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# The Prison and the Public

# Dealing with Difficult Pasts:

## The Dark Heritage of Political Prisons in Transitional Northern Ireland and South Africa

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**Neil Jarman has suggested as society moves from conflict to peace the ability of prisons to symbolise both the power and vulnerability of the state and those incarcerated means that there are often opposing desires for their future usage.[1] This is particularly evident in the cases of South Africa and Northern Ireland. In both contexts difficult recent pasts have resulted in very different visions of how the materialisations of conflict, and carceral environments in particular, are dealt with. Both countries have had relatively recent societal transitions — in South Africa as a result of the ending of Apartheid in 1994 and in Northern Ireland after the political negotiated cessation of the conflict known as 'the Troubles' with the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) in 1998. The role that prisons have played during these conflicts — and as potential dark heritage sites — is important. As former political prisoners have played prominent roles in both societal transitions how once infamous prisons have been dealt with and understood in their post-functional context can be revealing of underlying issues with the role of memory, ownership and engagement with the past in transitional states. Ultimately, the evolving treatment and role of these places of dark heritage reveals how society is dealing with difficult recent pasts.**

### Case-studies: Long Kesh / Maze, Northern Ireland and Robben Island, South Africa

Long Kesh / Maze and Robben Island are both internationally infamous examples of political prisons active during the 20th century, but their histories and roles in the societies that created them have as many divergences as commonalities. Robben Island has a longer history as a place of political imprisonment dating back at least three centuries in comparison to Long Kesh /Maze's first introduction as a make-shift internment camp in 1971. Robben Island had been used as a place of exile long before Europeans controlled this location. During the colonial era it was initially used by the Dutch settlers as shelter from local tribes, before being used to hold local dissidents, progressing later to being a broader site of incarceration for political opponents throughout the African and South Asia area.[2] Under British control in the late 19th century it continued to be used as a prison but this was later expanded to a general place of exile. There are in situ remains of accommodation and burial sites for those with leprosy, mental illness and chronic sickness. During the Second World War the island's role refocused to military defence and remnants of airstrips and large artillery remain *in situ*. In 1960, twelve years after the National Party came to power with Apartheid policies, the island reopened as a prison and political prisoners were transferred from the mainland. Robben Island ceased to operate as a political prison in 1991, finally closing in 1996 before reopening as a museum in 1997. It was placed on the World Heritage List in 1999.

There are at least five separate prison structures that remain *in situ* on Robben Island, all dating from the last 150 years of occupation as a penal settlement. The most famous structure is the Maximum Security prison (1963-1996), which held political prisoners until 1991. The Medium B security prison held common-law prisoners from 1974-1990, the common-law prisoners were then transferred to the Maximum Security prison until its closure in 1996. There are also remains of a common-law prison dating from 1956-1960 and from an earlier prison station dating from 1866-1921. Lastly, the remains of the house of a political prisoner held in isolation, Robert Sobukwe, are still standing. This house was reused after Sobukwe's release as a kennel for the prison service dogs but has been restored to represent its former state since the site reopened as a heritage site. The Maximum Security prison has the most in common with Long Kesh / Maze as it includes a number of structures that are formulated in a 'H' plan, similar to the H-Blocks famously replicated in the Northern Irish case-study. However, the scale and internal arrangement of these two H-Blocks differed considerably as the wings at Long Kesh / Maze were designed as single cell accommodation in contrast to the communal wings in Robben Island. The only single cell accommodation at the Maximum Security prison on

1. Neil Jarman, 'Troubling remnants: dealing with the remains of conflict in Northern Ireland'. In John Schofield, William G. Johnson, & Colleen M. Beck. *Matériel Culture: The Archaeology of Twentieth Century Conflict*. (2001) (London: Routledge) 281-295, 290.
2. Kate Clark, 'In small things remembered: significance and vulnerability in the management of Robben Island World Heritage Site'. In J. Schofield, W.G. Johnson & C.M. Beck. (eds) *Matériel Culture*, 266-281, 268.

