

Notes and Communications

Secrets, Lies, and History: Experiences of a Canadian Archivist in Hungary and South Africa

JOAN FAIRWEATHER

RÉSUMÉ Cet article est à la fois un examen de l'interne de dépôts d'archives privés d'Europe de l'Est et d'Afrique du Sud ainsi qu'une analyse du rôle critique des dépôts d'archives et des musées comme gardiens de la mémoire collective. Les expériences de l'auteure comme archiviste en audio-visuel, d'abord à Budapest, où elle a travaillé à la Open Society Archives créée par George Soros, et au Mayibuye Centre du Cap, fournissent une fenêtre unique sur des collections archivistiques hautement subversives et qui documentent les activités de deux régimes parmi les plus répressifs du XX^e siècle. Les contrastes et parallèles dans l'histoire récente de la Hongrie communiste et de l'Apartheid en Afrique du Sud offrent des exemples convaincants de la façon dont les histoires nationales sont modelées et contrôlées par les pouvoirs dominants. En vue de montrer leur nouvelle image de sociétés libérées, les historiens de ces deux pays doivent ré-examiner les documents du passé : parmi ceux-ci se trouvent des secrets bien gardés qui ont été soustraits à la connaissance du public ainsi que les mythes et mensonges qui ont été gravés dans la mémoire du public à coup de fréquentes répétitions.

ABSTRACT "Secrets, Lies and History: Experiences of a Canadian Archivist in Hungary and South Africa" is both an inside view of privately funded archival repositories in Eastern Europe and South Africa and an analysis of the critical role of archives and museums as the keepers of public memory. The experiences of the author as an audiovisual archivist, first in Budapest, where she worked at the Open Society Archives founded by George Soros, and then at Cape Town's Mayibuye Centre, provide a unique window on formerly subversive archival collections documenting the activities of two of the most repressive regimes of the twentieth century. The contrasts and parallels in the recent histories of Communist Hungary and Apartheid South Africa offer striking examples of how national histories are shaped and controlled by dominant powers. In order to reflect their new image as liberated societies, historians in both countries are faced with the task of re-examining the records of the past: the well-kept secrets that were withheld from public knowledge and the myths and lies that were fixed in public memory through frequent repetition.

I recently returned to Canada after working overseas for three years as an audiovisual archivist. After many years at the National Archives of Canada, the experience of working in privately funded archival institutions in Budapest and Cape Town offered fresh insights into the role of archives and the way

national histories are told and remembered. Both Hungary and South Africa are in the process of transformation as newly established democracies. Because of their recent experiences under repressive regimes, Hungarians and South Africans seldom view the past as a single narrative of facts and dates. Layers of political, ideological, and nationalistic interpretations must first be peeled away to expose the well-kept secrets that have been withheld from the public record and the downright lies that have been fixed in public memory through frequent repetition. The tendency to cover up or reshape the past is most dramatically apparent in South Africa, but it exists in Hungary as well. In Canada (as we know), the problem is less obvious but equally prevalent.

My job in Budapest resulted from an e-mail message I received in December 1995. George Soros, a Hungarian-born philanthropist in New York, was establishing a new archives associated with his university, the Central European University, in Budapest. The Open Society Institute in New York, which administers Soros's many foundations in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, was looking for an international team of archivists to set up this new archives. Among the areas of expertise they were looking for was someone experienced in handling audiovisual collections. In February 1996, I flew to Budapest to meet with the Director of the Open Society Archives, Trudy Huskamp Peterson. My contract as senior audiovisual archivist began in April.

George Soros, whose early experiences as a Jewish Hungarian during World War II and under communist rule had taught him about the oppressive power of closed societies, is a man with a vision. His dream for Hungary and other formerly communist countries (or closed societies) is to help them foster strong democratic structures to enable them to become, in the words of the Austrian philosopher Karl Popper, "open societies."¹ The primary mission of the Open Society Archives is to be a research centre for the study of communism, the Cold War, and human rights issues. The main users were students at the Central European University and scholars from Europe and the United States. Not only did the Open Society Archives offer them new avenues for research and intellectual debate about the past that had been shackled and silenced by totalitarian censorship, the material it housed was regarded as primarily subversive.

