make use of any “kraal” or enclosures below high-water mark, for the purpose of snaring or catching fish of any description”(Anon 1893).

Chief Human shares his personal experience of the fish traps:

The man who showed us the fish traps was my father. My father showed us how to do it. My grandfather used to do the same. There at Skilpadrand. And they also caught huge numbers of fish, but as time went on... The fish traps have to do to with the food chain. They packed the rocks in squares or circles and as a youngster I was doing that myself, without knowing that my forefathers had done it years before me. We used to pack the rocks there in Skoenmakerskop, there by Green Valley.

The municipal by-laws affected us, and we couldn't do it any more. The policemen started patrolling these areas. And when the policeman saw these fish traps they dismantled them. So, it was an attack on our culture. It was an attack on our way of living. It's heartbreaking how our children today, because of these laws don't know how to catch fish in the old way. They only know how to catch fish the colonial way. But because of the by-laws, and because you must abide by a quota and you must have a license, they can't go to the sea any more. Some of them went with bicycles even, from the areas that we are in today to catch fish, to put food on the table for their family. But up till now they can't do it anymore.

From the Group Areas Act<sup>3</sup> that they imposed upon us, up until today, they renamed us from KhoiSan to Coloured people to take away our possessions, to take away from us the land and the benefits of the land, to take away from us the marine life in the oceans, to take away the food in the rivers, to take away the medicines and the herbs, to take away the marijuana that we used to grow here, that we believed was a medicine. They took everything away from us, by giving us the name Coloured. They changed our identity. So, that we can't claim this land that once belonged to our forefathers.

<sup>3</sup> Population Registration Act No. 30 of 1950.

↑  
**Fig.64**  
 Details of the fishing scene in  
 Baviaanskloof  
**Fig.65**  
 Example of reed traps, Bayworld  
 Museum Port Elizabeth collection



I once lived in a place called Saulsbury Park, when I was a youngster. My father and mother had a big piece of land there. We had chickens, we had pigs, we had sheep, we had goats, and we used to go hunt wild animals as well, me and my elder brothers. But then we were removed from our place, to this place in the Northern areas. Where I'm living now. Away from the sea that we used to go to.

We were not hungry. Even when my mother did not have bread. We went to the veld. We used to eat there in the veld and we come back full. But with the removal of us from that place. We came to a place where these things didn't exist. So, we were left poorer.

Every New Year this place is quiet, because all the KhoiSan are at the sea. It's the only time that they can afford to go to the sea. They impose tariffs at the seaside, which are so costly that we can't go camp there. We used to go camp there for 3 or 4 weeks but because of the high tariffs and the fact that we are now so far from the sea we cannot do this any more. The transport costs are high, that we can't go to the sea anymore. But once a year all of us that are KhoiSan and, in other respects, Coloured can all go to the sea. They believe, and the belief is still up until today that you've got to wash the old year off and start a new year, fresh and clean. They believe that they've got to go to the sea to do just that. And they will spend their last money to do just that. Even with the high tariffs. All in all, it is a very sad story that was imposed on us by the authorities of the colonial government as well as the apartheid government.<sup>4</sup>

Chief Margaret Coetzee adds:

Thinking about our people on the West coast. Most of our people depend on making their living out of the sea, through fishing. And they are in the struggle now with government, that they did not get the quotas, that they used to have. And their lifestyle has been negatively influenced, very negative, that they can't live a normal lifestyle anymore. Their children can't go to school, because there is no income any more, and they were used to living off the sea. They were economically deprived, with the result that there is more poverty.<sup>5</sup>

### The territory and the case studies

The area under study in this research project extends from the coast of Nelson Mandela Bay to that of Plettenberg Bay.

The work group initially discussed the criteria upon which the choice of the study area should be based. We took into account the fact that the current provincial borders are a product of colonial conventions and, obviously, had no bearing on the range of the various tribes present in the area in pre-colonial times. However, failing to come to a unanimous consensus among the Chiefs and owing to the vast size of the South African coast, the practical choice was to select sites easily reachable from Port Elizabeth where we were based. Furthermore we also decided that, given that the Eastern Cape has been understudied as compared to other coastal provinces, it would be very productive and useful to study this area.

We nonetheless did visit certain sites outside of the zone we had delineated because they were particularly relevant from the point of view of the archaeological remains that had been uncovered in the past by researchers and because the similar geomorphology of the areas led us to believe that

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<sup>4</sup> Chief William Human, Korana, interview with the author, 13 April 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Chief Margaret Coetzee, Inqua, interview with author, 29 March 2018.

these sites may well have a bearing on our own study. The sequence of a cape, a bay and another cape was taken into account.

Naturally, we were well aware that apart from the sites we visited, there are probably many more that have not been discovered or have deteriorated to the point of being invisible over time<sup>6</sup> or, indeed, had been destroyed by the colonial occupation and subsequent development of the coast.

Members of the KhoiSan community, expert local guides, and colleagues from NMU made it possible for us to visit several different sites located along the coast other than the fish traps (image 66), such as caves, shelters, shell middens, and burial sites. These sites are indications of intense resource use and community life that once existed in the area. The sites visited were: Nelson Bay Cave<sup>7</sup>, Matjes River Rock Shelter<sup>8</sup> – which is one of the largest shell middens in a shelter in the world (Deacon J. 2011) –, Coldstream Cave, Tzitzikamma Caves, Klip Drift Fish traps, Klasies River Caves, Oyster Bay Fish Traps, St Francis Fish Traps, Papias Fontein site, shell middens sites along the coast near Port Elizabeth, Cape Recife Fish Traps. We are aware that significant remains have been found also near the mouths of the rivers Swartkooop, Couga and Sunday.

The three fish traps included in our case study and which were scientifically surveyed by the students are located in Cape Recife Nature Reserve (Port Elizabeth), Oyster Bay and Klip Drift.

One of the most obvious things that bind these three sites is the logic of the positioning of the fish traps vis-à-vis the surrounding geography. They were in fact all positioned on the extremities of bays, or capes, where sea rocks of a height of 2 to 3 metres, running parallel to the coast to form a sort of ridge which marks a change in the water depth, act as protection from the current, tides and waves of the open sea. The intertidal zone where the traps were constructed is essentially between the shore and the ridge of high sea rocks. This arrangement of the fish traps in relation to a ridge of sea rocks is absent from the fish traps located in the Western Cape like at Cape Agulhas and Still Bay.

Our site visits made it clear that their height makes them useful landmarks making it easier to find the traps (image 68, 82). The placement of the fish traps was strategic because it meant that the structure would be unlikely to sustain damage but also because the tidal pools they created would become ecosystems favourable to small and medium fish and for invertebrate species which doubtless formed an important part of people's diet (Kemp 2006: 33, 20). They also would have acted as breeding grounds for fish as evidenced by the abundant fish larvae we observed at the site.

It should be noted that at all the sites we visited, there was abundant fresh water in the form of springs or small streams nearby. This would have provided excellent conditions for a group or community to settle there permanently.

<sup>6</sup> For example, the fish traps at St Francis Bay are not clearly visible because of their constant exposure to strong marine currents and winds.

<sup>7</sup> Western Cape.

