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Conference Stream:	X	Respect and responsibility		Sustainability		Socially responsible design education
Discipline (e.g. Interior Design, Visual Communication, Cross-disciplinary):						Cross-disciplinary

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Reviving Communities through Storytelling & Creative Action

Abstract

The Khoi-San, the First-Nations' people of South Africa, were dispossessed of their lands and subjected to a cultural genocide, first by colonialism and then by Apartheid. Labeled 'colored' during the Apartheid era, the Khoi-San were victims of cultural annihilation in which they lost their social and spiritual institutions that held their identity. The systematic and deliberate erasure of their culture has led to collective historical trauma. Today, the Khoi-San are battling gangsterism, drug abuse and fetal alcohol syndrome, endemic to the community.

Natural Justice, an international NGO of lawyers for community and environment has for several years assisted the Khoi-San in their legal struggle to assert secure rights to their land and heritage. However, legal and material support has been insufficient in healing this historical trauma. The absence of positive community role models or heroes has disillusioned the Khoi-San youth, creating a need for cultural and spiritual healing. From this need the Heroes Project was born and is a collaborative work to reinvigorate the spirit of the community and enable them to address their contemporary issues.

The project, housed at the Law+Environment+Design Laboratory, brings into the forefront the key role design plays in enabling communities; through creative and critical thinking, design and open innovation, to catalyze and activate imaginations for positive change. The Heroes Project was conceived from mythologist Joseph Campbell's ideas of the 'hero's journey'. Based on this monomyth, the project seeks to create a series of graphic narratives that contemporize Khoi-San folklore and mythology to reconnect them with the youth. The project is a unique interdisciplinary collaboration among designers, lawyers and artists to conceptualize creative interventions for socio-political change. It is not merely designing graphic narratives, but engaging with the deep knowledge of experts, participation with community, and imagine the possibilities of this project beyond these graphic narratives.

Keywords: *Khoi-San, design, narratives, cultural trauma, heroes.*

Background

Many indigenous peoples have been dispossessed of their lands and subjected to discrimination and cultural genocide first by colonialism and then by settler capitalism. The years of assault on indigenous communities destroy their social fabric and deprive them of the cultural and spiritual resources needed to launch a successful struggle to secure their rights as indigenous peoples. To make matters worse the cultural and spiritual annihilation of many indigenous communities has sapped their youth of pride in their identity and denying them the inspiration needed for the legal and political battles ahead.

The material impoverishment and erasure of the cultural and spiritual traditions of the Khoi-San, the First Nations people of South Africa, has had devastating consequences on the community. In the

Western Cape, gangsterism (Daniels and Adams, 2010:47), alcohol and drug abuse and fetal alcohol syndrome (Vuuren and Learmonth, 2013:59) are endemic amongst the Khoi-San youth (also labelled as 'coloured') and they account for 60-80% of the prison population.

The Past – Contentious Landscapes

The situation of the Khoi-San and indigenous peoples with similar experiences is one of collective trauma. Collective trauma is understood here as a consequence of deeply disruptive events that have a negative impact on the unconscious of a group. While the memories of these events are repressed and the group may still be able to function with a semblance of normality, the repressed emotions from the trauma manifest themselves into consciousness and daily life in insidious ways. For example, collective trauma may be manifested as a negativity bias based on which an individual may habitually make choices that are self-sabotaging such as substance abuse or violence despite options to the contrary (Fanon, 2008).

Collective trauma is a result of centuries of systematic destruction of social and cultural institutions of the community. The condition of the Khoi-San, the Native Americans or the Australian Aborigines is quite unlike the cases of other groups who have experienced traumatic events, wherein the larger community to which these groups belong to is able to muster spiritual or cultural resources to heal their trauma. The condition of these groups is one where virtually the entire community was uniformly traumatized and institutions designed to address such trauma were systematically destroyed. Their inability to heal collective trauma can be substantially attributed to the loss of cultural and spiritual resources ('immune systems') that can restore people and repair culture (Lambert, 2008).