Robben Island was one corridor — Section A — which was attached to the administrative area where the leaders were segregated.

Long Kesh / Maze also has a direct link to World War II as the site was initially utilised as an airfield during that conflict and was largely vacant until the introduction of interment necessitated opening a 'temporary' mass holding centre. Long Kesh / Maze Internment camp opened in August 1971 utilising the remnants of Nissen huts that had been standing on the site since it was last used during World War II. After it became clear that the Troubles were not going to swiftly end, and prisoner control of these communalised structures could not be ignored any longer (especially after the burning of the camp by Republican prisoners in October 1974), a new addition was added to the site. From 1975 to 1978 eight H-Blocks were added to the prison landscape. These structures were intended to institute a new regime, to hold prisoners without granting them the special category status associated with the internment camp. Unlike Robben Island, where criminal and political prisoners were held in separate prisons, from this time the prison authorities did not recognise 'political' offences. Public attention moved to the H-Blocks as they swiftly became the focus of prisoner protests relating to this change of status. These culminated in the Hunger Strikes of 1981, when 10 republican prisoners starved to death. Long Kesh / Maze retained its profile after this time due to other events, including the largest mass prison escape in the UK in 1983 and highly public negotiations between politicians and prisoners in facilitating peace processes. The GFA allowed for the last prisoners to be released or transferred during 2001 and the prison closed in September of that year. To date the prison has been maintained as a high security site, the majority of its standing structures have been demolished and a proposed Peace Building and Conflict Resolution Centre has received planning permission. It remains closed to the general public.

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**From functional prison to site of dark heritage**

Dark tourism as a concept has been the subject of academic discussion since John Lennon and Malcolm Foley first coined the term in 2000. In their seminal monograph, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, they argued that the existence and interest in sites linked to death and disaster was a manifestation of the public appetite for consuming sites connected to death, disaster and destruction as a result of the western consumerist circumstances of the late modern world.[3] Carolyn Strange and Michael Kempa have further developed these concepts by exploring prisons as dark heritage through the case-studies of Robben Island and Alcatraz.[4] Whilst it might be assumed that prisons have a number of innate characteristics that lend themselves to becoming sites of dark heritage, Strange and Kempa have argued that there is no inevitability in such a transition. They state 'that they [prisons] have remained historic sites suggests that the cultural and political conditions that contribute to their preservation and historic interpretation remain operative'.[5] This contemporary relevance is particularly apt in the cases of Northern Ireland and South Africa, which have both undergone recent societal transitions where prisons, and ex-prisoners, played a prominent role. In both societies this has resulted in the heightening prominence of former functional prisons maintaining a public interest and shaping their dark heritage potential with and without government intervention.

The transition of historical prisons in both contexts have diverged considerably and reveal very different perspectives on how both societies have addressed the role of the difficult recent past. As briefly detailed in the short descriptors of the two case-studies above, Robben Island has transformed extraordinarily quickly from being a site of imprisonment to becoming not only a prison museum of national importance but an internationally recognized World Heritage Site. The connections of the site with the ruling ANC party and, specifically, the charismatic leader of the first post-Apartheid government, Nelson Mandela, has undoubtedly been a factor in this seemingly smooth transition. In contrast, the protracted processes of negotiation that resulted in the GFA had no unifying figure emerging from Long Kesh / Maze. The more morally complicated nature of the Northern Irish conflict has ensured that political imprisonment was, and remains, a controversial issue. It was one of the most divisive elements of the GFA negotiations and the releasing of political prisoners as a condition of the agreement was

3. Malcolm Foley & John Lennon. *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*. (2000) (London, Cengage Learning EMEA).
4. Carolyn Strange and Michael Kempa, 'Shades of Dark Tourism: Alcatraz and Robben Island'. *Annals of Tourism Research* (2003) Vol 30. No. 2: 386-405.
5. Strange & Kempa, *Shades of Dark Tourism*, 397.