Apart from some unique primary sources such as *samizdat* documents from Russia (underground writings by anti-communist activists during the Stalinist

1 The term "open society" was coined by Henri Bergson in his book *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (London, 1932) but was given greater currency by Karl Popper in his book *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London, 1945). Popper showed that totalitarian ideologies like communism and Nazism have a common element: they claim to be in possession of the ultimate truth. Because the ultimate truth is beyond the reach of humankind, these ideologies must resort to oppression to impose their vision on society. (Extracted from an article by George Soros, "The Capitalist Threat," *Atlantic Monthly Magazine* (October 1996).

era), the main body of holdings at the Budapest archives consisted of textual documentation gathered by the Research Institute of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, anti-communist agencies active during the Cold War. Their daily broadcasts into each of the Soviet Bloc countries in their own languages were intended to counter the pro-communist propaganda that dominated the airwaves of Eastern European countries behind the Iron Curtain. After 1989, the Radios moved their headquarters from Munich to Prague and continued to broadcast into some of the former Soviet Bloc countries where communism was still deemed to be a threat to world peace. The Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty material deposited in Budapest included reports monitoring local communist broadcasts and texts of protest literature, poetry, and the subversive writings of dissidents within the various countries – an extraordinary collection of material documenting one of the most repressive and ruthless regimes of the twentieth century. However, the actual tapes of broadcasts during the Cold War – possibly an audiovisual archivist's dream collection – that had been promised to the Open Society Archives in Budapest were still being housed in Prague at the end of my year's contract.

The archivists working on the Radio's collections came from all the former Soviet countries – Russia, Siberia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Poland, Rumania, and Hungary, of course. They were mainly young graduates, in their thirties, many of them studying part-time at the Central European University. All spoke English and at least one other European language in addition to their own mother tongue. English was, of course, the language we worked in at the archives, being the common language of all the staff. My special assistant in the audiovisual section was a Hungarian woman named Zsuzsa Zádori. When Zsuzsa took maternity leave we hired another archivist to take her place and to work with a growing collection of Serbo-Croatian video tapes (related to the tragic conflict in the former Yugoslavia), Olga Manojlovic, from Belgrade.

During my year in Budapest, I got to know a number of Hungarians who gave me a window into their country's turbulent history, and who were extremely helpful professionally. One was a dynamic filmmaker, Ibolya Fekete, who had a dream of making a movie from amateur footage – subversive images of a history some people would prefer to remain hidden – that she was convinced still lay hidden under floorboards and in attics across Eastern Europe. Then there were two filmmakers who had actually gathered up vast amounts of footage taken during the communist era. They called their company the Black Box, evoking images of a camera and the “black box” of essential flight information after an air crash.

I was in Budapest in November 1996 for the fortieth anniversary of the 1956 uprising, a seminal event in Hungarian history. In October 1956, encouraged by anti-Soviet unrest in Poland, Hungarians rose up in revolt against the communist-led government of Mátyás Rákosi, resulting in a heavy loss of

lives and destruction of property (an example was the toppling of a huge statue of Stalin, a news image that was flashed around the world), as well as the exodus of 200,000 Hungarians who fled to the West. In a matter of days, the leader of the reform movement, Imre Nagy, had seized power and the Western nations stood poised to assist in the liberation of Hungary (or so the Voice of America broadcasts apparently assured Hungarians). But world events (notably the Suez Crisis) overtook the uprising in Hungary and the Soviet Union, in a show of power, stepped in with brutal force to crush the revolution. On 4 November 1956, with Soviet troops in Budapest, the new communist-led government of János Kádár was announced. Retribution for the 1956 uprising lasted for years, and hundreds were executed for essentially political offences. Although himself a former communist exile in Moscow, Imre Nagy was among those punished for his role in the uprising. He was sentenced to death in a secret trial and hanged on 16 June 1958.

The Open Society Archives mounted a fascinating exhibition drawing attention to the competing versions of history that characterized the post-1956 period in Hungary. The exhibition posed the question: was the uprising revolutionary or counter-revolutionary in nature? The issue was a complex one. Many Hungarian intellectuals and academics saw the events of 1956 as a revolution waged against the Stalinist-style Hungarian Working People's Party under Rákosi that came into power in 1948. Others regarded the uprising as a counter-revolution against the pro-communist, anti-fascist revolution that brought an end to German occupation at the end of World War II. A third interpretation argued that the real counter-revolution took place after the intervention of Soviet troops on 4 November 1956, when Kádár's Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government took power. The exhibition at the Archives portrayed the many layers of "secrets and lies" that were told to the Hungarian people in the years following the uprising: the denigration of certain communist leaders (like Imre Nagy) who had fallen out of favour with those in power and the promotion of others who were held up as paragons of virtue and given the status of heroes.