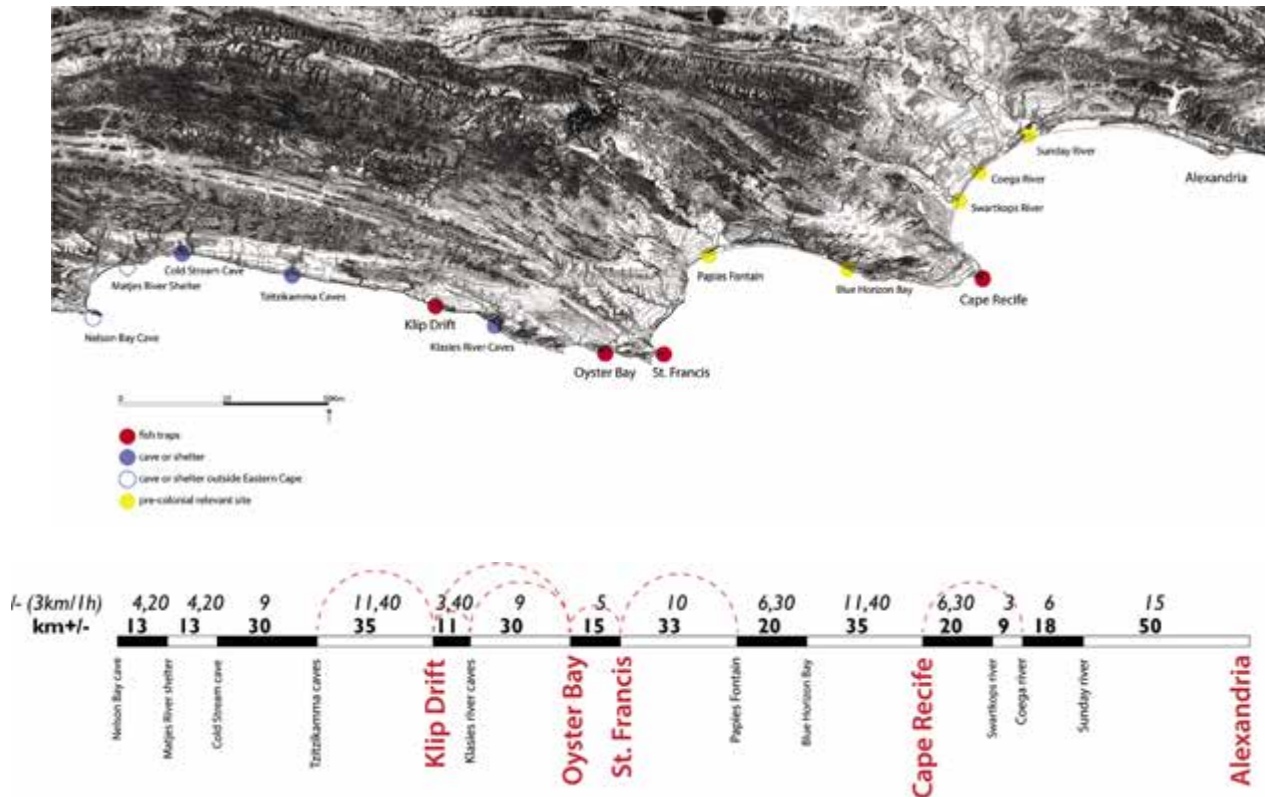
<sup>8</sup> Western Cape.

**Fig.66**

Map of the study area; sites visited with the KhoiSan peoples along the coast highlighted

**Fig.67**

The sites we visited represented linearly; the distances between them is expressed in Kilometres, and the travel time on foot



next page

**Fig.68**

Cape Recife fish traps: plan and diagrammatic section based on the site surveys. A-B-C-D-E-F-G-H are the fish traps; 1 and 2 are rocks that seem to be points of reference to find the position of the fish traps

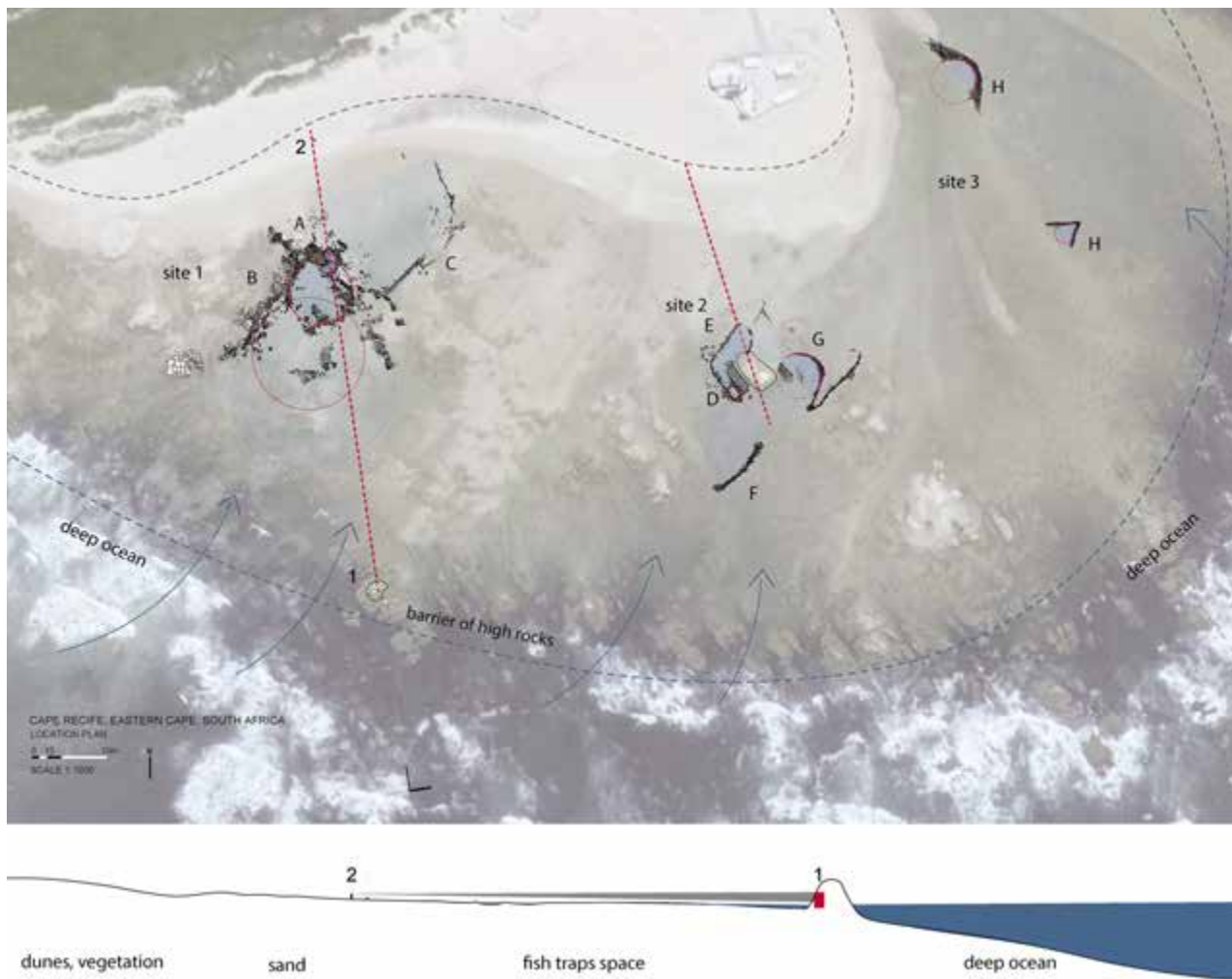
Looking at the map of the region marked with the locations of these fish trap sites, one wonders how far the communities who used the fish traps might have ranged. Could the sites located along the coast, like caves or shelters, be grouped with the various fish trap sites and might it be concluded that they were all used by the same community or communities?

