



# Equality without redistribution

## Development politics and heritage commodification in Red Location, South Africa

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## Equality without redistribution Development politics and heritage commodification in Red Location, South Africa

Marta Montanini

In South Africa, publicly funded projects that focus on heritage-making and urban regeneration are increasingly being labelled, announced and budgeted as development policies that intend to improve the living conditions of the inhabitants of a targeted place. At the same time, the many citizen protests that have followed the implementation of this kind of project are clear expressions of discontent and dissatisfaction. Although development is evoked, people living in sites of urban renewal or heritage projects struggle to benefit from them, and question the unfulfilled promises of project promoters and public officials.

Despite the fact that urban renewal, heritage projects and socio-economic development are often described and promoted as two sides of the same coin, protests suggest that the relationship between these projects and development is not as strong as is claimed by promoters and public officials, or, at least, they indicate the different and, sometimes, incompatible ways in which different actors conceive of and define development.

As part of my doctoral thesis, I conducted fieldwork on the premises of the Red Location Museum and Cultural Precinct (RLMCP) Project, an ambitious urban renewal and heritage creation project implemented in Red Location, a small section of New Brighton township, an area of 1,45 km<sup>2</sup> and about 15 000 inhabitants in Port Elizabeth, Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality.<sup>1</sup> The project, publicly funded, launched in 1996 and still continuing, involved the creation of a museum of the struggle against apartheid, and the construction of a set of buildings to foster cultural tourism in this poor area of the city inhabited by a majority of Xhosa people.<sup>2</sup>

When I started my research, in 2014, the project's site had been seized by a committee of residents that had put a halt to construction and impeded the functioning of building already completed. This action was just one of many demonstrations that have been held on the project site since its implementation. Residents were protesting against the delay in repairs to social housing that had been badly built in the early nineties. Public officials and project promoters described the protest as misleading and unfounded, saying that the project had nothing to do with residents' concerns, whereas the committee members believed that they were correct in connecting the dilapidated state of their houses, the lack of employment opportunities, and the construction of the cultural precinct in their township, addressing local government and asking for a higher degree of involvement in such socio-economic issues. According to the residents, the project was only one of many actions for development that the government must implement in the area, whereas, according to project promoters and public officials, the RLMCP was an all-embracing and multi-sectoral project, able to solve various township problems by boosting the cultural and tourism economy.

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<sup>1</sup> NMBM 2013.

<sup>2</sup> AmaXhosa are a Bantu-language ethnic group and the second largest ethnic/language group in South Africa.

These different ways of understanding the project goals and objectives do not merely signal a misunderstanding between actors, but highlight a problem that runs much deeper: the controversy has to do with the conception of development as well as whether a heritage-making and urban renewal project can actually improve citizens' living conditions. Ultimately, the contention over the RLMCP called into question local government responsibilities and actions in the realm of social justice and redistribution.

In this paper I focus on the conceptual construction of the RLMCP as a development project that has been nurtured by its promoters and I analyse it in relation to the claims of Red Location residents. In order to do so, I take the wider historical and political context that shaped the project into consideration. Clarifying the ambiguities of the past helps us to understand why and how they still persist. In addition, I attempt to provide a clearer picture of the different functions of the RLMCP, which, as a public project, is an expression of a specific political moment embodying a particular conception of national community, citizenship, and government of the social realm. Although the RLMCP is a complex project, which involves many actors, in this paper I have specifically focused on the project promoters and on the residents' committees that, through the years, have raised different claims against the RLMCP.

### **AN AMBITIOUS PROJECT, MANY VOCAL PROTESTS**

In 1996, in Port Elizabeth, the idea of an ambitious urban renewal and heritage creation project in Red Location was publicly launched. The first person to talk about this project in public was Rory Riordan, one of the members of the Transitional Local Council,<sup>3</sup> a human rights activist during apartheid, but also an entrepreneur and journalist with a liberal background. However, according to Riordan, the main inspirer of the project was Ernest Malgas, a black African National Congress (ANC) militant from Red Location. Malgas was imprisoned on Robben Island and died at the end of the nineties.

The master plan of the project, that was later known as the Red Location Museum and Cultural Precinct (RLMCP), went through a number of changes. The project's pillars were the creation of a museum of the struggle against apartheid (completed in 2006), and the construction of a library and an art gallery (completed in 2012, although the library has never been furnished). Through the years, the construction of three different-sized theatres, two cinemas, two rehearsal rooms, an art school, workshop and laboratory rooms, as well as a conference room were proposed and included in the master plan.<sup>4</sup> In addition to these buildings, the project also included elements of urban renewal and housing provision, namely the construction of 210 houses for shack dwellers who had to be relocated in order to make place for the implementation of the project, the construction of a bus stop and a market area, the creation of a statue of commemoration of the Rivonia Trial,<sup>5</sup> and the improvement and decoration of the main road that leads to the precinct. The museum opened its doors in 2006, while the art gallery has hosted only one exhibition and the library has never been opened due to lack of funding. All the other buildings have been planned but have not yet been built. When the project was launched, it was arguably the first of this kind in the whole of South Africa: the Apartheid Museum, in Johannesburg, was built only in 2001, in an entertainment precinct that includes a casino, while the RLMCP is situated in the centre of the township

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<sup>3</sup> The Transitional Local Council, with 100 members (50 representing the black townships, 26 whites and 24 Coloureds and Indians), was the first mixed council of Port Elizabeth after the end of apartheid. It grouped together, for the first time, councilors from different parts of the city which had previously been governed separately.