highly contentious. It has been argued that to facilitate the settlement of the conflict between the main political protagonists there was a need to deliberately avoid divisive points of principle. Cillian McGrattan has enumerated these as: 'how the North should be administered, how and indeed whether past injustices should be dealt with, how victims' needs can be met and how the past should be remembered and explained'.[6] In contrast to the deliberate openness of the new South African's 'Rainbow nation' to truth and reconciliation initiatives it has been argued that the longstanding and intractable nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland limits the ability to achieve such a wide-ranging political forgiveness. Mark Amstutz has argued that in contrast to South Africa the aim of the Northern Irish peace process could only ever be to reduce, not eradicate, hatred and distrust.[7] In such disparate contexts the retention of political prisons as heritage sites can have very different meanings and implications.

Prisons in transitional societies are material remnants of the recent past that can be used to facilitate and encourage the articulation of past injustices as part of a healing process (as in South Africa). However they can also be uncomfortable material reminders of the past in societies that have engaged difficult, and unresolved, issues about the past conflict (as in Northern Ireland). In such different contexts prisons as sites of dark heritage can have multiple meanings and provoke very different responses. However, one must remember the latent agency of heritage sites to change meanings, often in unforeseen and unintended ways. Strange and Kempa have enumerated the changing meanings of their case-studies including examples of enhancing (and masking) of specific narratives and the role of political (particularly governmental) intervention in directing public meaning.[8] In examining these two prisons in tandem it should be explicitly understood that prisons as dark heritage not only has multiple meanings but these can change over time due to a number of factors both internal and external to those who control them, interpret them and / or choose to visit them.

**Political prisons, heritage and value in transitional societies**

Martin Carver has argued that archaeological heritage is largely assumed to comprise monumental remains whose value is self-evident and immutable. Therefore, 'archaeological heritage' tends to self-perpetuate as those elements that are assigned protection, and therefore are valued, often mirror existing heritage.[9] Clearly, relatively recently constructed, and abandoned, prisons are not automatic choices as national, and international, heritage. That prisons as heritage exist in particular locations suggests an unusually heightened relationship between periods and places of incarceration and wider society. Clearly, both South Africa and Northern Ireland have longstanding associations with periods of mass political incarceration that date up through living memory.

That prisons as heritage exist in particular locations suggests an unusually heightened relationship between periods and places of incarceration and wider society.

Despite the prominence of political incarceration in these societies, for a prison to become heritage remains relatively rare. This is because even the most famous, or infamous penal institutions, create such strong reactions that destruction is frequently the first reaction to their initial closure. John Carman has written extensively about the role of value in national heritage creation and has suggested five stages in the process of changing value from functional to cultural: firstly the field is surveyed to determine quantity and quality of remains, it is then evaluated, valuation criteria are applied, selection for preservation occurs if the object is selected to become heritage and lastly controls are put in place to maintain the newly ascribed heritage.[10] These processes of heritage creation highlight that, at a national level, heritage creation is highly political. Therefore, the transition of a prison from a functional to heritage value is interconnected with contemporary politics of power and identity. No archaeological remains have 'innate' value, those that are selected are elevated to this status because they answer a contemporary need as much as illuminate an historical event or understanding. Therefore, prisons that have been retained and preserved tend to be unusual in having a link between imprisonment and political power or have achieved a level

6. Cillian McGrattan, 'Order Out of Chaos': the Politics of Transitional Justice'. *Politics* (2009) 29 (3) 164-172, 164.
7. Mark Amstutz. *The Healing of Nations: The Promise and Limits of Political Forgiveness* (2005) (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield), 166.
8. Strange & Kempa, *Shades of Dark Tourism*, 388
9. Martin Carver, 'On Archaeological Value', *Antiquity*. (1996) Vol. LXX: 45-56, 23.
10. John Carman. *Archaeology and Heritage: An Introduction*. (2002) (London: Continuum Press), 23.

of prominence with wider society that has ensured a public desire to retain them.