Attempting to answer these questions could help us understand the dynamics that may have existed between the groups who used these fishing techniques and the territory itself.

In the figure on page 80 (image 67) we organized the sites we visited linearly along the coast in terms of the distances between them, expressed in kilometres, and the travel time on foot between them for which we used the Google Maps standard of 3km per hour, although we can assume that the KhoiSan moved faster along paths that are unknown to us. In our case, we calculated the distances following the coast.

We believe this representation could help us hypothesize the range of the communities that used the fish traps and which sites were easily reachable from each other. It is not our intention to claim that distance was the only factor determining the use of sites by a community but it certainly could have been a decisive factor in their choices. Hine-Sealy-Halkett-Hart (2010:36) claims in this regard, “The labour required to build and maintain these traps, and the ability to harvest large quantities of food would undoubtedly have tied people to particular localities and influenced settlement pattern.”

We can note that Klip Drift is very close to the Klasies River Caves complex (3:40m) and that the fish traps at Oyster Bay and Cape St. Francis were relatively close to each other (15km or 5 hours on foot). Oyster Bay is a 9 hour walk from the Klasies River Cave complex while St. Francis is 10 hours from



Papiesfontein beach where important archaeological remains have been found.

Cape Recife seems to belong to an entirely different activity range linked to Blue Horizon Bay (25km away), where shell middens have been found, and to the nearby Swartkops and Coega Rivers (6:30 and 9:30 respectively) where other important archaeological finds were made.

In general, on the regional scale we can observe a repeating pattern of sites 35km away from each other representing 12 hours of walking.

Zooming in on the sites, the different sizes and densities of the fish traps is an important characteristic worth evaluating. Oyster Bay and Cape Recife are the most complex and extensive sites among those we studied meaning it probably catered to a more numerous community.

However relative extent and density of the different fish traps could also be a function of the existence of natural rock pools in which small fish could easily have found themselves trapped at low tide and could be captured. These are, in a way, natural versions of the fish traps. In this case the needs of the community could be easily satisfied without needing to expand the structure. Cape Recife and Klip Drift are both sites nearby to which there is an extensive area of low rock formations where rock pools of this kind can form.

Another determining factor is the relative sizes of the sites and the availability of different resources in the area, such as roots and wild animals, which could have reduced a community's dependence on fish. It is also important to remember that the remains we observe represent a specific moment in the life of these fish traps and they may not always have been used at the capacity we now surmise they had. It is entirely possible that the various traps were built over a long period of time to respond to demographic growth in a certain community. Likewise, if populations decreased, some traps may have fallen out of use (Memmott, Robins, Stock 2008:75). Consequently, what we see today probably represents the final phase in the use of these structures.

In terms of the design and the type of walls used, we make recourse in these case studies to the terminology used by several authors, indicated below, because the designs of the fish traps they describe are analogous to our fish traps.

In 1983 Kelly Bunbujee, an Elder of the Lardil people, described rock-wall fish traps in the Gulf of Carpentaria in Australia. Bunbujee notes three typologies: the enclosed wall or circular shape, the race or V shape, and the gated semi-circle. The different forms are linked to different strategies for optimizing their functionality vis-à-vis the currents, the depth of the site, and the natural rock formations in order to minimize the effort required to build and maintain the walls.

The different shapes are effective for different reasons: the circular shapes enclose and control a large extended area, when the V shape create a channel effect, using the current and direct the fish at the V point. Usually at the end point of the V there was a system of collection of the fishes: spread, pick-up if the tide was completely drained (Memmott, Robins, Stock 2008).

Another classification that could be useful for our purposes was proposed by Luo Wang and Liu Guo (2015) to describe sites on the Penghu Archipelago in China, where, to the “arched stone tidal weirs” (described by Bunbujee as semi-circular), are added the “single-room and double-room” typologies. The authors describe “arched” traps as “generally close to the shoreline, built in shallower waters. (...) The water level in arched traps was low or dry when tide falls. Only deeper places have water where fisherman can catch fish”.

The “single” or “double-room stone tidal weirs”, necklace-shaped weirs with one or two heart-like weir rooms, in contrast, are characterized by deeper water which hold fish naturally thanks to their heart-shaped form. “In order to stop the fish from swimming out of the weir rooms, the arched stone links the weir rooms often has a half-curved spiral at its end: fish swimming along the puzzled dike are thus redirected back towards the weir rooms” (p.321).

Lucy Kemp (2016:11-12), in her study of South African west coast fish traps, adds details regarding construction techniques, materials and the use of natural features to give form to the fish traps. She speaks about ‘vis-vywers’ or simply ‘vywers’ meaning ‘fish ponds’ in Afrikaans:

The vywers are built both within sheltered bays and on exposed headlands (Roussouw 1989, R. Branch pers. comm.), in situations where boulders or shale-like rocks accumulate and are accessible as building material, and they appear to be of one or a combination of three types. Some vywers are constructed entirely from

material available in situ, some are constructed using beneficial natural features, such as boulder spits or natural gullies where a wall is simply built to close off a natural feature, and a few are simply ponds where boulders have been removed to form a depression in a boulder field. Their shapes are either angular, or curved (...) and are either singular or a number of traps built in a complex interlaced fashion.

Kemp adds saying that the vywers can rely on natural structures for some of their forms, be entirely made, or pond-like with boulders removed.

### **Cape Recife Nature Reserve (Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality)**

We begin by describing the Cape Recife case study because it was the first site visited and surveyed by the students.

The first visit was organized by Chief Xam ≠ Gaob Maleiba and Chief Margaret Coetzee accompanied by a local guide and the then curator of the Bayworld Museum in Port Elizabeth. The site visit was conducted on 05/08/2016. This site visit was followed by further visits because the place is particularly fascinating and possesses an indescribable spiritual aura and a sense of suspension of time which are truly unique. The site is located on a peninsula that juts out into the ocean where the full force of the wind and waves and the fragility of humans before these natural forces can be experienced.

The area where the fish traps are located is a nature reserve under the supervision of the Municipality. Cape Recife is the first site which was surveyed by the architecture students working under the supervision of Senior Lecturer Donald Flint. This is because of its proximity to the university campus, its ease of access, and because these traps are not particularly complex. This allowed us to perfect the surveying method which we subsequently used at the Oyster Bay site.