An interesting retelling of history took place on 16 June 1989 when the newly established democratic Hungarian Republic held a public reburial of the martyrs of 1956, including Imre Nagy and those executed with him. The exhumation, identification, and reburial of these controversial politicians in the Budapest Public Cemetery was an open acknowledgement of the deliberate distortions that had been laid on history by those in power. The honouring of Nagy and his colleagues in this way could be seen as confirmation of the revolutionary (as opposed to counter-revolutionary) nature of the events of 1956.²

2 For more details, see István Lázár, *An Illustrated History of Hungary* (Budapest, 1996), pp. 123–26.

The “1956” exhibition was organized by Professor István Rév, who taught Cold War history at the Central European University and was the Academic Director of the Open Society Archives. It was through Professor Rév’s important intervention on my behalf a few months later that funding became available from the Soros Foundation in New York for my second overseas appointment – this time in my own country of birth, South Africa.

Thanks to a generous grant administered by the Open Society Foundation for South Africa, an audiovisual conservation project was established at the Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in South Africa located at the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town. I was hired to organize and catalogue the Centre’s valuable film collection and to train an assistant audiovisual archivist. The following year, the Mayibuye Centre applied for and was granted additional funding for a follow-up project focussing on its extensive sound and oral history collection.

Like the Open Society Archives in Budapest, the Mayibuye Centre documented the history of another horribly repressive era in the twentieth century, the era of apartheid. Running almost parallel chronologically to the Cold War in Europe, the official policy of apartheid began after World War II and ended shortly after the fall of communism and collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989. This was no accident. Paradoxically, the Soviet Union had strongly supported the liberation struggle in South Africa and, when it crumbled, the apartheid state could no longer justify its claim to be the Western world’s bulwark against a communist take-over in Africa. The Afrikaner National Party, which took power in 1948, institutionalized racism in South Africa and imposed a reign of terror against its opponents (mainly the African majority). This situation provoked international sanctions and brought about civil chaos within the country. Buckling under internal and external pressure, the apartheid government released Nelson Mandela, leader of the most powerful opposition movement, the African National Congress, from prison in 1990. After four years of negotiations, the first non-racial, democratic elections were held in April 1994, marking the end of white supremacy and the dawn of a new era in South African history.

The idea that eventually developed into the Mayibuye Centre was first conceived in the late 1980s when some of the outward trappings of apartheid began to disintegrate. Signs denoting “whites only” beaches, park benches, public toilets, etc., were taken down, and some of the most blatantly racist legislation was removed from the books. At the University of the Western Cape (allocated for the so-called Coloured [mixed race] community under apartheid law), academics and student activists who were involved in the liberation struggle started to collect some of the historical memorabilia of the era. These visionaries foresaw a time when national amnesia would set in and people would forget – or deny – that apartheid had ever happened. Their idea was to preserve the history of their pain and the terrible battle they had fought

against the state that had denied them their birthright – to vote, buy land, and live and work where they chose in their own country – in fact, had denied them their very humanity.

The mandate of the Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in South Africa, which was officially established in 1992, was to recover aspects of South African history that had been neglected in the past. The primary focus was on all aspects of the apartheid system and the liberation struggle, and on social life and culture in South Africa. The name sums up its objective: Mayibuye is a popular slogan meaning “let it return” in the Xhosa and Zulu languages.

A major archival collection (comprising textual records, an enormous photo collection, films, and videos), which was returned to South Africa, came to the Centre from the International Defence and Aid Fund in London, an organization that raised over \$100 million U.S. over a thirty-year period for the legal defence of political prisoners in South Africa and aid for their families. IDAF, as it was known around the world, also published briefing papers and books, and produced films and television documentaries to educate the international community about the realities of apartheid and to counteract the effective pro-apartheid propaganda put out by the white government – much as the Radios were doing in Europe in their anti-communist broadcasts during the same period.