As many of the key figures involved in the transitions of both societies — from revoking of Apartheid laws in South Africa to facilitating the peace process in Northern Ireland — were imprisoned for varying time periods it is not unexpected that the physical material of the prisons takes on heightened meaning. This is particularly true in relation to Robben Island and Long Kesh / Maze, which were high-profile prisons that held the most prominent political prisoners, often for extended periods, and were associated with high-profile events. So synonymous is Robben Island with Nelson Mandela that Roy Ballantyne defined it as 'Nelson Mandela's island prison'.[11] Whereas in Northern Ireland the long shadow of the 1981 Hunger Strikes, in which 10 prisoners starved to death over the issue of special category status, still dominates understandings of, and emotional responses, to the prison.

### Prisons and ex-prisoners in transitional societies

One important issue in explaining the elevated status of previous political prisons in transitional societies, is the often high-profile status of ex-prisoners. In both Northern Ireland and South Africa ex-prisoners have successfully — if at times partially — contributed to mainstream constitutional politics post-imprisonment. In South Africa the African National Congress (ANC), who constituted a significant number of the prisoners held during Apartheid, has been the majority party since the first democratic elections in 1994 and in Northern Ireland Sinn Féin have been the largest nationalist party since the first elections after the GFA in 2001. Sinn Féin first emerged into national politics in the early 1980s, but the election in 2001 was the first time that they gained more seats and percentage of the vote than their more moderate nationalist counterparts, the SDLP. However, the electoral success of some ex-prisoners in both Northern Ireland and South Africa does not reflect broader electoral success by all groups of ex-prisoners who have chosen to enter politics after imprisonment. In both contexts electoral success has been dominated by one particular party representing one faction of ex-prisoners: Sinn Féin as the electoral wing of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and the ANC. This has meant that other prisoner groups — including republican parties such as the Workers Party (originating from the Official IRA) and loyalist parties including the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP) and Ulster Democratic Party (UDP) (dissolved in 2001) in Northern Ireland and Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) in South Africa — have been increasingly marginalised politically. Such a situation is not only reflected in the context of constitutional politics but also in their engagement and representation in prison heritage.

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### Prison heritage and singular interpretations of the past

One of the key criticisms of the interpretation of Robben Island is that it reinforces and maintains associations of the prison solely with the ANC.[12] Whilst the prisoners of other political parties are not overtly dismissed it is clear that the most mediated elements of the site relate to ANC prison experiences and particularly those of their leaders. Section A of the Maximum Security Prison was the only part of the prison that contained single cells and many of the important post-imprisonment ANC figures such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Tokyo Sexwale served time in these cells. It is their stories that form the most in depth, and personalised, interpretation across the prison site. The interpretation of the cells includes four elements: a photograph of a past inhabitant, an associated artefact, interpretation panels and an oral recording of the ex-prisoner. Needless to say, having a photograph taken in 'Nelson Mandela's cell' is a necessity for the majority of tourists visiting the site. However, this very focused interpretation contrasts with how the more ordinary prisoner experience of the site is comparatively ignored. This is emphasized by the underuse of the Visitor Centre, which includes the stories of women visitors as well as Namibian prisoners. It is often locked and bypassed by visitor groups as they are bussed through the entrance gates to the prison complex.

Whilst Long Kesh / Maze is not yet open to the public as a heritage site there has been ongoing debates regarding what it means and whose meanings will be included in its presentation. The retained elements of Long Kesh / Maze — a representation sample of one H-Block, one Compound, the Administration Block, the

11. David Uzzell & Roy Ballantyne. *Contemporary Issues in Heritage and Environmental Interpretation: Problems and Prospects*. (1998) (London: Stationery Office), 7.
12. Including Harry Garuba, 'A Second Life: Museums, Mimesis, and the Narratives of the Tour Guides of Robben Island'. In N Murray, N. Shepherd and M. Hall (eds) *Desire Lines: Space, Memory and Identity the Post-apartheid City*. (2007) (London: Routledge) 129-144.