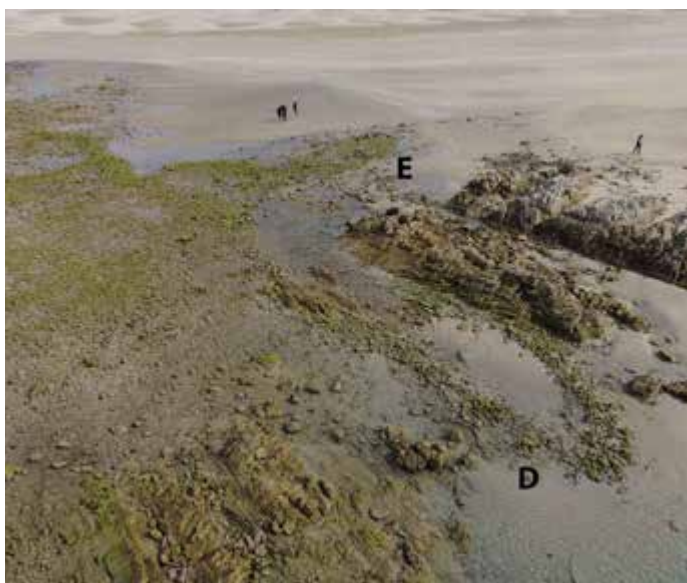
The first survey conducted by the students on 3 February 2018 was followed up by a subsequent survey on 28 November 2020 with Lucy and Hansie Vosloo. This became necessary because of the discovery of two more sites located not too far from the first. A massive sand shift which occurred in the final months of 2020<sup>9</sup>, revealed traces of unknown Indigenous infrastructure but also completely covered the site we had previously surveyed. This event highlights how shifting topography is an intrinsic characteristic of this area.

This event did, however, cause us to reflect on the worrying deterioration of the fish traps owing to rising sea levels and stronger currents caused by climate change.

At Cape Recife we identified three different sites where the traps were located (image 68), more or less at 200 metres from one another surrounding the point of the cape where the bay of the Nelson Mandela Municipality ends.

Comparing the aerial photography, the videos and direct observations made during our numerous visits to the site we were led to suppose that at site 1, the most westerly, (image 60) a single-room trap is

<sup>9</sup> I have been visiting this area regularly since 2016 and this was the first time I had witnessed this phenomenon. It completely altered the topography of the area from the dunes to the shoreline, covering entire areas in sand and rendering the landscape unrecognisable.



both the centre and the conclusion of the trap system present there. It is long and circular and looks a bit like an ear, it exploits a natural rock formation which surrounds it and forms part of the structure. It is 18 by 6 metres and was probably easily managed by one fisherman. It is deeper than the other structures and contains water, even at low tide which presented opportunities for use, as described above, as a pool for aquaculture.

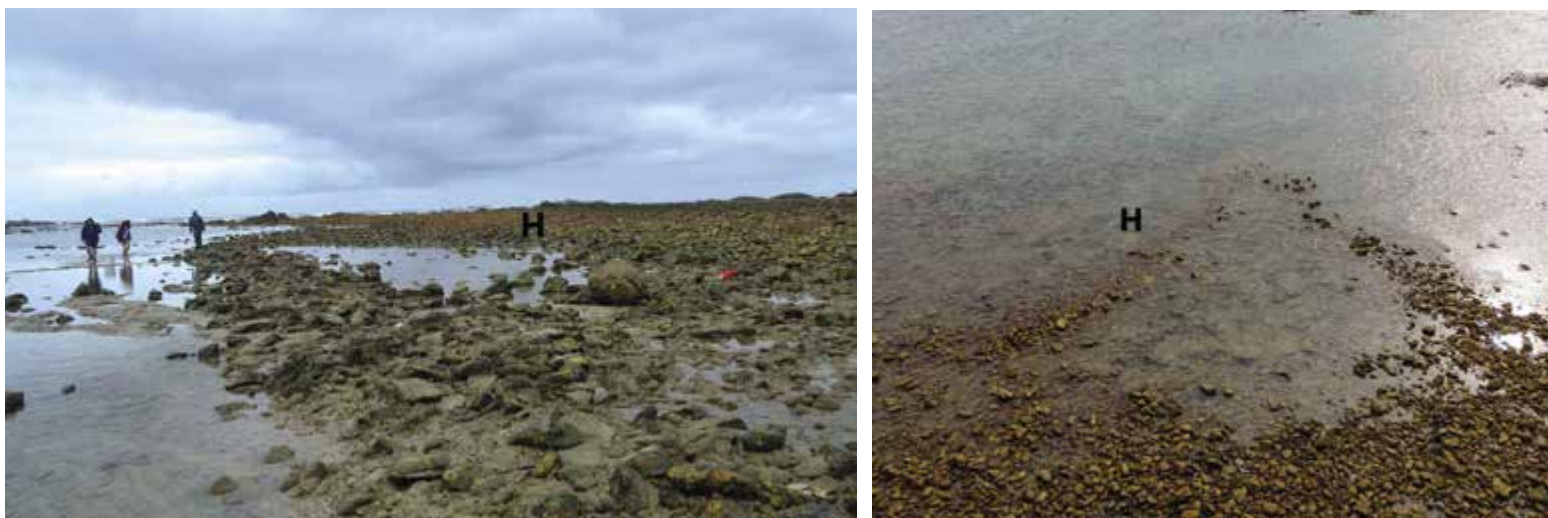
Adjacent to the single-room trap, to its west, are an enclosed wall and a gated semi-circular trap. Each of the traps in the sequence is smaller in diameter by half than the previous one as they proceed towards the shore: 72m, 36m, 18m<sup>10</sup>, suggesting that the fish probably conveyed, thanks to the current and the changes were in depth, towards the pocket trap where they could be caught.

At site 1, adjacent to the sequence described, moving south from the single-room trap, there are two tidal weirs placed consecutively. They are slightly curved to resist pressure from the ocean currents and are separated by a rock formation. One is rectilinear, about 24 metres long and 1.5 metres wide. The other is 65 metres long and reaches the foreshore. This structure has sustained the most damage. These two structures form a sort of calm shallow water basin of around 3000 square metres.


In summary we can imagine that at site 1, the fish were naturally conveyed by the ocean currents and tides towards the fish traps and driven towards the shore by these cleverly positioned, planned and constructed structures until finally finding themselves trapped in the single-room trap which, as mentioned above, is the deepest basin.

Site 2 is situated 200 metres east of site 1. A rocky ridge, 4 metres in height, near the shore, immediately grabs one's attention owing to its size. The tidal fish traps were built in the vicinity of this majestic feature.

<sup>10</sup> These dimensions are approximate and are given here to give an idea of the composition of the structure.



Here too we find a single-room trap of 11 by 6 metres which exploits an existing low rock formation to form its sides (image 70). This again appears to be the focal point of the fish trap system built at this position at Cape Recife. Adjacent to this trap there is another one which exploits the same rock formation to define its shape but, being badly damaged on one of the short sides, it is not possible to completely read the form. For this reason we put forward two different hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that this was a single-room trap twin to the first one, indeed, if the short side had been intact it would have had the same dimensions of 11 by 6 metres. The second hypothesis is that the trap might have been a long L shaped structure which extended towards the shore totalling 46 by 4 metres. Nearby, there are various rock features which are clearly man-made but, with the tides, the strong winds and in the absence of maintenance, the structures have not been well preserved and it is impossible to read them as a whole. Moving west, in the direction of the ocean, 45 metres away from the above described complex there is a 25 metre stone tidal weir which must have functioned as an access point for fish into site 2. This wall, along with the semi-circular traps which are found 90 metres away towards the east, forms a basin of calm water, even at low tide, in which fish could have, and still do, live and breed (image 69). The semi-circular trap, which is the most easterly of the structures at site 2, was particularly interesting because it forms a geometrically perfect semi-circle with a radius of 7.3 metres circling around a 1 metre stone. Of all the traps that we visited, this one is the most regular in form and seems to have been designed with more than mere functionality in mind and may have had a higher purpose which we do not know. At its eastern extremity, the semi-circular trap joins with a stone-walled structure which, despite being damaged, seems to create a pool outside the semi circle. Site 3 is located 200 metres to the north-east of site 2 and is made up of two traps with 50 metres separating them. One of the traps is semi-circular (image 72) and the other triangular (image 73) and both make use of a rock outcrop to form the wall on one side. The semicircular trap is 28 by 10 metres and the triangular one has walls of roughly 15 metres each. These two traps are positioned on the sides of a sort of canal where water enters with a different sea current to the one which acts on the two other sites described above.