This is one of the main reasons behind the Khoi-San's inability to effectively capitalize on their legal and political victories and material gains in democratic South Africa. This is especially so in terms of Khoi-San victories over the last ten years which include land restitution and high profile access and benefit sharing agreements relating to their traditional knowledge of the hoodia, rooibos and sceletium plants. Despite these victories, the Khoi-San are mired in internal conflict, entrenched leadership, low levels of higher education, endemic unemployment and widespread substance abuse and violence. The situation of the Khoi-San begs the question regarding the effectiveness of the various rights gains and innovative financing mechanisms in international and domestic environmental and indigenous peoples rights discourse.

The reality of collective trauma requires us to move beyond normative public statements and rights speak that link indigenous people's ways of life to stewarding the Earth. It forces us to address the stark reality of psychological trauma and social conflict amongst numerous indigenous communities and focus on solutions to these problems that go hand in hand with rights campaigns.

The Opportunity – Collaboration and Creativity

The re-building of traumatized groups into strong community with authentic leaders requires a new approach that not only focuses on the material, legal and political challenges but also seeks to heal the collective trauma. Natural Justice (Lawyers for Communities and the Environment), an international collective of lawyers headquartered in Cape Town, has for several years focused on providing legal assistance to indigenous peoples and local communities that would lead to wellbeing through secure rights to their lands and culture.

Seeing that the legal and material support has been inadequate for these traumatized communities, Natural Justice initiated the Heroes Project in 2013 with the Law+Environment+Design Laboratory (LEDLaboratory) based in Bangalore, India. The LEDLaboratory, a collaborative initiative of the Srishti School of Art, Design and Technology, and Natural Justice, is set up to address challenges in contentious landscapes, brings into the forefront the key role design can play in enabling communities and catalyzing ecological justice; through creative and critical thinking, design methodologies and open innovation, to catalyze and activate imaginations for positive change. The aim of the partnership is to develop innovative design possibilities within the Heroes Project to address the issue of collective trauma faced by the Khoi-San communities and effectively complement the rights-related work of Natural Justice.

The Heroes Project is inspired by the work of mythologist Joseph Campbell who articulated the common myth (monomyth) of the 'hero's journey' in cultures across the world. Campbell outlined the three typical stages of the hero's journey: *separation, initiation* and *return*. Each of these stages involves several milestones and the journey is a typical sequence of actions in hero stories across the world throughout history (Campbell, 2008). The Heroes Project seeks to work with Khoi-San youth to engage in selective revival of myths, rituals, rites of passage and ceremonies that resonate with the three stages of the hero's journey. The aim is to facilitate healing of their collective trauma and replacing dysfunctional coping mechanisms.
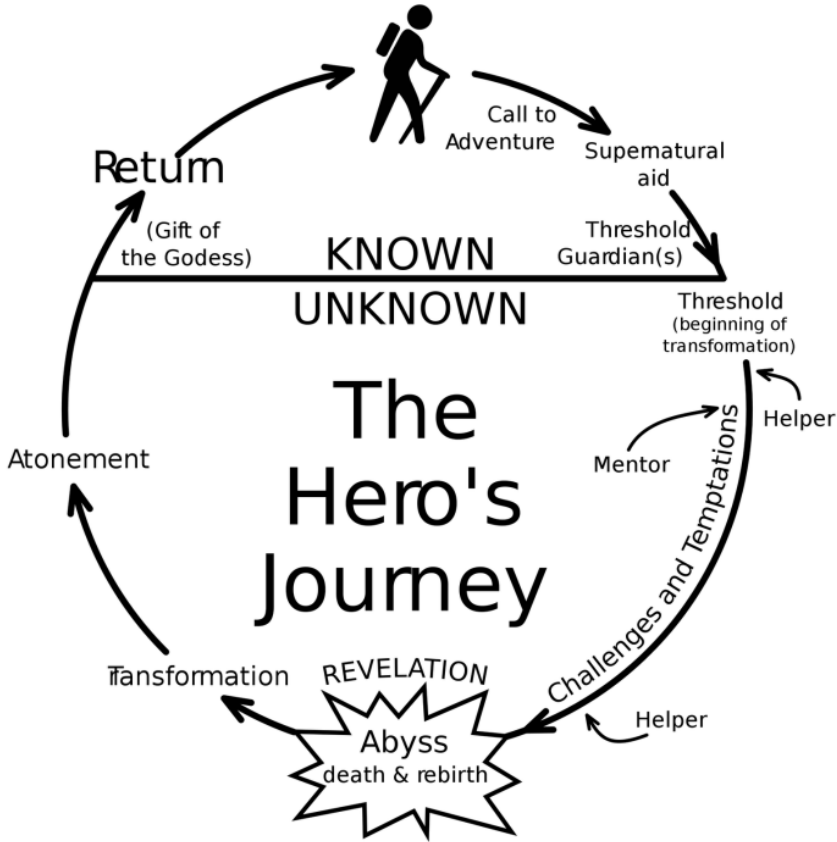