prison hospital, one watchtower, a cross-denominational church and a section of wall — have not yet been interpreted. However, in a recent report to the cross-party committee of the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister it is clear that the government intention is to embrace broad multivocality in its interpretations of the site. A member of the Strategic Investment Board asserted that there are 'about 33' different narrative strands identified and that each story would be told 'with sensitivity and equality'.[13] Laudable as this official policy is, it is clear that the ever increasing over-identification of the site by republican prisoners — in contrast to other stakeholder groups — is perceived as an issue that is becoming increasingly problematic. Graham and McDowell argued in 2007 that the government was creating 'essentially a sum zero heritage site' as it was already being 'claimed' by Republicans and had little to offer loyalist prisoners and communal conflict resolution.[14] Perhaps this situation may be changing as recent interviews with ex-Loyalist prisoners have indicated an interest in actively including their narratives. One stated in 2011: 'It's not just about Republicans, you know'.[15]

In both contexts there is a notable absence in the presence of another major stakeholder from the functional prison — prison officers. This is understandable in the context of South Africa, where the prison officers acted as representatives of what is universally considered a morally-reprehensible Apartheid state. It is to be debated whether the ex-prisoners or ex-prison officers would desire their inclusion in the interpretation of the site, despite the added balance and new perspectives that this would bring. However, their lack of presence from the more muddied waters of the Northern Irish conflict is less desirable. 29 prison officers were killed by both republican and loyalist paramilitaries during the course of the conflict. Whilst they will undoubtedly be included as one of the 33 narratives of interpretation in the eventual heritage site, Sara McDowell has argued that there is currently a lack of recognition of the deaths and suffering of prison officers and their families. The only public memorial for the Northern Ireland Prison Service is located in the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, England. McDowell argues that this absence of localised memorialisation reflects a continuing displacement of prison officers from the physical landscapes where they served and died and marginalizes their narratives from emerging communal memories of the Troubles.[16]

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**Economics and prison heritage**

In transitional societies, the economic costs and benefits of stability and peace are frequently presented as reasons for continued engagement with often difficult transitions. The economic benefits of improved tourism figures and international investment are consistently highlighted. Cal Muckley has estimated that the incremental costs of one contemporary terrorism-related facility in Northern Ireland would be 'equivalent to £3.69 million pounds sterling in 2009 prices' to the economy.[17] In this respect dark heritage sites such as Robben Island and Long Kesh / Maze have both positive and negative aspects. They are sites of interest for tourists who wish to know more about the recent conflict but the retention of their material remnants can act as unsettling reminders of the past. For dark heritage sites such as Robben Island and Long Kesh / Maze to transition from functional prisons to heritage sites there needs to be public interest, governmental support and also economic viability. It would be difficult to imagine Robben Island moving so swiftly from an island prison to World Heritage Site, or Long Kesh / Maze continuing its protracted transition to a peace and reconciliation centre, without the promise of economic benefits to accompany them. Robben Island is the primary visitor attraction in South Africa with visitor figure that have risen from 100,000 in the year it opened in 1997 to 350,000 in 2002.[18] The future of Long Kesh/Maze has consistently been couched in economic terms of regeneration and peace dividends rather than in cultural, social or emotional needs.

Clearly the relationship with economics and prison heritage is multifaceted. It not only relates to how much money tourists will generated at the site — either directly through visiting or indirectly through purchasing associated merchandise — but also how much money is

13. Mary McKee, 'Maze/Long Kesh Site: Departmental Briefing. Committee for OFMDFM'. (16 May 2012) (www.hansard.com)
14. Brian Graham & Sara McDowell, 'Meaning in the Maze: the heritage of Long Kesh'. *Cultural Geographies.* (2007) 14 (3): 343-368, 363.
15. PS (2011) ex-Loyalist prisoner from Long Kesh / Maze compounds.
16. Sara McDowell, 'Commemorating dead 'men': gendering the past and the present in post-conflict Northern Ireland'. *Gender, Place and Culture*. (2008) 15 (4): 335-354, 346.
17. Cal Muckley, *Terrorism, Tourism and FDI: Estimating a Lower Bound on the Peace Dividend in Northern Ireland* (October 8, 2010). (Available at SSRN: http://ssrn.com/abstract=1689510 or doi:10.2139/ssrn.1689510), 9.
18. See visitor figures http://www.robben-island.org.za/departments/directorate/annual/annual.asp