**Fig.69-70-71-72-73**  
 Detailed photos of the fish traps.  
 The letters refer to the ones  
 indicated in plan (Fig. 68)





**Fig.74**

Senior lecturer of the School of Architecture Donald Flint with the students during the site survey in Cape Recife

*next page*

**Fig.75**

Graphic representation of the survey with theodolite carried out in Cape Recife

### Oyster Bay

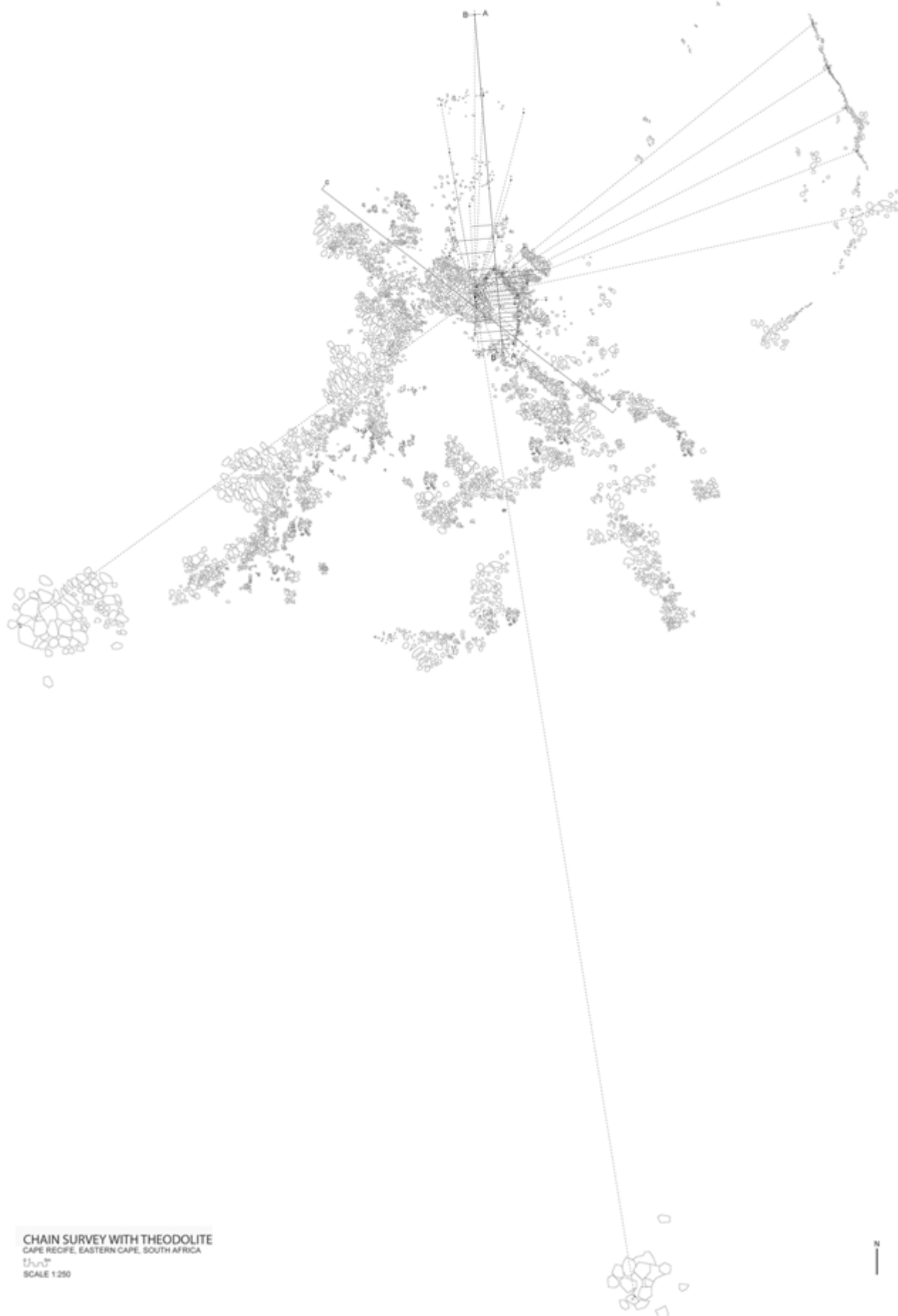
The fish traps at Oyster Bay were surveyed using the same method of theodolites and drones developed at Cape Recife.

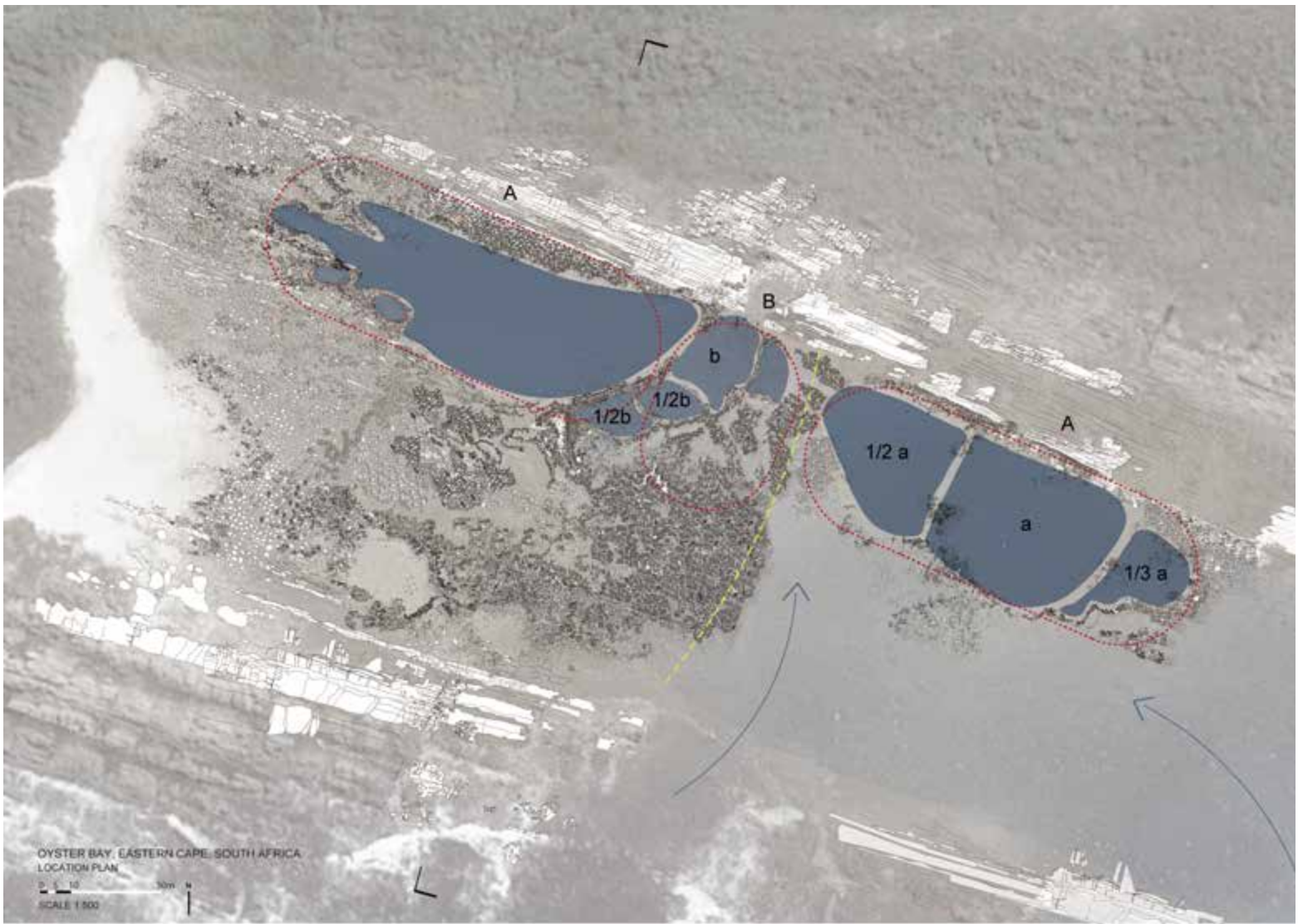
The site can be reached by walking along the coast coming from the west. Access from the east is impractical owing to sharp and irregular rocks. The other option for reaching the site is by traversing the dunes, covered by a thick forest of spiky fynbos which are now private property.