<sup>4</sup> Dojon Financial Services 2011a; 2011b.

<sup>5</sup> In October 1963, ten opponents of apartheid went on trial on charges of 221 acts of sabotage. During the trial, Nelson Mandela made a famous speech condemning the system of apartheid and explaining why the ANC had chosen to resort to violence. Eight of the accused, among them Mandela, were found guilty and sent to Robben Island prison. This trial is commonly known as the Rivonia Trial as Rivonia was the suburb of Johannesburg where the accused were arrested.

and, from the beginning, the elements of urban renewal and development have been included in the project conception. The RLMCP was a pioneer project, inaugurating the practice of creating heritage sites that connect commemoration of history with urban renewal and innovation. In 1998, as a side-project, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and Port Elizabeth Municipality, fourteen houses were built on the East side of the museum site. These were considered to be experimental social housing as they were built with low cost material, were two-storey and could be bought by their tenants thanks to a microloan extended by the municipality.

Riordan, through his consulting agency that was in charge of drafting the project business plan, has remained a major supporter of the project. Through the years, the project has also been supported by most of the city mayors and by several ward councillors. Nceba Faku, the first black mayor of the city, fought for the first funding to be approved by the city council, as did Jimmy Tutu, who was the elected local councillor for the municipal ward of Red Location. The project is also included in the most recent versions of the Integrated Development Plan, a municipal document that contains the development guidelines for the city. Funds for the RLMCP have been annually allocated in the city budget since 1998, as the project has been funded both by national and municipal funds. The last master plan establishes the funds needed for the construction of the whole precinct at about 593 million Rand.<sup>6</sup>

The project promoters gave two reasons why the project had to be developed in Red Location: the area had been one of the strongholds of the anti-apartheid movement and, since its creation in 1902, it has remained a poor and underdeveloped area. The first master plan, drafted in 1996, described Red Location as “a special place with a community assembled over many generations and with a history rich in unpublished anecdote worth conserving. A place worth giving new life to”<sup>7</sup> but also, as “a poor barren place with the potential to become much more, for itself and for the others”<sup>8</sup>...

The project promoters presented the RLMCP as a municipality-led intervention focused on improving the living conditions of Red Location residents by creating revenue from tourism, developing a local economy, and collecting and recognising local history. According to the promoters, the museum, the art gallery, the theatre and the cinema rooms could attract national and international tourists, while the library, the rehearsal rooms, the conference rooms and the art laboratory would serve local artists, school children, university students, and anyone interested in learning more about the history of Red Location and apartheid. The number of people that the project would attract to the township could, in turn, boost the creation of other economic activities. Besides, urban renewal would give a new face to the township, uncovering township potential and improving daily life.

Although, during the first years of its construction, the RLMCP was hailed as one of the most innovative projects of its kind in South Africa by national and international media, and in fact won international awards<sup>9</sup>, Red Location residents did not welcome the project with open arms. Many waves of protests threatened the construction of the museum and the other buildings. Three different residents' committees were formed at various moments of the project's implementation (firstly the New Brighton Concerned Residents' Group in 2002, secondly the New Brighton Coordinating Forum in 2005, and, lastly, the Red Location Steering Committee in 2013). In 2003, the clash between residents and local government ended in violent demonstrations and the detention of twenty-six people. That year, the confrontation between residents and local government over the RLMCP and Red Location housing required the intervention of a lawyer who was nominated as an

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<sup>6</sup> See Dojon Financial Services (2011b) for the costs of the Performing Art Complex (about 540 million Rand). To this sum must be added the costs of the museum's construction (about 22 million Rands and the Library and Art gallery (about 31 million Rand).

<sup>7</sup> Rushmere and Thompson, 1996.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> In 2005, the municipality received the World Leadership Award for architectural and civil engineering (World Leadership Forum, London) and the Dedalo Minosse International Prize (Ala-Assoarchitetti) in 2006, while the museum won the Lubetkin Prize (Royal Institute of British Architects) for the best architectural project outside Europe in 2006.

independent mediator. In 2009, three years after the museum opening, new protests were held in front of the museum with demonstrators interrupting construction and activities inside the museum.

Finally, in 2013, seven years after Red Location Museum was inaugurated, the Red Location Steering Committee (RLSC) forced the museum to close its doors and seized the other buildings, keeping staff and visitors from accessing the whole precinct without the committee members' previous authorisation. The RLSC did not give back the museum keys to Executive Mayor Danny Jordaan until 2016.

Residents' claims have focused on various issues: the main concern being that the local government was allocating most of the funds to the RLMCP project while the RDP houses (Reconstruction and Development Programme, or social housing) in the neighbouring area needed to be remodelled as they had been poorly built.<sup>10</sup> The houses on the Northern side of the RLMCP site were, in fact, part of a social housing project inaugurated in the early nineties, but never fully completed. Due to corruption and lack of funding, the local government could not complete the project, and supplied the beneficiaries with building materials of bad quality so that they could build their own houses. The result was that those houses deteriorated quickly and, when the RLMCP building started, these houses were in an extremely bad state. Local government has never solved this problem and claims related to Red Location's housing problem have characterised all the demonstrations on the cultural precinct site, from the beginning of the project to present. Complaints were also linked to the limited employment opportunities offered by the project: through the years, committee members complained about the lack of jobs for Red Location inhabitants, as they noticed that only a small number of the RLMCP staff lived in the surrounding area.<sup>11</sup> In addition, members of the most recent committee also denounced the lack of activities specifically aimed at younger members of the population.<sup>12</sup> The purposes of the cultural precinct and the kind of activities that could and should be held in the cultural centre have also been the object of several disputes over the years of protest.<sup>13</sup> Some of the museum staff, as well as the project promoters argued that a cultural centre could not be a community centre, and therefore non-cultural activities could not be managed in the precinct. Objections from residents did, however, result in the widening of the range of activities to be promoted, so that sports competitions and initiatives for various days of awareness could be included.