Figure 1. *The Hero's Journey Monomyth.*

The Present – Design Possibilities

The Heroes Project is to act as a catalyst for positive change in the Khoi-San youth in a number of ways, where the outcomes may:

- Be a tool for community members to negotiate their present day difficulties through the learnings of the community leaders;
- Be a source to learn about authentic leadership that is value-based; these values are those highlighted by leaders present today;
- Empower the community by allowing them to engage with this project through their own journeys that chronicle their hero moments, making them more aware of each other's strengths;
- Provide an avenue that can fuel a spirit of adventure and curiosity among the youth about their history and elders as the narrative is embedded in their myths; and
- Chronicle live stories that will allow for dialogue between community members in creative and personal ways.

The desired intervention is a graphic narrative series. However, before engaging in narrative building, an exploration of possibilities was carried out through research, illustrations, immersion into the context and character design, to imagine the people, places, issues and events, and arrive at various forms of interventions. Phase I was run as an undergraduate design diploma project, to discover the possibilities.

Figure 2. *Sample comic* (2013).   Figure 3. *Sample comic* (2013).

Exploring Methods & Forms

The Heroes Project first launched a complete immersion into the context of the Cape Flats and Khoi-San culture, past and present. This included understanding the nature of myths and what roles myths and beliefs play in their culture. According to Carl Jung, myths are public dreams and are responsible for the collective unconscious (Jung, 1968:3-41).

One of the larger initial design challenges was making the leap across cultures, histories, practices and beliefs. Along with the research it was important to develop sensitivity for the socio-political and cultural issues at the Cape Flats, from across continents. To help comprehend the extent of collective trauma and cultural loss, the design team observed that Khoi-San history is today's story in the northeast of India, where the current volatile political situation can potentially result in similar cultural collective trauma of the youth.

Khoi-San folklore and mythology provided a lens to understanding the community in the pre-colonial era through an appreciation for metaphors, analogies and symbols. The ancient Khoi-San had an extraordinary relationship and ability to communicate with nature and the universe at large. Their interactions with nature were cleverly interwoven into their stories and poems. How do we read ancient myths and current local stories and contemporize Khoi-San culture through the visual medium?

A graphic narrative's appeal largely depends on the visual language and design that need to be embedded in the visual identity of the region. It was here that an in-depth study of visual styles of the Khoi-San revealed what lay beyond their rock cave paintings – a spiritual realm where myths come alive. This discovery enriched the process of narrative building and character design. Current cultural modes of expression were explored, including Afro-Futurism, performing arts, music, and popular literature. The strategy for Phase I of the project was to develop a participatory social tool that was able to engage the community, to capture the voice of the youth, in an open and mindful space. It was necessary for engagement to be playful, to inspire and build a platform to share stories.
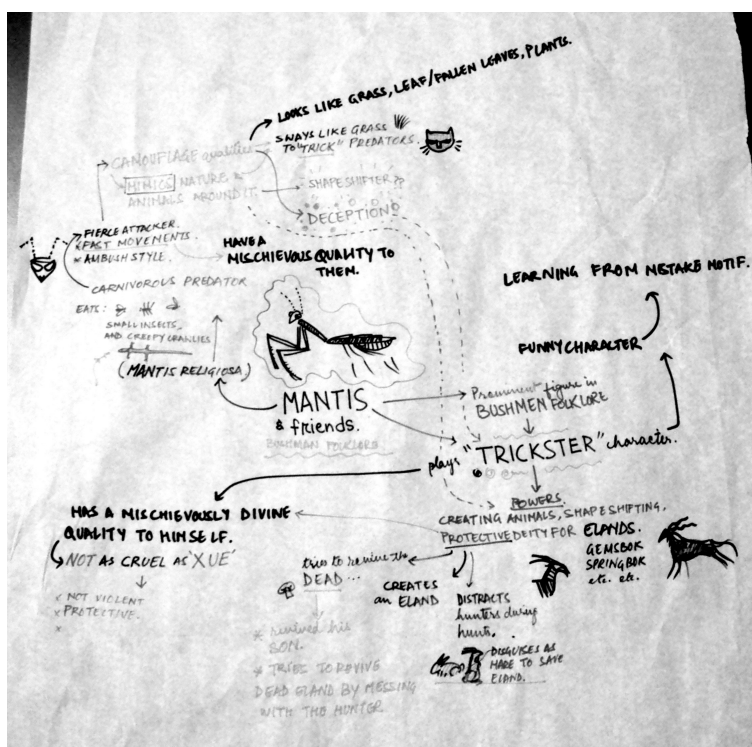