invested in interpretative elements and the impact they will have on the site's meaning and understanding. The custodians of Robben Island have had to react to its geographical isolation by developing substantial infrastructure around the movement of tourist to, from, and, indeed, around the island. One has to buy tickets for a ferry then be transported by bus to different elements of the site, at the discretion of the guide. This ensures that the tours are highly directed with the Maximum Security Prison being the highlight of the visit. Other stop-off points can vary to include the visitor centre, Robert Sobukwe's house, stone quarries that had been worked by prisoners, leprosia, remnants of criminal prisons, graveyards (including a Muslim shrine), World War II armaments and impromptu wildlife safaris. The itinerary can directly impact on the understandings of the island that the tourist can extract from the visit. Likewise the development of a large number of narrative strands and unrelated structures at Long Kesh / Maze whilst attempting to broaden understandings of the site could end up diluting or confusing the significance of the site. The Royal Ulster Agricultural Society has recently relocated to the site and there are plans to involve the Ulster Aviation Society to develop the World War II airfield history.[19]

At Robben Island the necessity of having a guided tour of the extensive site means that tourist interactions with the island are controlled and the designated guides control interpretation, some of which are ex-prisoners. This personalised form of interpretation has been supplemented by interpretation boards, which litter the site and tend to either show factual developments or display archive and relatively contemporary photographs of ex-political prisoners interacting and engaging with the site since their release. Narratives that have been downplayed include the other aspects of exile experience on the island, the final years of the Maximum Security Prison when it held 'criminal' prisoners transferred from the Medium B Security Prison (which has now been converted into a community centre) and the stories of the 'criminal' prisoners. One can question whether decisions to exclude the stories of criminal prisoners, and regress the buildings to a 'golden age', are limiting the narratives of the site. Likewise, one can question if the inclusion of so many short-lived — and even unrelated — elements to the reformulated site of Long Kesh / Maze and the exploring of so many narrative threads is actually skewing the meaning of the site? Allen Feldman has argued that the higher profile, numbers and greater involvement in prison protests by Republican prisoners ensures that they will remain at the centre of any investigation of the site.[20] Perhaps treating each of a multitude of narrative threads 'in equality' will dilute the most significant narratives from the site so that interpretation of Long Kesh / Maze is no more representative than the dominant narratives of the ANC is at Robben Island?

As political prisons are dark places, often physically and symbolically, to enable a transition to a place that also aims to educate and entertain there is often a change of emphasis, if not a selective interpretation of the site.

**Contestation of dominant narratives**

As political prisons are dark places, often physically and symbolically, to enable a transition to a place that also aims to educate and entertain there is often a change of emphasis, if not a selective interpretation of the site. These post-functional interactions with the site, whether they be preventative, creative, restorative or destructive have the potential to move beyond the aesthetic and impact on how the site is interpreted and understood. Whilst some form of intervention is needed to allow a functional prison to be utilised as a tourist attraction, at the very least for health and safety reasons, these changes often become entangled with value decisions on what should be emphasized and what can be forgotten. Like the curation of museum exhibitions, decisions regarding alterations to facilitate tourist engagement reveal what Fratz calls, 'judgments that help create hierarchies of merit and importance'.[21] At Robben Island as well as the decision to highlight high profile ANC ex-prisoners in the interpretation of the site there have been a number of structural changes made to the prison buildings to allow easier access for tourists. In the Maximum Security prison a wall has been removed post-closure to allow access to the yards around the prison building (it is retained sufficiently in place to allow movement back to its original position if so desired in

19. Karl Alexander. Maze/Long Kesh Site: Departmental Briefing. Committee for OFMDFM. (16 May 2012) (www.hansard.com)
20. Allen Feldman. *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*. (1991) (London: University of Chicago Press), 148.
21. Corinne Fratz, 'Rhetorics of Value: Constituting Worth and Meaning through Cultural Display'. *Visual Anthropology Review.* (2011) 21 (1) 21-48, 21.

future). On a very different scale the vast majority of the standing remains of Long Kesh / Maze have been demolished in order to allow interpretation of a representation sample of the site.