After the opening, there were also complaints about the museum's contents. Residents criticised the way in which the history of Red Location had been presented: in particular, they complained that local heroes of the anti-apartheid struggle had not been duly honoured.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, on several occasions residents denounced the fact that their artefacts, their stories or their pictures had been exploited by the museum without them being duly remunerated.

In sum, throughout the implementation years, residents' complaints touched upon many different problems and addressed the nature and the goals of the RLMCP project. Residents' demands focused on the lack of fulfilment of the promises of local government members, public officials and project promoters, and insisted on tangible evidence that the project would really improve their quality of life. The RLSC has been very vocal: it sent several letters to public officials, local politicians and to an executive mayor who grew up in Red Location (Ben Fihla), asking them to deliver on what the RLSC saw as their responsibilities. The RLSC even signed a memorandum of understanding with the municipality in which their requests in term of housing and employment were clearly stated.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, J. Matyu, "Call to look for missing millions", *The Herald*, 20/10/1995; J. Matyu, "Upgrade Red Location", *The Herald*, 29/01/1996; M. Jack, "Infighting delays Red Location housing upgrade", *The Herald*, 20/06/2005; T. Gqirana, "Protesters force closure of Red Location Museum", *The Herald*, 22/10/2013; A. Williams, "Hope for museum as budget approved for 288 new houses", *The Herald*, 04/11/2014.

<sup>11</sup> Interviews with members of the Red Location Steering Committee, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Interviews with members of the Red Location Steering Committee and Museum Staff Members, 2015.

<sup>14</sup> See Cherry, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with a RLSC member, 2015.

Despite all the demonstrations and the halting of the project, its supporters never stopped collecting funds to complete it, acting as if the demonstrations were only a collateral effect of an otherwise successful project.

## THE RLMCP AS AN INTERSECTIONAL SPACE

Heritage-making projects are complex phenomena to study. Referring to museums in particular, James Clifford argues that “when museums are seen as contact zones, their organizing structure as a collection becomes an ongoing historical, political, moral relationship - a power-charged set of exchanges, of push and pull”.<sup>16</sup> Heritage projects are therefore intersectional spaces in which different power relations come into play and where different actors and different visions of art, history, economy, politics and society, among others, merge and collide. That is why such projects are analysed from various perspectives and in different disciplines.

In countries that have undergone important political transitions, such as South Africa, heritage-making projects are often analysed and perceived as forms of representation and interpretation, and they are also seen as ways to construct and reconstruct history and memories. From this perspective, their meaning-making effects prevail, in addition to their role in consolidating a specific vision of history and a specific relation with the past. Janet Cherry, Gary Baines and Noëleen Murray have analysed the RLMCP from this point of view.<sup>17</sup> Such projects can also be evaluated in terms of their economic impact: investment and return on investment, as well as the economic sectors that may profit from these projects. This approach, which is more functionalist, is the one adopted by the RLMCP promoters, who compare the RLMCP to similar developments in other countries.<sup>18</sup> In addition, heritage-making projects can be considered in terms of aesthetics and architecture, viewing them as material translations of values and belief systems or as place-making agents. Along these lines, Lisa Findley, Michelle Smith, Naomi Roux and Vuyisile Msila have analysed the project’s master plan and its architectural style and have compared the RLMCP to similar projects in other South African sites.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, heritage-making projects can be studied as government tools: they can be seen as ways to govern minorities, communities or marginal spaces. This dimension of the RLMCP is the least explored one, although a number of authors have analysed other projects from this perspective.<sup>20</sup>

A number of aspects of the RLMCP project have thus been considered by a number of scholars but, interestingly, the aspect that has not received much attention is the township development agenda and the role assigned to the project in the development path. This is perhaps because of the common tendency to take the development aspect for granted, thinking that a new project will automatically lead to some kind of improvement.

The RLMCP is, without a doubt, a very interesting case, as it is composed of different elements: a complex project that is, at the same time, a commemoration site and a site of history construction, a space for art creation, and an experimental site for urban renewal and social engineering. Its promoters had the ambitious aim of building a comprehensive project that, starting with the conservation of the past, and including the exploitation of art potential, would direct the township and the city towards

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<sup>16</sup> Clifford 1997: 192-193.

<sup>17</sup> Cherry 2012, Baines 2006, Murray 2013, 2015.

<sup>18</sup> The project’s business plan includes comparisons to similar cultural centres around the world. See Dojon Financial Services (2011b).

<sup>19</sup> Findley 2004, Smith 2016, Roux 2015, and Msila 2013.

<sup>20</sup> See Rassool 2009, and Murray and Witz 2014.

the future. Development was the most distant project goal, the one that would be fully reached only at the completion of all the project elements.