Figure 4. *Elements of character design* **(2013)**

Figure 5. *The Heroes Workshop in Cape Town* **(2013)**

Figure 6. *Shadow puppetry at the Heroes Workshop* **(2013)**

The graphic narratives needed real stories of local heroes. A workshop, designed based on theatre games and shadow puppetry, was facilitated in collaboration with local artists, at a community centre in the Cape Flats, where the youth participated in sharing stories, through music, theatre exercises, beat boxing, and other spatial and performative activities, that enabled the youth to play, create and share ideas. The visual cues and aids through the workshop activities and storytelling were the characters designed for the Heroes Project narrative. The characters, derived from Khoi-San mythology, were designed and developed based on Carl Jung's archetypes.

Cave Paintings, Archetypes and Characters

The characters are based on spiritually significant animals and their therianthropes seen in rock cave paintings. Therianthropes are visual representations of the state of being half human and half animal. The character design and development were based on beliefs and myths surrounding the animals and their therianthropic forms. The main characters, inspired by the five spiritually significant animals from Khoi-San stories, are the lion, the jackal, the baboon, the eland and the mantis. These mythological characters were overlaid onto the four Jungian archetypes: the king, the lover, the wizard and the warrior. The fifth character, the mantis, is based on the archetype of the 'supernatural aid' from Joseph Campbell's monomyth.

Figure 7. *Exploring visual styles* (2013)

According to Khoi-San beliefs, the lion is a strong beast but is naive and foolish. The lion is seldom the one that triumphs at the end of the story. The character of the lion was developed on the Jungian archetype of the 'warrior'.

The character of the baboon is based on the Jungian archetype of the 'wizard'. In Khoi-San tradition the baboon has a notorious reputation and is mischievous, unpredictable and has shamanic powers. The baboon character in the story must seek to find a balance between a manipulator and being manipulated.

Unlike most myths, here the nature of the jackal is seen as a protective guardian, always looking after the hunters. The jackal's character is adapted from the Jungian archetype of the 'lover' (Moore and Gillette, 1990).

The eland is the most spiritually significant animal in Khoi-San mythology; often referred to as the 'rain animal', it is believed to be the most spiritually potent by the Khoi-San. The largest antelope in South Africa, the eland's character is based on the Jungian archetype of the 'king'.

Figure 8. *Final illustrations of the characters* (2013)

The fifth character, inspired by the mantis, is the Khoi-San deity */Kaggen*. /Kaggen is said to be a shape-shifting bushman shaman attributed to have created the moon and antelopes. This shape-shifting Khoi-San deity, although a trickster by nature, plays a great role in imparting wisdom.

Through the workshop teenagers from the Cape Flats shared stories through shadow puppetry, drama games, role-play, and beat box improvisations, all contributing to collecting stories to be adapted in developing the graphic narratives.

