MAKING A COMIC ABOUT WESTBURY'S ANTI-APARTHEID ACTIVIST, FLORRIE DANIELS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how a comic about the anti-apartheid activist, Florrie Daniels, may be used to de-marginalise the Westbury community. Further, I propose the possible extension of this method to other communities and argue that marginalisation can be addressed with the distribution of a community's positive heritage. Comics are the most accessible medium for the propagation of education; by exploiting their innate ability to convey narratives across multiple physical and intellectual barriers, sustainable community resilience and upliftment may be achieved.

1. INTRODUCTION - WESTBURY'S MARGINALISATION INCONTEXT

Westbury neighbours the historically significant Sophiatown, in Johannesburg, South Africa. Its name changed from "Western Native Township," to "Western Coloured Township" in 1962 after apartheid'srace-based evictions between 1955 and 1960 demarcated the areas for coloureds[1] (Brindley, 1976). It was renamed "Westbury" in the 1980s (Payne, 1987).

Like most non-white communities[2] during apartheid, Westbury suffered municipal neglect and political oppression. From the 1970s the area faced severe overcrowding due to a housing backlog; which had been building up since the 1960 forced removal. A series of expansion restricting by-laws exacerbated this. The apartheid government made cursory attempts to tackle these issues but did too little too late for any lasting impact (Dannhauser, 2018; Payne, 1987; Westbury community knowledge holders, 2018).

In reaction to the area's poor municipal development, a number of Westbury's residents organised themselves into the "Westbury Residents Action Committee" (WRAC) in 1981. This civic body was led by a beloved community 'grandmother', Florrie Daniels. WRAC with Daniels at its helm initially dealt with social problems and gave a voice to the community in municipal dealings. The government, however, paid little heed to the movement which was becoming increasingly aware of apartheid's unequal treatment of them. As a result, Westbury's community and WRAC became political[3] and allied to the "United Democratic Front" (UDF) and "African National Congress" (ANC) in 1983. In coalition with the UDF, WRAC assisted with the establishment and organisation of civics throughout the western areas of Johannesburg, and parts of Soweto. This led to the founding of the western areas umbrella civic called the "Community Residents Action Committee" (CRAC) (Mudney Halim, 2018; Jansen, Fritz, Mohamed, & Kavin, 2017; Penniken, 2017; Westbury community knowledge holders, 2018; Westbury Residents Action Committee, 1985). The UDF later recognised the area as a source of South Africa's better organised pro-UDF civics (Switzer & Adhikari, 2000).

Throughout the 1980s WRAC with Daniels organised numerous socially uplifting projects and spearheaded local distributions of UDF and ANC media and strategies. This was achieved despite constant and violent harassment by apartheid police and military (Jansen et al., 2017; Penniken, 2017; Westbury community knowledge holders, 2018). To date, Westbury's contribution to the struggle against the apartheid has not been formally documented or recognised. Instead, the contemporary view of Westbury is highly derogatory (Dannhauser, 2018; M Halim, 2017). It is of vital importance for Westbury's community that their instrumental contributions to democracy in South Africa be recognised and their true narrative distributed.

Today's marginalisation of coloured areas, like Westbury, is insidiously political. The reasons for this relegation are based on post-apartheid bias deriving from the political propagation of misinterpreted apartheid rhetoric and policies. During apartheid coloureds never carried passbooks and could participate in elections[4] from 1983. These same freedoms were only extended to Abantu blacks in 1994. The dominant language amongst coloureds is Afrikaans, which is perceived by many South Africans as the language of oppression. Apartheid stemmed from white Afrikaans nationalism, and thus any Afrikaans speaking peoples are inherently tainted by this heritage (Essop, 2016). That coloured communities suffered a mixed heritage of conquest, slavery, indoctrination, received farm wages in alcohol, and experienced forced removals is often overlooked by political attitudes which still believe that coloureds benefited under apartheid and colonisation (Adhikari, 2005; Dannhauser, 2018; Khoza, 2018; Madia, 2018; Penniken, 2017; Van Driel, 2017).