It was no accident of chance that brought me to the Mayibuye Centre. During the 1980s, at the height of apartheid repression in South Africa, I was involved in the work of IDAF through its Canadian committee, called IDAFSA (Canada), based in Ottawa. In 1988, I took a year’s leave of absence from the National Archives to work as a full-time staff member in its documentation library as information officer. I also served as vice-president of the board of directors for a number of years. When IDAF was unbanned with other anti-apartheid organizations in 1990 and closed its London office, IDAFSA (Canada) reconstituted itself into a new organization to raise Canadian funds and support for partner organizations inside South Africa. The Mayibuye Centre was one of these partner organizations.

My work at the Mayibuye Centre was at once back-breaking and exhilarating. If the audio-tape collection from the Radios in Prague seemed to be an audiovisual archivist’s dream collection, the film and sound collections I worked on in Cape Town were quite the opposite! The film collection, consisting of 800 cans of mainly 16mm footage was kept in a small storage room on the university campus. The room was freezing in winter and stiflingly hot in summer. There was no air conditioning available and no equipment to screen the material, not even a hand-winder! (Later the South African National Film and Sound Archives loaned us a winder and we purchased a second-hand editing table.) The material had arrived from London in 1991 and was simply left there to gather dust for six years. The Centre had neither the experienced staff nor funding to accession the films or bring them under even

the most rudimentary control. Lists existed for the video tapes (which were often edited versions of the titles represented in the film collection) and there was also a database that had come with the material from London. But this was of little use to researchers or filmmakers eager to have access to the extraordinary footage until the cans were properly identified, sorted, and numbered.

With the help of my assistant, an African librarian named Zabelo Mbita, the rows of dirty cans were cleaned and their contents identified, classified, and described. We prepared an accession register and an indexed Guide to the IDAF Film Collection. The catalogue descriptions for each film title were also entered in a national database of audiovisual material administered by the National Archives of South Africa. Being subversive material, banned under apartheid's sweeping censorship laws, some of the cans were difficult to identify because the labels gave no clue to the contents. One of them bore the label "All the World's a Stage." Mystified as to its identity, we later found out that the film had been shot in the 1950s by the brother of a leading anti-apartheid activist and member of the Communist Party of South Africa, Dr. Yusef Dadoo, and shipped to IDAF in London. The misleading title on the can was a deliberate ploy to deceive the South African customs officials! But we were required to do more than identify obscure footage. The Mayibuye Centre, in its haste to set up exhibits before its opening, had stored some of its most valuable footage behind glass display cases in the foyer. Imagine our surprise when we opened these cans and in one of them found priceless footage of a clandestine interview with Nelson Mandela conducted in 1961 by the BBC in London. Banned the year before, the African National Congress and its leaders had gone underground. Soon after the interview, Mandela was rearrested in South Africa and became "invisible and voiceless" for the next twenty-seven years.

I tried to establish liaisons with other archival organizations in South Africa, just as I had in Budapest. It was particularly interesting to make contact with the South African National Archives in Pretoria, a state institution that, under the previous regime, had been utterly hostile to the notion of a non-racial democracy and whose doors had been firmly closed to non-white students and researchers. It was reported that archival employees had spent the final months under white minority rule at the shredding machine, destroying vital official records relating to the activities of many government departments. Although post-apartheid South Africa rejected a Nuremberg Trial model for dealing with the perpetrators of war crimes and human rights abuses under apartheid, it was probably fear of a retributive backlash that prompted this purge of official documents before the 1994 elections. Many of the human rights abuses and atrocities committed by officials and ministers in the apartheid government became public knowledge in the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that was set up by the new

government in 1996. However, only one senior government official³ came forward to ask for amnesty, and few, if any, will be brought to justice for their part in the vicious deeds that were committed under their explicit orders.

During my second year at the Mayibuye Centre, while working with the audio-tape collection, I developed an extremely helpful relationship with another formerly state-run institution that had played a major and often sinister role in upholding the aims and objectives of the apartheid regime, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). The woman who now heads the corporation's sound archives, Ilsa Assman, became a good friend, sharing many common interests and concerns, particularly in the area of oral history. We both attended an oral history conference in Johannesburg, which profiled the plethora of projects on a wide range of issues taking place all over the country. Oral history is recognized as a vital access point to the stories and experiences of the vast majority of people who lived, and died, under apartheid. The Mayibuye Centre's collection of oral history interviews of returned political exiles is among its most treasured audio collections. The personal accounts of childhood starvation and disease in the notorious homelands, of police brutality and prison torture, and of military training and armed struggle fought across the borders bear vivid testimony to the enormous price that was paid for democracy in South Africa. Like our friends at the National Film and Sound Archives, Ilsa Assman was determined to rectify the sins of omission and commission of the SABC's past and to work more closely with repositories like the Mayibuye Centre where the voices of the formerly oppressed and presently disadvantaged majority are being recorded and preserved for posterity.