Figure 9. *Theatre games at the Heroes Workshop* (2013)

A mammoth challenge of undertaking a design impact project is community consent and participation. Early in the project, with Natural Justice, the National Khoi-San Council was consulted for approval to embark on this journey. With this consent and the success of the workshop in capturing individual journeys and events in the Cape Flats, the Heroes Project, poised to begin creating narratives, launched into Phase II.
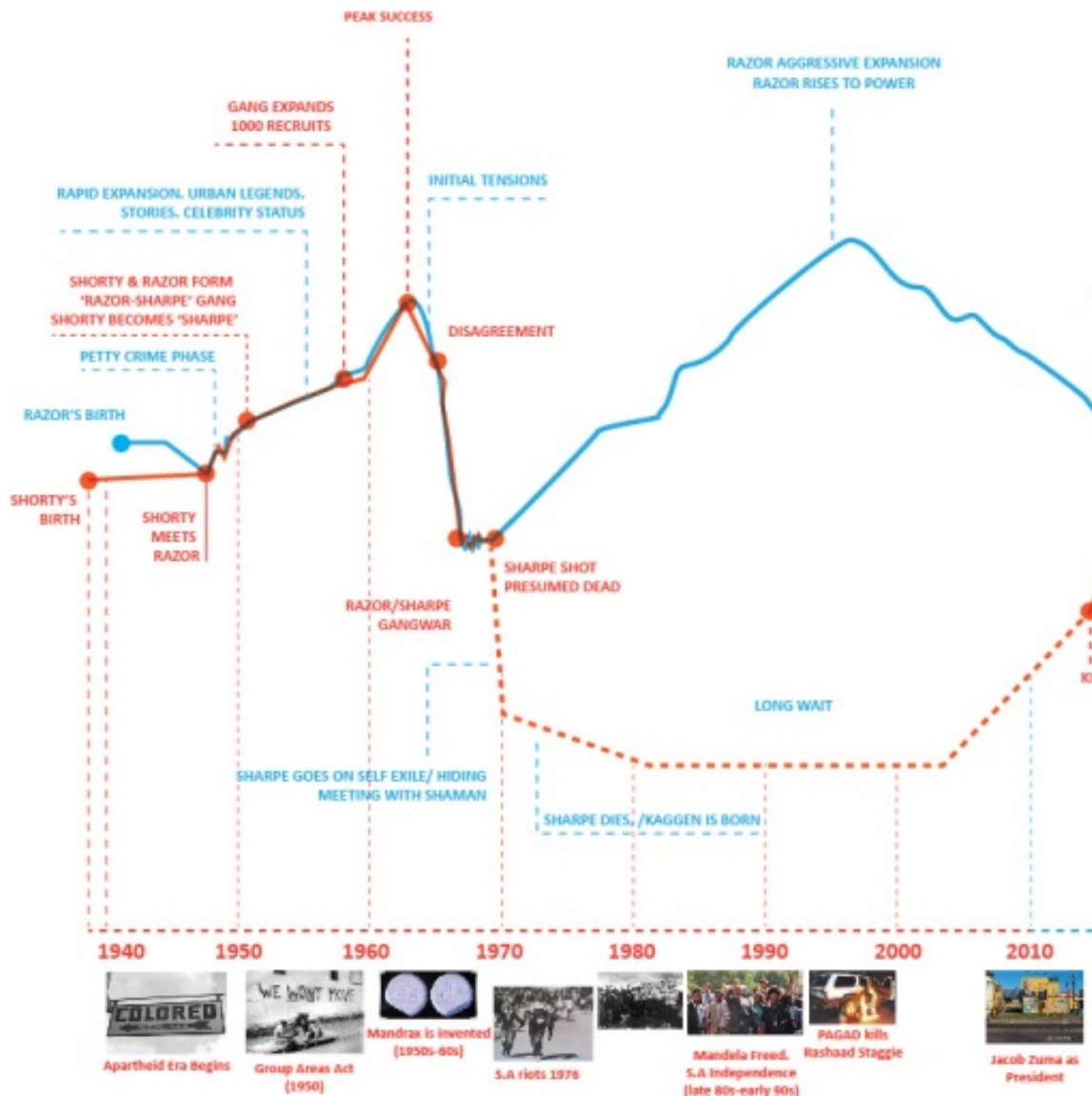
Phase II: Origin Story Creation

Figure 10. *Events timeline for the meta-narrative, up until 2010; weaving history into fiction* (2014)

The series of narratives to be developed are the individual stories of the four characters, intertwined through events, relationships and challenges, who move into an unknown future with /Kaggen. This creative storytelling required the construction of a meta-narrative and structure, bringing together history, fiction, characters and their past, the uncertain volatile context of today, and the hope that lies

ahead. The hero's journey inspired the structure of this meta-narrative, and helped to enrich and detail the characters' appearances, expressions and interpersonal dynamics.