## HERITAGE-MAKING AND DEVELOPMENT: A FRAGILE RELATIONSHIP

Since its conception, two different discourses, both coming from the national government, have been at the heart of the RLMCP. The first is related to the immediate post-apartheid period and the construction of a new nation that needed to turn previously disadvantaged people into equal citizens. One of the most meaningful initiatives in this sense was the promulgation of the new Constitution in December 1996. The second discourse has to do with the progressive integration of South Africa into the global economy, and the consequent transition to neoliberal policies. At the national level, this choice was evident in the shift from the RDP, a mix of developmental policies that echoed the Freedom Charter and a more socialist perspective, to GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution), an economic program that followed the recommendations of international financial institutions and that was developed during Thabo Mbeki's government.<sup>21</sup>

These two discourses translated in two national goals: the recognition and inclusion of a specific and majority part of the population in the national project and the positioning of South Africa as one of the main and most reliable players in the capitalist economic system.<sup>22</sup> The RLMCP was an attempt to pursue these goals at the local level, at a time when emphasising the developmental angle would satisfy both by connecting democratisation and neoliberal policies. The issue of development has, indeed, been at the centre of the project since it took off: the RLMCP was presented by its promoters and supporters as a development project that would use heritage-making, history commodification and tourism as efficient levers to achieve human-centred economic growth.<sup>23</sup>

In 1998, an architecture competition for the construction of a museum of the anti-apartheid struggle and a cultural precinct in Red Location was launched at a national level. Nceba Faku, the then-mayor of the city, wrote in the presentation of the competition that the project's aim was "to transform Red Location, a sad and neglected place of great political significance in the history of the anti-apartheid struggle in the Eastern Cape indeed, the whole country, into a major tourist attraction".<sup>24</sup>

Initially, the RLMCP was perceived and lauded as a praiseworthy initiative and a number of scholars from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University participated in the development of the museum contents and helped organise events linked to the precinct, putting their expertise at the service of the project which was a novel one with its experimental approach appreciated by many Port Elizabeth academics and activists<sup>25</sup>. Scholars alternated between a procedural, methodological and comparative approach concentrated on how to create material and non-material heritage for the construction of a national community, and a more critical angle, focused on why the local government wanted to set in motion this heritage-making project and what effects it would have on the citizens and the surrounding environment.

<sup>21</sup> Freund 2007; Adelzadeh 1996; Fine 2015.

<sup>22</sup> B. Freund argued that "the demonstration of South Africa as a well-run efficient participant in the global economies that plays by the rules, but is managed by the 'previously disadvantaged' is extremely important to Mbeki and his team" (Freund 2007: 194).

<sup>23</sup> The local newspaper *The Herald* published a speech made by one of the main promoters of the project in a public meeting: "[He said] that the council had inherited a city in which about 17 000 families were still forced to endure the indignity of the bucket system and more than 15 000 had to walk distances to obtain water. The council was committed to bringing development to areas where there was at present no viable commercial life. It was hoped the Red Location Museum was an initiative to encourage this. Without these kinds of initiatives in the townships, they would simply become ghettos". "R100 m apartheid museum planned", *The Herald*, 23/09/1996.

<sup>24</sup> Albert Heroldt Architects 1998.

<sup>25</sup> This idea came up in various interviews held with several academics from the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University who had been asked to write texts for museum exhibitions or who arranged conferences at the museum.

Progressively, the protests and then the halt imposed by the residents on the RLMCP project have forced scholars, as well as local politicians, journalists and activists to take into consideration the controversial dimension and the internal contradictions of the project. The fact that it was failing to benefit residents forced the different actors involved in the project to reflect openly on the relationship between development and heritage-making projects. Politicians and officials had to admit that the project did not automatically lead to improved conditions for the area's inhabitants, nor did it solve their problems of unemployment or lack of basic services. An official attaché of the municipal Directorate of Sport, Recreation, Art and Culture who was in charge of managing the project complained that "we are a service-based directorate and not a revenue generating one!";<sup>26</sup> making clear that, for the Directorate, the main interest of the project was not creating wealth for everybody, but simply providing culture as a public service.

For the RLMCP promoters, development was a twofold process: the renovation, modernisation and standardisation of the area, and also employment creation and the construction of an environment in which creativity and proximity would generate new opportunities. The creation of a desirable and sustainable residential area, supported and boosted by the presence of the cultural centre, was seen as the material and aesthetic translation of development. The area had to become "world-class" and the project was meant to inspire similar initiatives elsewhere. In a lecture to the Architectural League of New York, architect Jo Noero, explained that:

When we finish with this project we will create an entirely new South African kind of city centre which will be culturally based, where people will live twenty-four hours per day, and it will be built on probably the poorest side of the city [...] very brave!<sup>27</sup>

The project was presented as an alternative form of welfare, expected to provide a marginalised population with an additional source of revenue, new employment opportunities and self-entrepreneurship possibilities. This idea was particularly appealing, as, at the end of the nineties, facing a growing economic crisis that was hurting the automotive sector, Port Elizabeth local government opted for economic diversification, trying to switch from a manufacturing to a service economy. Talking about this kind of project Sharon Zukin argues:

It is quite a wager this museum will create a tourist industry and that tourism will save the town from economic decline. But when the last factories have closed their gates and neither business nor government offers a different scenario, ordinary men and women can be persuaded that their city is ready to enter the symbolic economy.<sup>28</sup>

Her statement mirrors the words of a Red Location resident:

At that time, I was a young activist so I would go to public meetings about the museum. Before you own a house, you need to own the information; we would ask: what are you bringing here for us? Which will be your input? And what do you answer if we say that our priority is housing? But people would be easily convinced that the tourists would bring money to be reinvested there. The truth is that a museum is not something that creates revenue!<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with an official of the Directorate of Sport, Recreation, Art and Culture, 20/11/2015.