Reorganization and an infusion of new ideas and professional encouragement from the international archival community have brought a new image to the South African National Archives. Canada's Terry Cook has played a special role in this transformation process and has earned a revered status in South African archival circles. But nothing can bring back the documents that were destroyed in the archival purge prior to the elections; nothing can recover the lost years, even centuries of white domination when acquisition policies denied the very existence of African leaders and luminaries, and the recorded history of the country distorted or ignored the histories of its original inhabitants. South African museums are also slowly getting the message that their blatantly Eurocentric exhibitions and collections are completely inappropriate in the new South Africa and harmful to the construction of a harmonious and integrated society.

A few weeks before I left Cape Town in August 1999, I attended a conference held by the South African Historical Society entitled "Not Telling: Secrets, Lies, and History." Many of the papers presented there exposed the

3 This was Adriaan Vlok, Minister of Law and Order, who was given amnesty for authorizing the bombing of the offices of the S.A. Trade Union Confederation and the South African Council of Churches.

failure of former representations of South African history to acknowledge and honour the contributions of the vast majority of the population – black South Africans. Moreover, case study after case study brought out the hidden secrets of exploitation and evil manipulation, which characterized archival and museum practices in South Africa over a great many decades. Among the most compelling was the example given by a coloured historian, Professor Ciraj Rassool, who spoke about the chilling practice of exhuming the bodies of Khoikhoi people authorized by the South African Museum in Cape Town (and other highly respected South African institutions) in the interests of pseudo-scientific research determined to establish “proof” of white racial superiority. The study of the anatomy of these so-called primitive people became an obsession in South Africa in the early part of the twentieth century, and the museum vaults are filled with hundreds of caskets containing the skeletons of indigenous people. The descendants of people whose graves had been desecrated were calling for the proper reburial of their ancestors as a gesture of respect and reconciliation on the part of the museum.

There are at least two post-apartheid museums in Cape Town that are committed to presenting an alternate view of history – the “People’s History” – so long neglected or deliberately suppressed in South Africa. I had close working relationships with them both during my time at the Mayibuye Centre. The first is the District Six Museum in downtown Cape Town; the second is the Robben Island Museum about seventeen miles off the mainland.

District Six Museum is an attempt to reclaim the history of a community that was destroyed (literally bulldozed out of existence) in 1966 when the apartheid government brought in the *Group Areas Act*, an exercise in social engineering that involved the forced relocation of millions of non-white South Africans. District Six, a large area at the foot of Table Mountain which was inhabited for a century by mainly coloured South Africans, was declared a “white” area and the people were forced to move to bleak townships designated for “coloureds” further out of the city limits. The museum is situated in a former Methodist Mission building and displays archival photographs of houses and people who were once part of a vibrant community. Rows and rows of street signs, which were taken down by a white municipal worker in 1966 (but not destroyed although he was ordered to do so) are displayed above a blown-up map of the district that covers the hall floor. Oral histories are an important part of the exhibition, the memories of older people being particularly revered. Visitors to the Museum who never knew District Six can now witness a history in which they were either complicit (as white South Africans) or which had been previously suppressed and denied them.

Visited by boatloads of tourists every day, the Robben Island Museum⁴ is

4 Robben Island was declared a United Nations’ World Heritage Site in January 2000.

a forty-minute ferry ride from Cape Town's fashionable Victoria & Alfred Waterfront shopping complex. Once the prison site where Nelson Mandela and thousands of anti-apartheid activists and leaders were incarcerated, the Robben Island Museum has become a national symbol of hope and victory. An extraordinary feature of the museum is that the tour guides are all former inmates. During the apartheid era, embarrassed by the hell-hole image of Robben Island internationally, the government proposed to convert it into a holiday resort or nature reserve. This was strongly opposed by anti-apartheid activists (particularly historians at the University of the Western Cape), who had dreams of establishing an educative museum on the island. The debate was essentially a contest over public memory of the island and what it stood for. For the resort planners, publicly remembering the island's natural beauty allowed public forgetting of its political role. For the museum planners, publicly remembering the horrors of the prison was part of a project of reconstruction and celebration. Finally, the museum builders won the day. But striking a balance between preserving the past as a frozen image in time and moving on to present the dynamic relationship among past, present, and future is a dilemma which Robben Island staff will be wrestling with for some time to come. Chairperson of the Robben Island Museum Board, Ahmed Kathrada, who was himself a prisoner on Robben Island for many years, eloquently expresses the vision for the museum that he and others cherish:

While we will not forget the brutality of apartheid, we will not want Robben Island to be a monument of our hardship and suffering. We would want it to be a triumph of the human spirit against the forces of evil; a triumph of freedom and human dignity over repression and humiliation; a triumph of wisdom and largeness of spirit against small minds and pettiness; a triumph of courage and determination over human frailty and weakness; a triumph of non-racialism over bigotry and intolerance; a triumph of the new South Africa over the old."⁵

In April 2000 the Mayibuye Centre was amalgamated with the Robben Island Museum as its archival wing. The Centre's staff (including its former Director, Professor André Odendaal⁶) has already played a major role in the establishment of the Museum, and its holdings comprise a rich and remarkable historical resource. When political prisoners were released from Robben Island in the early 1990s, they streamed off the boats carrying boxes of mementoes from their years of incarceration. These boxes were deposited at

5 From the Opening Address by Ahmed M. Kathrada of the Robben Island Exhibition "EsiQithini," South African Museum, Cape Town, 26 May 1993. Published in "The Robben Island Exhibition EsiQithini" (Cape Town, 1996), pp. 10–11.

6 Professor André Odendaal is now the Director of the Robben Island Museum.

the Mayibuye Centre and became known as the “Apple Box Collection.” The boxes contained soccer jerseys, sports equipment, and a wide range of items depicting prison life, but most important of all they held pages and pages of handwritten “history books” (retold from the perspective of the oppressed) and texts of speeches, writings, and literature on the liberation struggle. These documents were passed from cell to cell – written, often on flimsy toilet paper, by many different men, judging from the variety of handwriting styles represented – and kept hidden from the eagle eyes of the prison guards. Apart from the well-organized and widely used Historical Papers Collection, Robben Island Museum also has access to the Centre’s extensive multi-media collection of photographs, artefacts, and art work, as well as films, videos, and audio recordings documenting South Africa’s painful past. The oral history collection has particular relevance for the museum’s “Cell Stories” project, which aims, before they are lost forever, to capture the stories of hundreds of political prisoners, who spent most of their adult lives on the Island.

The most powerful and at the same time the most controversial forum for conflicting versions of the past and visions for the future in South Africa today is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which published its interim report in October 1998. The records of the TRC hearings (housed at the South African National Archives) became in a very special sense the repository of South African memory. Mandated to uncover the truth about South Africa’s recent past in order to facilitate the process of national healing and reconciliation, the TRC was established in 1996 as part of the negotiated settlement between the liberation movement and the apartheid government. As one founding document of the TRC put it: “once we know the truth, we can begin to put the past behind us and move with hope into a peaceful future.” To heal a nation deeply scarred by racial divisions and human rights abuses is no simple matter. The impact of the TRC on South African society has yet to be determined, but there is no doubt that the hearings starkly revealed what happens when a society loses its humanity, sense of shame, and moral outrage. The vivid images of television coverage and the five volumes of raw data in the published report have etched into the common conscience an awareness of apartheid’s crimes against humanity that most white South Africans refused to believe and the apartheid regime had consistently denied.

How future generations of South Africans will remember the past – which memories will prevail and which will be suppressed – remains to be seen. The reconstruction of South Africa’s past to reflect its new “rainbow” image presents a wide range of problems strenuously debated at academic conferences and explored in a number of recent publications. Eager to shake off the myths and distortions of the past perpetuated by the ruling white minority, South African historians are faced with a new set of conflicting versions of history representing the political agendas of the newly empowered majority. Like the 1989 reburial of the martyrs of 1956 in Budapest, the past can never be permanently laid to

rest. It must continuously be unearthed and re-examined, and the gaps, silences, and hidden messages investigated, if the “truth” is ever to be told.

As the keepers of public memory, archivists and archival institutions, whether they are in Hungary, South Africa, or Canada, have the responsibility to preserve a balanced and inclusive record of the past. Only then will historians be able to uncover the secrets and lies that often lie beneath the surface – the deliberate deceptions that are the hallmark of dominant societies worldwide.