

ARTICLE

Makhanda: reflections of past, present and future

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Abstract

The decomposition of milk is the fermentation of sore-milk. The repining of sore-milk is the readiness of the cream. So are many norms of the history of Makhanda. Once in these lands we were brothers and sisters living together in harmony. Once in these lands we fought. We have done it in fighting the injustices of the past. Today we continue to fight for transformation that is inclusive. And tomorrow we reconnect all the threads, and know from a deeper place that we have always been brothers and sisters. The trail of tears is over. The home coming is now. This article is a journey for all. It is a celebration for earth creatures. For we have made the mark.

Introduction

Contemplating on the remains of the tar roads in Makhanda, potholes and donkeys are a norm. The dust in the air of the town breeds a world of secrets and wonders that appears during winter. Home to many earth walkers, and a melting pot of cultures through the annual national arts festival, Makhanda is a prominent city in the Eastern Cape of South Africa – a city that has risen out of Grahamstown, Grahamstown known for its horrors of a past that is a reminder of pain and suffering of not only indigenous people but also loss of land, including African traditional leadership. Makhanda remains a representation of hope out of despair. The name Makhanda in IsiXhosa can be translated in many ways, from the gridding of stone to the hard-headed spirit. To its residents the name Makhanda is a symbol of hope to reclaim what has been lost and transform what has existed for decades from the rise of colonialism, the apartheid regime, to the spirits of reconciliation under democracy.

Like many cities, early mornings in Makhanda are characterised by cold breezes accompanied by drops of showery clouds as the seasons alters. Miasma travels with the light of an early rising sun. The silent streets from Makhanda East to West, from the streets of Fingo Village, Tanti, Joza Extensions, Enkanini, Ghost-town, Hill 60, to High Street, Fitzroy, Somerset Street and Albany road, lament for all that has been lost as people dream in their hidden sacred cocoons called homes, at times, for some, they pelt in the comforts of their own early morning rituals. For some strange reason

the town continues to transmit symbols that haunts it – 1820 Settlers monument, Elizabeth Salt statue, the old goal, Provost prison to mention a few. The awareness of the existence embedded in these symbols form norms that are of a ritual/reality of an everyday life inherited from the past. As soon as the first light of the day appears, its current diverse generation is exposed to the contested, distorted and unsettling remains of the past. When the first star of evening unfolds the city sleeps in longing to heal the wounds of the past.

Makhanda: Earliest times to the arrival of the 1820 settlers

There is not much that is recorded of how life was in Makhanda precolonial times. The history of town is always known by its diverse communal arrangement. There are few limited historical sources that gives a clear understanding of how nature and development life was in Makhanda prior colonialism. The current known city of Makhanda, has its long-distorted history which is contested in many perspectives and methods of study. From palaeoanthropology works, historians, journalists and artists including the public to several names of the town (eRhini, Grahamstown, City of Saints, and Settlers City) that carries symbols of the town that continue to haunt it in current socio-political issues..

Like many towns in South Africa, Makhanda has its own layers of history. Layers of history with a long legacy that is of a time that once was (and continue to

exist), a time that has long disappeared through generational breaches and ascending of contemporary ecosphere. From the life of animals, *abaTwa* (San, Bushmen), Khoekhoen (Khoi, Khoisan), *Inqua* empire (near Graaf Reinet), Gonaqua (Khoekhoe + Xhosa), *AmaNtinde*, *Imidange*, *amaMbalu*, *AmaGqunukwebe*, *Ruiter* (Khoekhoen from Western Cape), *Rharhabe* Dutch-speakers, *Ndlambe*, English, *Tswana*-speakers (from the interior), *amaMbo* (Mfengu), *amaXhosa* (work-seekers), to Indians, Students (Private schools, Rhodes from 1914), National Arts Festival visitors, Traders from afar (Somali's, Pakistani's, etc.)

In its (Makhanda) earlier times, from the 1700s, the existence of humans in Makhanda area is dated to the presence of Bushmen and Hottentots, who lived and tilled the land until the arrival of the amaXhosa and Europeans, who for a moment lived in harmony like brothers but today are known to have a long history of Frontier wars. An area without name in existing written history. But the area is famously recognized in recorded history, as an area with sour grass, streams of water from river (Kowie River) to natural strings, wild animals (leopards, quagga, wildebeest and others) between present day city of Port Elizabeth and the Fish River stream that runs in Pikoli mountains in Peddie. Uncontaminated lands that animals and autochthons feed from.