<sup>27</sup> J. Noero, Lecture to the Architectural league of New York, 2010, minute 54.00.

<sup>28</sup> Zukin 1995: 79.

<sup>29</sup> Interview held with a Red Location resident, 24/11/2015.



Finally, the project was supposed to help alleviate poverty using an indirect approach and with a long-term perspective. It would reinstate previously marginalised areas in the market economy, making those communities attractive to the market. In 1995, before the launch of the project, one of its main promoters published an article in a local newspaper with the title “Flounder or flourish” and argued that the area could either become even poorer and collapse, or flourish following the path of progress.<sup>30</sup> This discourse contained the typically neoliberal either-or argument, often summarised by the acronym TINA, “there is no alternative”.<sup>31</sup> Project promoters presented heritage commodification and the tourism sector as the single possible way forward, and the only appropriate form of development that could be applied to the township.

In South Africa, especially in the nineties, government would talk about development as a national goal and a state priority. For this reason, stepping into the development path seemed to be an act of civic responsibility, while protesting against the project meant boycotting the development of the whole nation.

In 2012, after a period in which the residents’ complaints became more vocal, the consultancy firm in charge of drafting the project’s business plan, commissioned “A developmental study to maximise the social and economic impact of the Red Location Cultural Precinct” from another consultancy firm in order to determine what could be the best way to use the RLMCP as a socio-economic leverage tool. The study’s final report described the relationship between the RLMCP and the residents as “strained [...] and not reciprocal”<sup>32</sup> and affirmed that the problem relied on the fact that the opportunities brought by the project were underutilised. At the same time, the report recommended that redistributionist logics should be avoided, according to which “other development must be on hold until the historically disadvantaged communities have appropriately been empowered; first redistribution and development, and then growth”.<sup>33</sup> The report suggested adopting an incremental logic that fixed long-term objectives and that would be “conditional on progress being made with regards [sic] to socio-economic development in the adjacent communities”.<sup>34</sup> In other words, the RLMCP project was not considered to be developmental, but the recommendation was that it becomes a development tool as a means of survival considering its location. In any case, no concrete solutions were provided other than the sole recommendation of “working out a mixture of initiatives that will satisfy community development needs and the pursuit of the art and culture mission”.<sup>35</sup> It was also stated that “the involvement of the local communities from conception to implementation [cannot] be over-emphasised, as that would encourage them to take ownership on the process”.<sup>36</sup> In this sentence it becomes clear how development was conceived as a process that must be led by the state via local government officials, with the aim of attracting the private sector. This, in turn, implied that the citizens’ duty was simply to follow the preordained paths.

The relationship between heritage commodification, urban regeneration and development is a very ambiguous one. The establishment of a link between these different interventions is not only a rhetorical trick: it produces at least three different effects. First of all, it leads to an understanding of development as a generic upliftment of the city’s economic situation, which means that the people that live close to the project sites are kept from thinking that the project only addresses them. Secondly, it superimposes economic inclusion on social inclusion, narrowing development down to the creation of local economies. Thirdly, it strengthens the idea that heritage can only be determined by the state. Heritage itself can

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<sup>30</sup>R. Riordan, “Flounder or flourish”, *The Herald*, 18/12/1995.

<sup>31</sup>G.P. Hart argues that “the so-called developmental local state has become a key locus of contradictions of the post-apartheid order, helping to expose the vulnerable underbelly of neoliberal capitalism” (Hart 2002).

<sup>32</sup>Development Partners and The Matrix 2013: 7.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*: 9.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*: 10.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*: 10.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*: 34.

become a commodity, one that can be shared and visited, and which can be comprehensible and marketable using international standards. In the case of South Africa, the establishment a relationship between heritage-making and development also responds to another need: concealing neoliberal politics with post-apartheid issues that still influence the socio-political landscape.

## **SOCIAL COHESION, ATTRACTIVENESS AND CONTROL IN NEOLIBERAL TIMES**

The idea behind the RLMCP was debated two years after the first democratic elections, in a moment in which international assets were changing and Mbeki's government was trying to consolidate the image of South Africa as a good player in the global economy. At the same time, it was also trying to portray its policies as aligned with those of Mandela's government. On the one hand, it was necessary to start the macro-economic reforms that the financial institutions considered to be mandatory, and on the other hand, previously disadvantaged people believed the African National Congress (ANC) promises, especially concerning the strengthening of social-economic rights and the rectification of apartheid imbalances in all social sectors.

The correction of inequalities was the other side of national reconciliation: forgiveness gave access to full citizenship in the new nation. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which addressed human rights violations perpetrated during apartheid, wrote in the Commission's final report: "My appeal is ultimately directed to us all, black and white together, to close the chapter on our past and to strive together for this beautiful and blessed land [...]. The Commission has done its share to promote national unity and reconciliation. Their achievement is up to each one of us".<sup>37</sup> In exchange for forgiveness, citizens gained the right to reparation and restitution. After the end of apartheid, the new government and the ones that followed struggled to find a framework that would give substance to restitution, defining what restitution could mean and who was entitled to benefit from it.<sup>38</sup> Pier Paolo Portinaro states that, in the case of massive violation of human rights, the number of potential victims explodes, as it is impossible to define the scope of those events.<sup>39</sup> For instance, it can be easily argued that socio-economic inequalities generated by the apartheid regime still affect the lives of those who were born after apartheid ended, but it is much more difficult to quantify to what extent they affect them or calculate this effect individually. This is why, in South Africa, governments has fallen back on collective and symbolic reparation.