With the help of a local guide, who secured permits and transported us in a 4x4 vehicle, we were able to visit the site by crossing this private property. We first visited this site on 25/11/2017 with Chief Thomas Augustus and the survey with the students took place on 3 and 4 March 2018 during spring tide.

We also visited the site a month before the survey (11/02/2018) using the coastal route with Ernst Struwig and the Vosloo family. This visit was important for the purpose of studying the site more closely and deciding whether to use this path with the students. This option was dismissed because it would have taken far too long and would have been exhausting to carry the measuring equipment necessary for the survey.

The site is located at a place where the coast pulls back forming a type of recess and, thanks to the fact that the rocks here (unlike at the other sites) are not particularly high, it forms an intertidal zone where the traps were constructed.

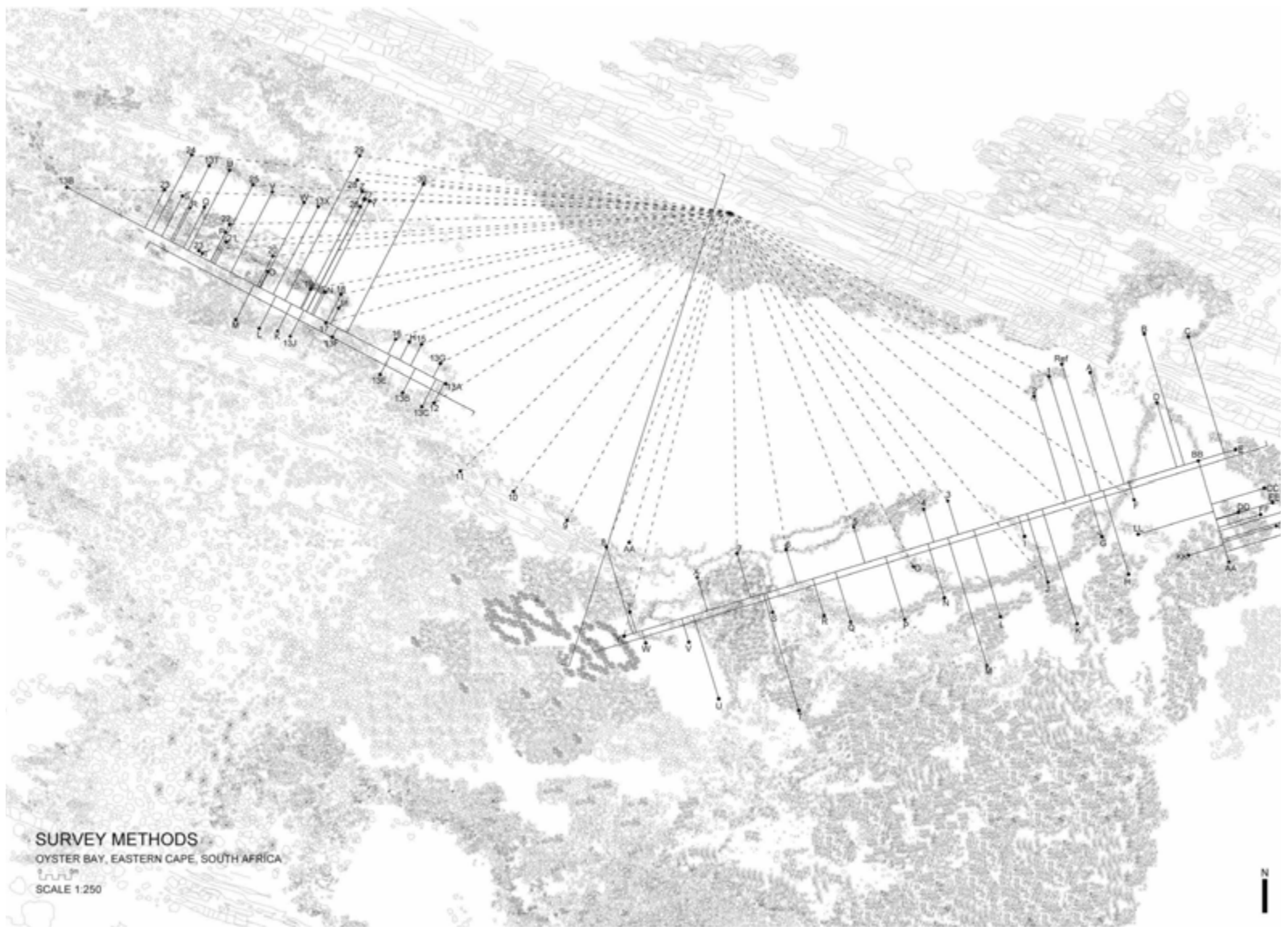




↑  
**Fig.76**  
 Oyster Bay fish traps: plan and  
 diagrammatic section based on  
 the site surveys

↓  
**Fig.77**  
 Photo of the fish traps in Oyster  
 Bay





This area is generally important in terms of heritage because of the rich archaeological finds present in the area and because of the coastal forest which is particularly extensive and grows on the very ancient dunes that extend from Oyster Bay parallel to the coast until Cape St. Francis. Despite this, recently there have been drawn out discussions concerning the possible construction of a nuclear power station here which would have a drastic impact on this stretch of coast. The project has been suspended thanks to a group of KhoiSan locals in coordination with the local residents.

The fish traps at this site are the most extensive ones included in our study. The area is around 300 metres long parallel to the coast and around 55 metres wide. The structures are still intact and can be read easily (image 76 and 79).

The system in its entirety is composed of three adjacent systems indicated in diagram 76 by A-B-A where A is circa 45 by 140 metres (ratio 1:3), while B is 45 by 60 metres. The two systems most exposed to ocean currents (B and A) have the same design of a succession of three single-room traps with the central one being the largest.