The colonial history of Makhanda claims that in the late the 1700s, a number of migrants started to insinuate the area, from amaXhosa under the leadership of chief Rharhabe lineage, son of King Phalo, who clashed excessively with the San and the Boer (Dutch farmer). When the amaXhosa settled in Makhanda, they resided as a nation, with herds of cattle and knowledge of growing crops, governed by their customs and traditions. They live alongside the Dutch, San and Khoe including many clans that were associated with amaXhosa chieftaincy. Men were fond of their cattle which they nurtured. Women and children survived through milk and crops from their fields. Together they lived in different and the only thing that connected them were the lands and livestock. There were a number of disputes and conflicts that existed amongst the amaXhosa (internal), the Dutch, San and Khoe but the in the end there was sense of harmony until the arrival of the British in South Africa.

In the early nineteenth century, imperial Britain established its brutal military base (known today as Fort England, a mental institution) in the land, and this completely contaminated and altered not just the landscape, but also altered frontier relations of the area by erasing and ridiculing the remains of the physical appearance, dress, diet, medicine, defence and weaponry, religion and magic, law, economy, foreign relation, trade and language (Tisani, 2000) with decades of contestations and a history of bloodshed.

As historical events occur and changes in the amaXhosa community, a system of norms to elucidate the past impacted the people of Makhanda to take a different but unavoidable choice to adapt in a new world that is emerged. A world shaped by ideas and views of the British dominance. In the relevance of the many events that occurred in 1811/12, 1819 22nd April progression that retaliations of the British policies that has prevailed to shapes South Africa today. A world built in stones of monuments of conquest. Policies and laws that continues to deprive the many South Africans access to their ancestral lands and the remaining traces of the past. Sacredness that remains in the spirit of existing royal houses of the amaXhosa oral tradition.

The city of Makhanda can never be avoided in understanding the history of South Africa from the emerging of colonialism through post-colonial period that gave birth to the apartheid regime and present day democratic policies that govern the people. A city that is known to have witnessed a number of pivotal moments which have left distorted and unsettling memory of the past in the history of South Africa.



Figure 1. 1820 Settlers National Monument

Which we can learn from today. Moments that have shaped the land from 1811/12 expulsion of the amaXhosa from the Zuurveld. This is the moment of the fourth frontier war of 22nd April 1819 between the amaXhosa and the British empire, and 1820 Settlers that arrived as an occupying force. These moments are significant in understanding the history of the town and the legacy that continues to exists with its norms.

Makhanda's own heritage is of diverse communities of people who have migrated from different parts of the world to settle in the land. Prior to the arrival of the 1820 settlers, Makhanda was known as Graham's town (named after Colonel John Graham). A name that was once celebrated in the past but today it is a reminder of many atrocities. For most residents of the town, this name is a living legacy of despair.

As a young boy raised in the town the 1820 Settlers Monument represents a symbol of a domination and control, and its unique physical location makes it a true surveillance, camera, casting, its shadows on every part of the land. It stands high in Makhanda watching every building, every movement of people, peeping into private affairs of every conceivable variety. Its existence can never be avoided. An image of a ship designed building, with a bronze image of a statues carrying chisel with a diamond shaped pick. I could not help but to fear the place, not wanting to visit or even stand close to it. My earliest memory of visiting it was during high school when my school was invited to be part of Science Festival. I got to stand close to the building not wanting to enter out of fear. I never knew what triggered this fear I had of this building as a child. Despite my childhood fear, I became fond of the work done by people working in the building today.

The 1820 Settlers National Monument today is home to the Grahamstown Foundation that has existed over the past five decades, ruining and enriching cultural and educational programme in South Africa at the same time. From the annual National Arts Festival to National Schools Festival, Eastern Cape Schools Festival, Science Festival, Masicule Music programme, Rhodes University graduation ceremony and many other functions, this sacred geometry building continue to intrigue and annoy, inspire and invoke memories of visitors of various backgrounds and persuasions.

The 1820 Settlers has its own past and its name carry an important date in the history of Makhanda. The year 1820 truly marks a turning point in the history of the land, for the arrival of the Settler will mould and shape not only the history of the Eastern Cape as it is now called, but also the entire country we now know as the republic of South Africa. The arrival of thousands of hungry and poor and landless settlers on a very strategic part of the continent seeking better conditions of life will transform all the norms and values of a whole nation, to the extent that by the close of the 20th century the indigenous people have been pushed to the background while British names and symbols predominate the surface.