It is in Phase II that the Cape Flats history and /Kaggen's story emerge, inspired by current prison mythology surrounding the origins of the 'Numbers Gang'. An elaborate story of /Kaggen and his trials has been developed simultaneously, set in the apartheid years and Post-independence South Africa.

The co-creation of the graphic narrative script is a unique story in itself that crosses disciplines and geographies; unlike most graphic narratives, the Heroes Project scripts are driven by the visual storyboards. Based on the interpretation of the storyboards, a rough script was written and incorporated, coordinating among lawyers and designers, pushing each others' imaginations and boundaries, revealing possibilities of positive choices for the Khoi-San youth.
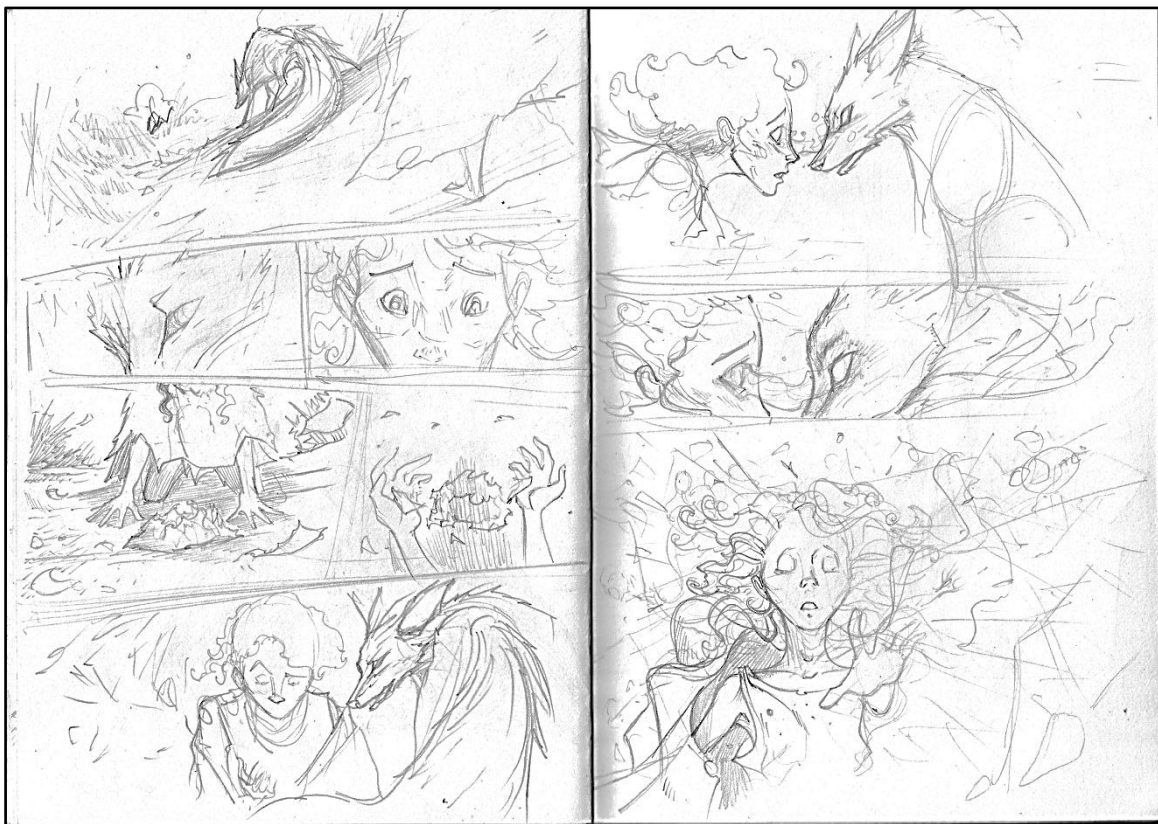