 **Fig.78**  
Graphic representation of the fish traps in Oyster Bay



**Fig. 79**  
Aerial photo of the fish traps in  
Oyster Bay.



Close to the beach there is a large and capacious rock pool which forms a basin 3000 square metres in size and is flanked by the two single-room traps which are 10 metres in diameter. Similarly to Cape Recife, we can imagine that the basin, in which there is calm water year round, along with the two single-room traps were used for aquaculture and became a permanent source of fish.

### Klip Drift

Klip Drift was “discovered” thanks to the help of my colleagues at NMU, Hansie and Lucy Vosloo. The survey was done using drones only.

We only organized one visit to the site on 29/09/2018 with Lucy, “Alexis” Tsotsiopoulos, the student who performed the drone survey, and a local person who generously offered to take us in his 4x4 to the private property from where the site can be accessed and then on to the traps themselves.

The coast here is quite dramatic in cross-section (image 82) especially owing to a sudden drop between the vegetation covered ground above and the rocky shore (image 83). This made reaching certain places quite difficult. The site with the fish traps, however, is situated in a favourable spot because the hill pulls back from the ocean, forming a sort of natural amphitheatre with a gentle slope allowing easy access to the site from above and providing protection from the strong winds. From the other side there are tall rocks forming a ridge parallel to the shore which offer further protection. It is, in fact, thanks to the existence of these rocks that there is an area about 15 metres wide and 270 metres long where the water enters through three gaps in the rocky ridge. This creates a sheltered area of shallow water: the perfect spot for fish traps.

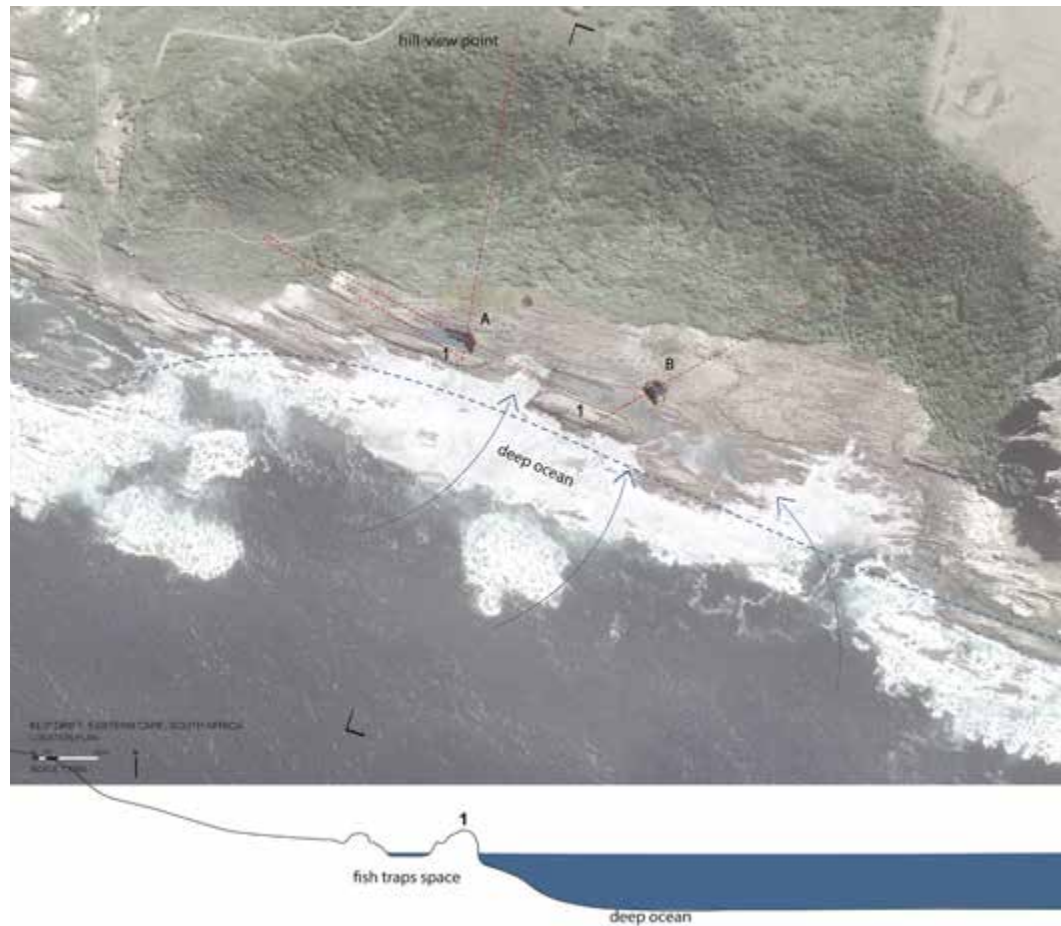
Much like at Cape Recife, the tall rocks are also an important visual landmark for locating the fish traps from high up (see image 68).

There are two fish traps located on opposite sides of the site at a distance of 200 metres from one another. They are positioned so that they would have both interacted independently with the two pools of calm water formed in the intertidal zone between the ridge and the rocky shore.



**Fig.80**  
Dr Magda Minguzzi of the Nelson Mandela University School of Architecture with the students during the site survey in Oyster Bay

**Fig.81**  
Site survey in Oyster Bay



**Fig.82**  
Klip Drift fish traps: plan and diagrammatic section based on the site survey

next page

**Fig.83-84**  
Klip Drift: points marked A and B indicate the fish traps positions on the site

The trap located to the west of the site is a stone tidal weir, a sort of dam of about 11 metres in length, with a single-room trap, about 5 metres in diameter, on one side toward the middle of the wall. On the eastern side of the site there is a single-room, circular trap with a diameter of about 10 metres, similar to the single-room traps surveyed at Cape Recife and Oyster Bay.

In the aerial photographs one can clearly see that the stones had been moved from their original positions in order to build the walls of the traps. As a consequence of this relocating of the stones, the bottoms of the traps are sandy and there are fish to be found. We can imagine that the sandy floor of the trap made it easier to use pointed fishing tools like the spears used by the KhoiSan.

Here too, like at Cape Recife, the traps always have water in them which makes them perfect for acting as fish nurseries or for aquaculture.

### Final points

As we can see from the case studies, the fish traps worked closely with the tides, the wind, the ocean currents, changes in level and the consequent flows of the water. They take into account the form and dimensions of the rock formations which allow water to enter the coastal intertidal zone at specific points and the position, shape and dimensions of the walls of the tidal fish traps are in perfect synergy with this universe of constantly moving water.





The fish traps seem to make use of a set of similar dimensions and typologies which points to the people who made them engaging in a systematic search for the perfect, or at least the correct, way of doing things in terms of managing the spaces and volumes of water, reaching the pools, and catching the fish trapped inside. They are designs which seem to value harmony above and beyond their mere functionality. They represent the human being as part of and in union with the cosmos. The geometry of these structures, as we have already noted, is similar all over the world and they represent a sustainable, even harmonious, relationship with nature and the universe in general.