The RLMCP was consequently presented by its promoters as a form of collective reparation for Red Location community, whose members had fought and suffered in the anti-apartheid struggle. The reparation was described as symbolic and ongoing, or incremental, as it coincided with the economic benefits brought by the project itself and by the progressive integration into the new nation and the new society. The commodification of history appeared to be the solution to two problems: poverty and segregation. In the absence of other resources in which to invest, the peculiarities of a place or specific events linked to a historical period could be used as economic leverages; making heritage marketable and accessible was also regarded as the easiest way of de-segregating a disadvantaged place.

In this sense, the RLMCP project was in line with what people expected from the post-apartheid leadership (to provide restitution to them in some way), and at the same time addressed a more neoliberal goal: to make the township more attractive and pave the way for the construction of a smart and mixed-housing

<sup>37</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2008: 23.

<sup>38</sup> The best example of this dilemma is the difficulties that all South African governments have had to face when dealing with land reform and land restitution.

<sup>39</sup> Portinaro 2011.

area that could be more suitable for a middle-class and, progressively, host workers employed in the creative economy and in the tertiary sector.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the aim was not just to transform Red Location into a safer and more attractive area, but to create a new reputation for the area, presenting it as an extraordinary place. Red Location had gone from being on the margins of politics and urban planning to a central, desirable enclave: a transportation hub, a remarkable spot, and an experimental area. Luc Boltanski and Arnoud Esquerre talk about this logic as one used to “induce heritage creation” while describing *capitalisme de l'enrichissement*, which is a form of capitalism based on a process of adding value to things and having an interest in luxury and exceptionality.<sup>41</sup>

With regard to the transformation of the township landscape and reputation, the project involved the creation of a cohesive, safe and open community. Its goal, which involved people's behaviour and morality, reflected a way of governing urban marginality that, again, served both post-apartheid and neoliberal logics. From the post-apartheid politics point of view, social cohesion and the creation of a non-racial society have been, and still are, topics at the top of the political agenda. In the 2012 government report “!ke e: /xarra //ke: creating a caring and proud society. A national strategy for developing an inclusive and a cohesive South African society”, the development of a sense of nationalism is intermingled with social cohesion and peace.<sup>42</sup> However, one struggles to find a clear and accepted definition of “social cohesion” and “nationalistic sense” in such documents. In the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality sustainable planning guide,<sup>43</sup> social cohesion is related to the idea of proximity, mutual control, mutual trust and safety. In the RLMCP project, heritage-making was also seen as a way of strengthening social cohesion, as the museum was supposed to provide some kind of catharsis from past suffering,<sup>44</sup> and become a temple that embodied national values.<sup>45</sup> The RLMCP was supposed to be also a non-racial space, but the way in which the space was described in the project master plan of 2012 reflected the neoliberal idea of a place to “discipline the poor”<sup>46</sup> where the middle class could feel safe, rather than a place where racial barriers would not exist. The business plan states: “Functions here [at Red Location Museum] are genuinely non-racial. Probably because of the quality of the architecture and the excellent cleanliness and security in the area, this is a preferred township venue for non-racial events”.<sup>47</sup> According to this sentence, the main non-racial element of the project seems to be the fact that the project is located in a black township and that everybody, from anywhere in the city, can attend the events, and feel safe and at ease. Non-racialism ends up by making the space sterilized and anonymous, as Cherry noted in her museum review.<sup>48</sup>

The project also intended to rescue Red Location from collapse while reconnecting it to the city. Without denying the reality and the seriousness of Red Location's problems (unemployment, bad state of the houses, housing shortage, etc.), the project provided a blurred and distant vision of the current inhabitants. Problems in the area have been mostly explained using the argument of lack of connection and integration with the rest of the city. However, the inhabitants and those of the adjacent township are far from being disconnected with the city in social, economic or political terms. Red Location is very close to the city centre (about twenty minutes by public transport) and its residents are very aware of their positioning in city policies: during the recent protests, the members of the resident committee were

<sup>40</sup> This idea is repeated by many actors implied in the project, but it is also visible in J. Noero's social housing project drawings and in an artwork by J. Noero, A. Factor and D. Long, exhibited at the Biennale di Venezia and named *The Transformation of Red Location*, 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Boltanski and Esquerre 2017.

<sup>42</sup> DAC 2012.

<sup>43</sup> In 2001, Port Elizabeth, together with Despatch and Uitenhage, formed the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality.

<sup>44</sup> In the competition brief preface, Nceba Faku defines the project as “a catharsis for those who pent-up the anger and frustration birthed in the past, a window of insight into the plight of the inhabitants of this area” (Faku in Albrecht Heroldt Architects 1998).

<sup>45</sup> The Business Plan states: “the Museum is solemn and has a sense of shrine and pilgrimage” (Dojon Financial Services 2011b).

<sup>46</sup> Soss, Fording and Schram 2011.

<sup>47</sup> Dojon Financial Services 2011a: 17.

<sup>48</sup> Cherry 2012.

able to exploit their personal relations and contacts with local ANC members and municipality officials. At the same time, they were able to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the institutions they were related to and they succeeded in finding different strategies that would overcome the red tape. For instance, the seizure of the buildings is a successful strategy in itself, as it forced local government to respond to residents' claims immediately, bypassing normal procedures. The kind of integration that the project refers to implies the idea that township inhabitants are out of the city borders, when, in fact, they are undoubtedly part of the city.