These attitudes resulted in the heritage of areas like Westbury being overlooked in national development plans. The dismissal of Westbury's trauma during apartheid has resulted in their dehumanisation by outside communities that do not believe the area is deserving of priority development (Dannhauser, 2018; Madia, 2018; Van Driel, 2017). This is alarming as Westbury was socially and economically impoverished by apartheid policy and, with continued neglect from the government, has retained a reputation for violent gangs and substance abuse (Dannhauser, 2018; Jansen et al., 2017; Van Driel,2017). This is sadly a regular occurrence throughout South Africa's still impoverished regions but combined with a lack of recognition for Westbury's contributions, has devastated the community's overall self-efficacy (Dissel, 1997).

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in their ability to problem solve and persevere through challenges in order to achieve goals. It is determined by how often and how well that individual, their family, community, and role

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[1] Contemporary coloured culture descends from homogenised Khoi and Griqua nomads. Malaysian slaves and children from mixed race relationships. Under apartheid, coloureds were racially amalgamated as a group apart from the historically populous Abantu, or black, cultures (Adhikari, 2005; Brindley, 1976; Dannhauser, 2018; Penniken, 2017).

[2] Community roughly defines people according to a particular region, belief system, culture, or activity. For Westbury this refers those who live or once lived in the township (Flinn, 2007).

[3] Many civics from the Vaal Triangle region of today's Gauteng province experienced a similar phenomenon. Apartheid policy limited municipal development in all except white areas. This caused an increase in service delivery protests which turned political due to a combination of the UDF's media campaigns and unnecessary police brutality (Switzer & Adhikari, 2000).

[4] Then president PW Botha's Tricameral parliament gave coloureds and Indians limited voting rights, but did not allow any anti-apartheid parties to participate in elections (Adhikari, 2005; "Against Botha's Deal," 2018; Switzer & Adhikari, 2000).

models have succeeded according to the opinions of both that individual and society (Bandura, 1977; Hook et al., 2016). If the only widely accessible information about a community is that of poverty, crime and substance abuse; the cultural resources available to them for the development of self-efficacy are severely limited (Bushnell & Wild, 2017; Dissel, 1997). External involvement and infrastructural development can alleviate poverty and its associated problems, but, it cannot be sustained without community driven problem solving and participation (Switzer & Adhikari, 2000; Tosh & Lang, 2006; Zeilig, 2014). In order to sustainably improve Westbury, its self-efficacy must be raised to facilitate local problem-solving (Estrella & Forinash, 2007; M Halim, 2017; Knowles & Cole, 2008; Ryan, 2017). I argue that this can be accomplished by distributing a highly accessible narrative about Westbury's heritage both to the community and broader society.

2. THE ACCESSIBILITY OF COMICS

Comics use sequential graphics and text to tell a story (Levay, 2013; McCloud, 2006). The medium, which was once seen as trivial[5], has become increasingly popular for serious historical narratives (Blades, 2017; Brister, 2014; Schack, 2014; Thomas, 2011; Worcester, 2017).

Comics have a relatively low production cost and can be viewed across numerous platforms. These include digital web-comics, newspaper and magazine sections, pamphlets, graphic novels, and exhibited posters. Unlike fine art, comics are not as restrictive to high socio-economic background through elitest gallery markets, and unlike film, their viewing does not require a designated time and location, or expensive electronic devices (Carter, 2011; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Meskin & Cook, 2012).

The beauty of comics is their accessible multi-modal communication; separating comics from purely textual mediums. Both the explicit and implicit communication of text and images are used in unison to disperse a message. This increases how much information can be interpreted by an individual, and allows different intellectual levels to interpret and enjoy the medium at whatever speed and analytical intensity necessitated (Christensen, 2006; Meskin & Cook, 2012; Mitchell, W, J, 1994; Sundberg, 2017).

Visual art as a narrative is also advantageous for establishing empathetic connections. One typically remembers lived experiences as emotional narratives to make sense of cause and effect scenarios and empathetically insert oneself into a story character's experiences. Thus, stories can distribute otherwise boring facts and opinions in an entertaining style which encourages empathy for others (Carano & Clabough, 2016; Chaney, 2013; Keen, 2006; "The Power of Storytelling: The Annual International Conference, Bucharest," n.d.). Image-based stories further this by visually recreating real communities for the viewer to recognise and feel empathy towards (Harvey, 2015; Maughan, 2016; Thomas, 2011).

These advantages mean that comics are also suited for educational purposes. The medium encourages development in literacy and visual communication skills. Comic's also make their subject matter interesting for students, which when combined with their diverse communication format allows students to both learn more and hunger to learn more (Bakis, 2011; Christensen, 2006; Kan, 2010). Ultimately, producing a comic about Westbury was perceived to be the most accessible and informative art with which to educate the local community and outside society about Westbury's heritage.