Such interventions with the material remnants of the prisons have been the subject of contestation. Concerned at the lack of progress towards retaining and opening the site of Long Kesh / Maze to the public, the Republican former prisoner group, *Coiste na n-Iarchimí*, held a conference on the issue of the future of the site. Its resultant report detailed their case for the prison to be preserved as a museum. In their conclusion they overtly engaged with the dark heritage potential of the site: 'Heritage is about sites of importance and not simply about the architectural value of buildings'.[22] Such a standpoint on the importance and value of the site has been contested by both unionist politicians and academics, including Graham and McDowell, who have countered Republican claims about the site and its exceptionalism. Objections have centred on fears of the site becoming a 'shrine to the Troubles' or, more specifically to the hunger strikers of 1981. However, Graham and McDowell have questioned the significance of the site 'In heritage terms, there is nothing unique about the Maze. Prisons, sites of conscience, sites of pain and atrocity and sites of symbolic value are well-established concepts in heritage lists'.[23] Their concerns centre on its potential to maintain, if not enhance, its divisive and singular identities, heritages and potential claims of victimhood through the material structures. They do not suggest that such narratives will be unavoidable: 'their 'sentience' will be represented by meanings and by the hulks of the prison buildings'.[24]

At Robben Island there is also evidence of increasing discomfiture with the ANC-dominated narratives of the prison. Harry Garuba's recent studies on ex-prisoner guides at the site uncovered a difficult relationship existing between those who were previously incarcerated and their new role as tourist guides.[25] Whilst one of the major selling points of Robben Island is the use of ex-prisoners as guides — as key to authenticating the visitor experience — the guides have increasingly protested their lack of ability to articulate their own understandings of the site and how this connects to the wider experiences of disenfranchisement by ex-prisoners in South Africa. With guides effectively portraying themselves as continuing to exist 'behind bars' due to their self-perceptions as being poorly treated and restricted in their interpretation of the site there is clearly an ongoing tension existing in the relationship between those who were previously incarcerated and its new role as a place of tourism. In both cases, despite government control they retain the potential for any official interpretation of place to be contested.

## Conclusions

Prisons as dark heritage illuminate a heightened and highly public connection between society and imprisonment. They are not natural choices as sites to be retained and remembered and the decision to maintain them is often connected to contemporary political and societal needs. As such all sites of prison heritage reveal their own specific narratives of transition and political intervention that is particular to time and place. However, they also tie into broader narratives of power, identity and economic realities of tourist potential that are more universal. Such sites tend to be particularly poignant in revealing the politics of heritage creation and selection, including the degree of societal engagement with the difficult recent past, what it means and who owns /claims it.

Long Kesh / Maze and Robben Island reveal a number of communalities as well as divergences in how these sites continue to function in the context of a wider transitional society. In both cases the importance and selection of interpretative narratives are directly linked with issues of identity and power that are salient to society and political elites as historical understandings of place. Whilst the relationships of both sites with their wider societies are individual there are a number of key issues that are held in common. This includes the link between the elevation of the prison to site of dark heritage and reciprocal elevation of ex-prisoners within political society. They also reveal the often-unmentioned connection between the retention of these sites and the economics of addressing tourist desires in transitional societies. Lastly, the role of contestation of dark heritage narratives is central in revealing disenchantment with interpretative narratives of the sites, and indeed the difficult recent past.

22. Coiste na-Iarchimí. *A Museum at Long Kesh or the Maze?* Report of conference proceedings. (2003) (Belfast: Coiste na n-Iarchimí), 32.
23. Graham & McDowell. Meaning in the Maze, 373.
24. Ibid, 374.
25. Garuba. *Museums, Mimesis, and the Narratives of the Tour Guides of Robben Island*.