Figure 2. Picture of Chief Makhanda

Although the 1820 Settlers National Monument is a memorial in honour to those who have contributed in the shaping of South Africa, one cannot deny the repercussions it has had and continue to have on past and present generations. For the youth today, it is a reminder of pain and suffering.

Makhanda is one of the most prominent historical figures in the history of the town. Today the town is named after his proclaimed heroic actions in retaliation of colonialism. Makhanda, a man known for gridding stones for medical purposes, with a persona of a hard-headed spirit, that only adhere to his voice was a true son of the land. Many myths and tales from oral tradition speak of Makhanda as a man of many worlds that became a high influence in his path, from traditional Khoe to the amaXhosa customs. He was exposed to the Christian missionaries and may be considered as half convert. Even today people of Makhanda have their own expression in communicating with each other using historical reference, '*Kuyoba njalo Ukuza kukaNxele*' (it will remain the same until Makhanda returns) '*Imbumbulu zojika zibengamazi*' (the bullets would turn to water) both having a similar meaning, *something that will never happen*. Makhanda is a significant historical figure that invokes both hate and love among his people. As chief Ndlambe's most trusted man he could see into the future and he held the prophecies of the land and the people. At the same time, he is an idealized figure that is hated because many believe he led the amaXhosa nation to their own downfall because his prophecies (the bullets would turn to water) was exploited by the British much to the detriment of the amaXhosa.

In the ensuing combat of 22nd April 1819, the amaXhosa were outwitted and subsequently suffered the most traumatic defeat at the hands of the British, leaving a large number of the amaXhosa warrior dead and some injured. Later the same year Makhanda was arrested and sent to Robben Island. Myths assert that Makhanda drowned trying to escape Robben Island and his body was never found.

These events paved the way for the arrival of 1820 settlers. These were not just any settlers: they were hungry, poor, unemployed and emaciated migrants that lacked interest for the diverse way of life in Makhanda. Their main mission was to dominate, kill, and take away from the locals all that can be stolen and appropriated. This is the memoir that now stands tall looking over the entire land as the 1820 Settlers National Monument.

Decades of wars considered to be frontier wars between the amaXhosa and the British lasted until late 1879. One would assert the alteration of norms shaped by conflicts and bloodshed to the long-suffering of the people completely altered

the laws and policies of the land to the establishment of the institutions and structures that continue to shape the history of South Africa today, from the transitional period of the English (British) to the Afrikaans (apartheid regime).

In 1948 the monsters of the National Party took over the entire land that we now call South Africa and institutionalised all the atrocities that had gone on in the previous century with their system of racial segregation. The Group Areas Act introduced in 1950 separated homes and sanctuaries for Indians, Coloured and African communities. This monumental time of the Group Areas Act in Makhanda served to displace and destroy the foundation and the spirit of many diverse communities. People of Fingo village and Kowie street continue to remember the forced removal of people who were unified by common lived experiences under the policies and institutions of the apartheid administration. In spite of these traumatic experiences for the people who lived in Fingo village and Kowie street, the spirit of togetherness and hope remains in hearts and memories of the people. There is always hope in despair.

As we enter the new dawn of the fifth world, there is hope in the liberation of the people through unity to build and transform South Africa to move beyond colonial and apartheid legacy. The ideals of the founding fathers of modern South Africa as a rainbow nation post 27 April 1994 is yet to be realised but we are now closer to that ideal than any other moment in our history. This is evidently reflected in the willingness to re-engage and chart a new course. In 2007 *Proceedings of the Provincial Summit on Transformation of Place Names in the Eastern Cape: Reclaiming human dignity through transformation of place names* led to the notion of multiple narratives that opened up discussions for healing an unjust past to shape the grievances of the present, and above all to look up to a new and brighter future.

The making of modern South African history

Makhanda is home of the creative and historical. Makhanda is home of the National Arts Festival, the largest gathering of creative talent on the African continent. The unique historical setting of Makhanda makes it a melting pot of the meeting of cultures a long history that started with the interaction of the Dutch, British, Missionaries, Khoekhoe, Khoe, San, KhoeSan, including the amaXhosa paramountcy of the King Phalo lineage from amaNdlambe to amaNgqika. The unresolved tensions created by these interactions left a legacy of a long history of wars between amaXhosa and the British, with repercussions that are still alive today as they were first enacted. The fall of the amaXhosa under the leadership of Ndlambe including Ngqika created a leadership void that has not yet been filled in the soul of the Xhosa nation. The demise of amaXhosa, a nation that once was the fiercest nation of its time left its next generation trying to reclaim and rescript its own history from many hostilities and norms that continue to rise.