Chief Jean Burgess comments on the relationship between form, function and spirituality embodied in these structures:

The repetition of the semi-circle is very significant if we look at the creation. The circle represents the perfection of the cosmos, like the shape of the earth, and to sister moon, to sister sun, and the shape of the planets and if you go into the cosmos, you see circles all the time. And the circle means, for us as the first Indigenous peoples, that “it is complete”, the circle means completion. And it is only the great creator that can complete. We as human beings cannot complete, we cannot dissect. We portray the humbleness of our imperfections as humanity. And to me the semi-circle reflects that humble imperfection. The semi-circle is a way of projecting the incompleteness that was human-made and not made by the great creator. The semi-circle symbolises that it is not perfect, and we feel that it is human evidenced, because when human beings create it is a continuous process and therefore never ever complete and perfect. So, the shape of the semi-circle is exact. So, the semi-circle is reminding us to be... Not to be arrogant, to acknowledge our imperfections and we can only strive towards perfection. We can only strive to become a circle, but the semi-circle never becomes a circle there's always a little opening somewhere. (...) We as the First Indigenous Peoples hosted a World Indigenous Conference in South Africa and we invited Indigenous Peoples from all over the world. And every Indigenous person had to bring water from a river of their country of origin that was combined in South Africa. With that act, we united our spirits and our ancestors through the water. And then we had an International Water Ceremony where we felt immediately that every Western barrier that kept us apart, disappeared, and we became brothers and sisters, we immediately had a bond; we the World's First Indigenous Peoples. We established a spiritual bond that no one can take away from us. Now the power of the water ceremony is indescribable. You must participate in it in order to comprehend the depth of this water ceremony and the spirit of the wind direction in the water. Our ancestors are present and that to me is about never forgetting who you are, and never forgetting the depth of your beingness to mother earth, to the great water, to the great spirit of the wind direction, and all those in you as a descendent of the First Indigenous People's.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Chief Jean Burgess, Ghonaqua, interview with the author, Cape Recife, 29 January 2020.

## Appendix



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## OUTCOMES OF THE PROJECT

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### **“The Spirit of Water” art project, exhibitions and video projections:**

#### 2017

- New York, 23 September till 15 October 2017, Hot Wood Arts, 481 Van Brunt St. Brooklyn
- Port Elizabeth, 27 September - 30 November, Nelson Mandela Art Museum. In celebration of the Heritage Month.
- Zagreb, 27 September - 1 October, Hdlu.
- Mexico, Universidad Nacional Autonoma, Centro de Ciencias de la Complejidad, 23 November.
- Venice, 17 November 2017, Fabbrica del vedere.
- University of Southampton. The description of the project is part of the MOOC program of the University: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwdanHhJI20&feature=youtu.be> <http://moocs.southampton.ac.uk/oceans/2017/07/05/exploring-oceans-goes-south-africa/>

#### 2018

- Graaff-Reinet, 22 February - 22 June 2018, Graaff-Reinet Old Library Museum.
- Benin, 20 June (video projection), Le Centre, Arts and Culture.
- Venice, 21 June, 16 International Biennale of Venice, Architecture, Scottish pavilion.

#### 2019

- Lisbon, 14th International Conference on the Arts in Society, Polytechnic Institute of Lisbon, 19 - 21 July 2019. Conference and video projection.
- Valencia, University Politecnica of Valencia, UNESCO chair's conferences series “Earth architecture, culture, construction and sustainability”, course 2018 - 2019, organized Prof. F. Vegas and Prof. C. Mileto. 28 June, sala de prjection ETSA-UPV. Conference and video projection.
- Port Elizabeth, Nelson Mandela University, Faculty of Art. Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IK 21) Conference, 8 - 11 November 2019. Conference and video projection.
- Port Elizabeth, Nelson Mandela University, Institute for Coastal and Marine Research (CMR), “Diversity Symposium”, 13 November 2019. Conference entitled Pre-colonial sites along the coast of Eastern Cape and practices of cultural re-appropriation”.

#### 2020

- Port Elizabeth, Nelson Mandela University, Revitalising the Humanities Canon in South Africa colloquium, 5 - 6 March 2020. Conference and video projection.

## Awards

### 2018

- Nelson Mandela University, 18. Engagement Excellence Award as team leader for the project “The Spirit of Water”.
- 2018. Nelson Mandela University, 18. Performing and Creative Arts Award for the project “The Spirit of Water”.

### 2019

- NIHSS Humanities and Social Sciences Awards 2019. “The Spirit of Water” was short-listed as one of the 3 best project/film, in South Africa, for the category “Creative Collections: International Art Project and Performance”

### To watch the film **The Spirit of Water**:

<https://vimeo.com/534102794>

For info and ©:

[magda.minguzzi@mandela.ac.za](mailto:magda.minguzzi@mandela.ac.za)

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**Fish traps video resources:**

Hardy B. from the Brewarrina Cultural Centre, “Fish traps - with Dr. Dave” by Dr. David Watson from Charles Sturt University: <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa5WSRxpUj0&list=PLdes5\\_XP9UcM5QDm9G9dHYFZnufzktq67&index=10&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa5WSRxpUj0&list=PLdes5_XP9UcM5QDm9G9dHYFZnufzktq67&index=10&t=0s)> (15/09/2019)

Brewarrina Aboriginal Fish Traps <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa5WSRxpUj0&list=PLdes5\\_XP9UcM5QDm9G9dHYFZnufzktq67&index=10&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qa5WSRxpUj0&list=PLdes5_XP9UcM5QDm9G9dHYFZnufzktq67&index=10&t=0s)> (15/09/2019)





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**Fig.86**  
06 May 2017. Cape Recife Nature Reserve, aerial photo of the "The Spirit of Water" art performance and rituals

### Published Books

1. Alessandro Brodini, *Lo Iuav ai Tolentini: Carlo Scarpa e gli altri. Storia e documenti*, 2020
2. Letizia Dipasquale, *Understanding Chefchaouen. Traditional knowledge for a sustainable habitat*, 2020
3. Vito Getuli, *Ontologies for Knowledge modeling in construction planning. Theory and Application*, 2020
4. Lamia Hadda (édité par), *Médina. Espace de la Méditerranée*, 2021
5. Letizia Dipasquale, Saverio Mecca, Mariana Correia (eds.), *From Vernacular to World Heritage*, 2020
6. Sarah Robinson, Juhani Pallasmaa (a cura di), traduzione e cura dell'edizione italiana di Matteo Zambelli, *La mente in architettura. Neuroscienze, incarnazione e il futuro del design*, 2021



Finito di stampare da  
Officine Grafiche Francesco Giannini & Figli s.p.a. | Napoli  
per conto di FUP  
**Università degli Studi di Firenze**



This book describes a research project begun by the author in 2015 and co-authored by the Chiefs of the KhoiSan communities living in the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa aided by staff and students at Nelson Mandela University. The scope of the project was to investigate methods and procedures that could help re-establish the link between the indigenous communities and their forgotten sites. Making use of a participatory and interdisciplinary method we explored the tangible and intangible heritage of this part of the country with particular attention to the remains of precolonial fish traps located along the shoreline. Included also are important testimonies from the KhoiSan chiefs who, alongside the author, led the project.

**Magda Minguzzi.** Dr Magda Minguzzi is an architect, artist, and Senior Lecturer- responsible for the PhD programme at the Nelson Mandela University School of Architecture (SA), with a particular research focus on tangible and intangible heritage of the First Indigenous Peoples of South Africa.

ISBN 978-88-5518-315-4 (print)  
ISBN 978-88-5518-316-1 (PDF)  
ISBN 978-88-5518-317-8 (XML)  
DOI 10.36253/978-88-5518-316-1