Figure 11. *Storyboards* (2014)

The Future

The power of heroes and their journeys are to inspire and generate a sense of possibility against all odds. Heroes are present in many forms from mythical figures to a member of one's community. The importance of the hero is one of activating the imagination to push the boundaries beyond the odds placed before them. This narrative can be seen as an instrument to enable a person to transform and transcend their present contextual political reality to a future that can be inclusive of the seemingly impossible. Joseph Campbell once said that 'the adventure of the hero is the adventure of being alive'. It is in this spirit that the graphic narrative series hopes to instil among the Khoi-San youth through the telling of heroic tales of Khoi-San youth and grounded in their history, myths and culture.

The graphic narrative series seeks to capture the hero's journeys of four young people from the Cape Flats. The narratives weave together Khoi-San stories, myths, traditions, history and contemporary social, political and economic reality. The Heroes Project narratives seek to use heroic, culturally rooted stories as a way of offering possibilities to negotiate the present day challenges being faced by the Khoi-San youth. The graphic narratives also offer a medium, among many, to revitalise the importance of their myths and legends among the youth with the objective that this revitalisation will give the youth an avenue to understand their identity and history.

During the first half of 2014, the Origin Story was developed, and will soon seek community consent. Once approved, it will be launched in late September at the District Six Museum, Cape Town, South Africa. Residents of District Six, an inner-city neighborhood, were forcibly removed during apartheid, making this venue for the launch ideal to initiate cultural revival. The hope is to later disseminate in the Cape Flats, and catalyze new collaborations with local South African artists and designers, performers and illustrators, to develop the next phase of activities, thus taking collective ownership of reviving community spirit and enabling imaginations to see new opportunities.

Figure 12. *Pages from the graphic narrative* **(2014)**

Reference List

"Afrofuturism" is an emergent literary and cultural aesthetic that combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western cosmologies in order to critique not only the present-day dilemmas of people of colour, but also to revise, interrogate, and re-examine the historical events of the past.' (2013) Quoted from Wikipedia at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrofuturism

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Image Reference List

Figure 1. *The Hero's Journey Monomyth* [Poster] At: http://blog.mugglenet.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/heros-journey-cycle1.png (Accessed on 07.07.2014)

Figures 2 & 3. Choudhury, Abhishek (2013) *The hero's journey sample comic* [Illustration]

Figure 4. Choudhury, Abhishek (2013) *Elements of character design* [Illustration]

Figure 5. Orderson, Kurt (2013) *The Heroes workshop in Cape Town* [Photograph] At: http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-VulBLCOs7R4/Uos6xAd1AhI/AAAAAAAAAm4/LZs3DH4RXrc/s1600/vlcsnap-2013-11-04-16h29m42s99.png (Accessed on 07.07.2014)

Figure 6. Orderson, Kurt (2013) *Shadow puppetry at the Heroes Workshop* [Photograph] At: http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-P7flEBSqaUw/Uos61--nWeI/AAAAAAAAAnI/JjBx4dkC52I/s1600/vlcsnap-2013-11-04-17h17m54s80.png (Accessed on 07.07.2014)

Figure 7. Choudhury, Abhishek (2013) *Exploring visual styles* [Illustration] At: http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-rroEjzCdC5g/Uhr0ZMe3oII/AAAAAAAAAWU/KmlpPOvu9FI/s1600/20130819_163229.jpg (Accessed on 07.07.2014)

Figure 8. Choudhury, Abhishek (2013) *Final illustrations of the characters* [Illustration]

Figure 9. Orderson, Kurt (2013) *Theatre games at the Heroes Workshop* [Photograph]

Figure 10. Choudhury, Abhishek (2014) *Events timeline for the meta-narrative, up until 2010; weaving history into fiction* [Poster]

Figure 11. Choudhury, Abhishek (2014) *Storyboards* [Illustration]

Figure 12. Choudhury, Tewari (2014) *Pages from the graphic narrative* [Illustration]