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WITH THE STUDY

For this study to succeed it depended upon the involvement of Westbury's community through narrative inquiry. This method gathers information by asking community members to tell stories about their own experiences, thereby allowing the community to determine what direction the research takes (Boje, 2001; Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Estrella & Forinash, 2007). In order to develop a relationship with the community, there were two interview stages. The initial interviews revealed unpublished information about Westbury's heritage and suggested alternative records. Florrie Daniels' personal archive, which was kept by her descendants, and several books and articles which referenced Westbury were also utilized to produce the comic's first drafts (Baines, 2005; Flinn, 2010; Mudney Halim, 2018; Tymon, 2006).

The second stage included focus groups or the original interviewees and took place after the comic's first draft had been assembled. Community members were encouraged to critique the draft and give suggestions which would make it more representational of their heritage (Flinn & Sexton, 2013; Nieftagodien, 2010). This increased the narrative's depth and imbued an enthusiasm for the research when the community realised that they had the power to determine the narrative's direction (Westbury community knowledge holders, 2018). The comic became an artwork for the community, as opposed to about them.

The community members involved started to recognise that their personal stories had a place in South Africa's history. There was a palpable difference in the pride for their heritage and enthusiasm for the comic's completion.

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[5] The development of Anglophonic and Western comics was stigmatised after Wertham published his 1954 study, Seduction of the innocent. It stated that comics were addictive, and could dangerously influence young readers through explicit and implicit messaging.

Members of this study's associates from the Centre for Education Rights and Transformation (CERT) were increasingly invited to events organised by Westbury's increasingly involved community. It was a pleasant surprise as the study did not expect any change in the self-efficacy of these community members until the comic was officially distributed. This situation requires further contextual analysis.

The study only started because members from Westbury's community with academic connections explained that there was such a need (M Halim, 2017; Sithole, 2017). This unveiled a budding awareness among community members about their heritage's importance and their own marginalisation. Once the study started, a bitterness about this marginalisation was uncovered and prevalent amongst all interviewed individuals, even if the majority were at first only mildly surprised about the significance of their heritage. It is important to note though, that these individuals were chosen based on their knowledge of Westbury's heritage, and not for proportional representation of their community's opinions. Thus it was a biased sample pool. However, at the end of 2018 Westbury erupted into organised protests for the first time since 1994 (Marinovich & Silva, 2000). These were in reaction to police apathy and the area's marginalisation (Evans, 2018; Khoza, 2018). Other than the area's 2018 riots, they also participated in public talks and conferences, such as the annual Neville Alexander Conferences. Since 2018 Westbury also organised annual Heritage Day celebrations, and organisations like the Together Action Group and the Westbury Youth Centre became increasingly active.

The community's self-efficacy seems to be on the rise based on their desire to encourage academic studies, like this one, and Westbury's gradual renaissance of old organisational strategies. WRAC has previously used universities to further their needs, such as when they organised a mass health screening and vaccination in 1984 (Westbury Residents Action Committee, 1985). This study and comic whose goal it is to enhance Westbury's self-efficacy for social change appears to be the result of initially growing self-efficacy causing grassroots level social change in their desire to be heard.

5. CONCLUSION

This study intended to determine if a comic could address Westbury's marginalisation by providing its community and broader society with a narrative about their positive heritage. This was done to counter disproportionately negative reputation which had crippled Westbury's self-efficacy and ability to sustainably self-improve. Central to this process was a consistent determination of the comic's content based on what the community reasoned was best. This allowed for a more interesting and representational narrative.

Although, the primary goal of this study was not to measure how much the comic developed Westbury's self-efficacy, or what effect that increased self-efficacy might have on the community, it certainly revealed a change. Throughout the comic's production, Westbury became increasingly involved in social action, which demonstrated that its self-efficacy was increasing. These developments can barely be attributed to the comic, as it is still in production. However, the comic and its goal to develop the area's self-efficacy can instead be attributed to a willingness in Westbury's community to self-improve, which the comic is sustainably encouraging.

Upon the comic's completion, a future study should be done in order to record what aspects of the comic contributed to the Westbury's de-marginalisation according to Westbury's community and outside society. Future results could be used to determine how sustainable projects like this one are, and if they can be improved upon in future attempts to further encourage community-based self-upliftment.

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