Despite the fact that project promoters talk about township integration, the project is much more effective in governing social conflict. Silencing and excluding dissent seems to be the objective, especially when dissenting means criticising the path established by the government in the process of building a new nation. The RLMCP limits dissent by embodying and constructing a comprehensive pattern that determines how history must be remembered, the present lived, and the future imagined. Moreover, it provides a tangible representation of the presence of the state in the township and an indirect answer to those who claim that national and local government are leaving the needs of the poor unattended. The RLMCP is not only a tool for social control, but also a way to delegate state powers and responsibilities (in this case the responsibility to govern and solve the township development problems) to a third entity. It marks both state presence and state absence. This is why it can be said that, presented as a post-apartheid and transitional policy, the project is, for all intents and purposes, a neoliberal tool.

## **EQUALITY WITHOUT REDISTRIBUTION**

The RLMCP ends up enforcing formal equality while removing the question of redistribution from the political agenda. The ways in which the project shapes equality differ, and some are more explicit than others. Moreover, this equality is deceitful. Some of its characteristics derive from how citizenship was shaped in the immediate post-apartheid period, others, instead, come from how equality is constructed in neoliberal times.

A first conception of equality implies acknowledging the former oppression and its consequences. The project promoters justify having chosen Red Location as the project site by focusing on the suffering of its inhabitants and affirming that the local government has the responsibility of tackling the consequences of the apartheid regime. In this case, the promotion of equality and full-citizenship is linked to the status of victims or descendants of victims. If, on the one hand, the post-apartheid government had to recognise previous unjust actions, on the other, public services delivery, basic rights, compensation and redistribution end up overlapping when someone is given this status (it becomes more difficult to understand if the establishment of an efficient transport network or the construction of a school are acts of compensation or services that the state has the duty to deliver to its citizens).

The second way in which equality is pursued is by creating a sense of common belonging. Citizens can be equal when they feel part of the national community. The RLMCP ambition is to generate different opportunities for citizens to know and understand the interplay between local and national history, and to express their identity through art. Furthermore, the RLMCP aims to become a place rooted in South African democracy where citizens can feel at home regardless of their ethnicity, culture or religion. As a representation of a national community, the RLMCP is not only focused on citizens: it seeks to project on an international level a specific narrative of South Africa as a modern, dynamic and reconciled country. Despite this all-inclusive approach, many consider the RLMCP to be a project only for the township: for instance, a local public official commented: "I'm a white man, I will never go to the museum."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Interview held with a public official, 21/04/2015.

The commodification of residents' stories is also presented as a form of equality: the richness of their life stories counterbalances their poverty. Over the years, different activities have been organised in order to collect stories and objects related to the struggle and, recently, to ordinary township life in the past. The creation of the museum favours seeing memories as a form of economic resource. Of course, not everybody owns life stories that can be of interest to the museum, creating a sort of hierarchy between residents. Residents respond to the commodification of their memories by asking for money in exchange for the display of their stories, pictures, objects, etc.<sup>50</sup> Owning memory increases the power of certain residents in relation to the RLMCP and expands their margins for negotiation. For instance, one Red Location family protested after a photograph of its members had been displayed at the entrance of the museum, allegedly without their authorisation, and another resident asked for the restitution of one old Red Location barrack that had been used as an artefact and displayed outside the art gallery.

Another conception of equality is linked to the idea of individual responsibility. In theory, every citizen, without distinction, can benefit from the opportunities offered by the project and be included in it. This possibility is described as a matter of will, engagement and creativity. In practice, only artists, political and civic society activists and students have been involved in the activities organised in the cultural precinct. In order to improve the relationship between the RLMCP and the residents, the museum followed the latter's requests and organised different types of activities, such as sport tournaments, and have provided space in the precinct to host local associations. The museum staff has also been criticised for this choice.<sup>51</sup> Project promoters not only ask the residents to be engaged in the project's initiative: they seek their support and adherence to its goals and visions. This project, like other forms of neoliberal management,<sup>52</sup> relies on committed and passionate people. In turn, residents ask for real jobs and not volunteering opportunities.

Lastly, township transformation and the creation of a mixed housing neighbourhood are seen as efforts to reach equality: the middle-class resident is the ideal one, and the perfect city becomes an improved version of residential suburbs that is more liveable and sustainable, but where security is a priority and extreme poverty is invisible. Although residents did not oppose urban regeneration itself - throughout the different waves of protests they raised all sorts of claims in relation to roads, pavements, lack of services and obsolete sewage systems - they expressed their concerns regarding an imposed transformation process in which they were not given the chance to choose the priorities. In sum, residents rejected equality without participation.

A common trend among these ways in which equality is presented is that the question of redistribution is constantly bypassed. The various business projects and reports that have been produced regarding the RLMCP seem to suggest that poverty is the status of those people that live at the margins of market and society, and whose living conditions impede the realisation of true citizenship. The solution, then, is to reconnect them to the centre and integrate them in the city's economic system, while making their environment appealing and welcoming for outsiders. Heritage-making and history commodification are then seen as indispensable tools. In fact, politically, they are perceived as means instead of goals.

The claims of residents challenge the vision of poverty as half-citizenship: it is by virtue of their full citizenship that they feel entitled to take ownership of the project and it is because they are aware of the interplay between post-apartheid politics and neoliberal policies, that they claim that priority must be given to housing projects. Resident committees take ownership of the project promoters' discourse of the project as reparation: it is precisely in the name of reparation and progress that they claim that their

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<sup>50</sup> See T. Timsethe, "Struggle artifacts sought for museum exhibition", *The Herald*, 14/03/2007 and A. Williams, "Homeless man wants his shack back from museum", *The Herald*, 10/09/2014.