Makhanda is made of many secrets and wonders of people and the history that has existed since the beginning of time regardless of how it is transmitted to present generations. People living in Makhanda have come in contact many times in many ways to know the fuming racial and inequality tensions that continue to haunt its community. From historical events (of expulsion, wars, apartheid regime and democracy), the spirit of togetherness is still under reconstruction as the city was once a united city in diversity.

Today the city remembers stories of the retaliation and conquest, stories of being forcefully removed from their homes with friends and families. Norms continued shape and evolve in the community. Many have settled in the city and those who were born and raised in the city have left Makhanda in

avoidance of memories of the painful past. One would look at these norms as not just like any other socio-economic-political representation and repercussions of all the isms extracted from the past, but also as a narrative that connects the present discourses that shapes Makhanda. The history of Makhanda has established its continuous rebirth as a symbol of transformation that South Africa can learn from with layers of history as the proverbial onion that remains to be uncovered. In spite of these bifurcations, Makhanda continue to strive to address the lament and wounds of the present through its past in numerous methods and viewpoints. It's been 209 years since the expulsion of its first diverse inhabitants. The town continues today to carry its traditions as it is today home of many institutions that allows people all over the world to find home away from home. Creating a diverse community that strive to fight recurring pattern of injustices from the past to the present and the future.

Conclusion

Makhanda has a long history, a history that its people continue to learn and continue to strive for peace. Pivotal events continue to adhere to ideas and symbols of despair that shapes the town. Tales and narratives of the history of Makhanda has arisen from its ashes to remind its residences of its past. The people of Makhanda have found hope in a history that is known for retaliation and the spirit of unity in diversity in seeking social cohesion in the present. Transformation that addresses the unsettling injustices of the past, searching together as unity in inclusiveness in the present and a brighter and more evolved future are the ideals that hold the greatest promise for all. In finding healing in the past and fighting to transform the present to alter the future, we do not have to forget the events of the past. At the same time however, those dramatic and traumatic events should not hold us back as a people, for we are truly different colours, one people as the great prophet, Lucky Dube taught us.

How can 201 years of painful memories be recovered in 26 years of democracy as present matters are arising? Potholes, water scarcity, poor service delivery, electricity, debts, corruption in municipal governance seem to be the new norm that needs unity of the people of Makhanda in creating inclusivity for a shared future. By addressing patterns of the past in existing institutions that continue to shape the present of Makhanda and healing the entire community in the spirit of oneness we can correct the mishaps of the past, live in peace and prosperity now, and look ahead to a brighter future together.

Reference

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About the Author



Masixole Zinzo Patrick Heshu was born and bred in Makhanda. He matriculated at Nombulelo Secondary School, after which he completed a Bachelor of Social Sciences degree, majoring in Drama, Industrial and Economic Sociology, and Politics and International Studies. He also completed an Honour's degree in Drama, specializing in Directing and Applied Theatre at Rhodes University. He is currently finishing his MA degree in History at Rhodes University; his research is titled 'ONE EVENT MULTIPLE NARRATIVES AND AUDIENCES: EXHUMING THE PAST THROUGH PERFORMANCE'. In 2017 he introduced and directed a historical tour called 'Battles-Iimfazwe: Transportation to the past' for the National Arts Festival in Makhanda, which won the Standard Bank 'Encore' Ovation award. He has won numerous awards for directing *'The Xhosa Chronicles'*, *'Umnqa-Never Defeated'*, *'Ntsiki Speaks'*, *'Dancing with the Dead'* amongst many more. Also, in 2018 he was invited in a Public History conference in Las Vegas, Nevada and Arizona State University in United States of America, to present methods of the importance of combining history and creative arts to produce new knowledge. In 2020 he was invited by the South African History Society Conference, his presentation title "When the Past meets the Present: An exploration creative history in relevance of 1819, 22nd April," where he discussed on how history can be used to speak the language of the present. He is the artistic Director of Zinzolwam Eastern Cape Theatre and a member of board of trustees at Albany Museum. He recently finished Producing, Directing and performed as an actor in a Film which is coming so on called 'Abenkolo-Men of Faith', a film which explores events leading to the Fifth Frontier War in the Eastern Cape, South Africa.