<sup>51</sup> Interview held with a member of the Red Location museum staff, 16/03/2015.

<sup>52</sup> On this subject, see Hibou 2015.

houses must be fixed. Moreover, by addressing different institutional stakeholders, they address poverty as a collective and a state responsibility, and as a signal of state disengagement.

While the state sets itself apart from issues of social justice and redistribution by labelling them as obsolete, it gets involved when it comes to efficiently exploiting all the available resources. One of the project promoters said “I quote Keynes: the state must deliver economic efficiency, social justice, individual freedom. We have achieved the last two and we need to concentrate on the first one.”<sup>53</sup>

A paternalistic position that sees the local government as the agent in charge of choosing the best path to progress is combined with the political need of pacifying and empowering the poor. The RLMCP project seems to represent the idea of dispossession of David Harvey and Julia Elyachar.<sup>54</sup> The latter underlines how “part of what is dispossessed [...] is the power to decide what matters or, in other terms, what is value”.<sup>55</sup> This is perhaps why, in her museum review, Dorelle Sapere, an official of the Nelson Mandela Bay Development Agency, states that: “The RLMCP is a magnificent set of buildings but largely superimposed on a community as layers of another reality”.<sup>56</sup> In this sense, the different claims of the residents regarding the project are neither wrong nor out of context; instead, most likely, heritage-making projects are just not the adequate answer to development, social justice and redistribution matters.

## BEYOND THE RHETORIC OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE

Scholars and officials tend to assess heritage-making and development projects such as the RLMCP by focusing on if and how the projects improve income and living conditions of the people residing nearby, and on if and how the projects satisfy international standards in terms of exhibition and display methods, tourism facilities and access.

Residents' complaints are then described as signs of “project failure”, implying that, if the promoters and the project staff had taken the right path and made the right choices, everything would have taken place smoothly and the project would have successfully linked heritage-making, history collection, job creation, civic awareness and economic growth. In these cases, a win-win scenario is implicitly depicted, but it can only take place if everyone plays by the rules.

However, the case of the RLMCP shows how different factors are combined and how a project that is presented as developmental has, in fact, other goals that are not hidden or explicit, but just not shared by all the actors, and which depend on the need to conceal different policies. There is no actual hidden agenda, but, heritage-making projects often have more than one agenda, as they are conceived at the intersection of various events and respond to different choices. Represented as light interventions, heritage-making projects are actually vigorous and meaningful governmental actions that have different effects, some of which are unpredictable.

Depicting heritage-making projects as development policies is often a way to combine state involvement in the economic realm and state retreat from the social realm. That is why, from a political perspective, it is incautious and probably unwise, to analyse such projects in terms of “failure” or “success”. The project's failure or success must not be found in the achievement of the alleged project goals, but instead in the extent to which local political leaders are able to present the intervention as consensual and intrinsically positive, with the ability of distributing its success and good reputation (but not the wealth generated by them) among all the interested parties.

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with one of the project promoters, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> Harvey 2004 and Elyachar 2005.

<sup>55</sup> Elyachar 2005: 8.

<sup>56</sup> Sapere in Development Partners and The Matrix 2013.

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**Egalité sans redistribution en Afrique du Sud**  
Politiques de développement et marchandisation du patrimoine à Red Location  
**Résumé**

Le projet de musée et de centre culturel de Red Location, dans la périphérie de Port Elizabeth, invite à s'interroger sur la relation ambiguë qu'entretiennent projets patrimoniaux et politiques de développement. A partir d'une analyse des descriptions et présentations faites par les promoteurs de ce projet comme des mouvements de protestation des habitants de Red Location, cet article montre en quoi cette ambiguïté est générée par une conception néolibérale du développement combinant à la fois intervention et retrait de l'Etat. Dans une logique d'intervention étatique, le projet renvoie à l'engagement du gouvernement de construire la cité et la nation postapartheid ; dans une logique de retrait de l'Etat, il délègue aux activités touristiques, culturelles et patrimoniales la tâche de résoudre les problèmes sociaux-économiques. En définitive, en tant qu'instrument de politique néolibérale, le projet de Red Location vise à promouvoir l'égalité des citoyens tout en réduisant au silence tout discours sur la redistribution.

**The equality without redistribution**  
Development politics and heritage commodification in Red Location, South Africa

Based on a review of the Red Location Museum and Cultural Precinct project in Red Location, Port Elizabeth, this paper questions the ambiguous relationship between heritage-making projects and development policies. Analysing project descriptions and presentations by its promoters, as well as the protests of Red Location inhabitants, this paper shows how this ambiguity is caused by the adoption of a neoliberal conception of development, which combines both state involvement and state retreat. As a form of state involvement, the project embodies the government commitment to constructing a post-apartheid city and a national community; as a form of state retreat, the project delegates the task of finding a solution to socio-economic problems to tourism and cultural/heritage activities. Ultimately, as a neoliberal tool, the project seeks to promote equality among citizens while silencing all redistribution discourses.

**Mots clés**

Afrique du Sud ; développement ; égalité ; néolibéralisme ; patrimoine ; postapartheid ; protestations ; Red Location Museum ; rénovation urbaine.

**Keywords**

Development; equality; heritage; neoliberalism; post-Apartheid; protests; Red Location Museum; South Africa; urban renewal.