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Galashewe and the big hole Mine Museum: 'exploring community engagement within museum practices'

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2019

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29362

Bopape, Boitumelo Agatha, (2019) Galeshewe and the Big Hole Mine Museum :exploring community engagement within museum practices, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, https://hdl.handle.net/10539/29362

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Abstract

I grew up in Galeshewe Township, Kimberley. Growing up in the area, one way or the other, you would have known or heard about the Big Hole (also known as Kimberley mine) and De Beers Company. This was because most men from Galeshewe community including my father worked for De Beers. At that time, the mining labour market was one of the main economic trade institutions in and around Kimberley and Kimberley was one of the most developing cities. Throughout the years, both the Big Hole and De Beers became a symbol of power because of their contribution towards shaping the city of Kimberley and shaping Southern Africa Region's global position in the mining industry. Even with all the economic influence over the centuries, most mining businesses were eventually shut down in Kimberley but one of the renowned mining landscape Big Hole pit was converted into a museum in 1968 and has been one of the most popular attraction for the city of Kimberley.

In 2005, the Big Hole museum was reconstructed or renovated into an open-air museum complex that displays (attempt) the nature of its operation during the heydays and the lived experience of the miners. This museum project was said to become a lasting legacy for the people of Kimberley, and would help position Kimberley from a mining based economy to a tourism-based one. However, with all that it stands for, which is both a tourism attractions and heritage site, there is just a disconnect between the museum and the local community of Galeshewe. I made this observation when I worked at the Big Hole on various projects[1]. My work required me to work with the community of Galeshewe township and whilst working on these projects, I could not help notice a lack of

[1] I worked and interacted with the Big Hole Mine Museum on two various projects: Northern Cape Tourism Authority (2010-2015) and the Liberation Heritage Route Project (LHR) through the National Heritage Council (2014)

interest by the local community for the museum. This disconnect between the community and institution is what particularly concerned me, mainly because the history that is told about the Big Hole mine is largely shaped by the contribution of mineworkers who are members of Galeshewe community.

Considering the ways in which individuals and societies constitute themselves which is mainly through their links to memory or history, my interest is to understand the community's disconnect by reflecting firstly on the aspects of the museum display (material collection), secondly on the community's reflection of the museum and lastly, on how the museum is managed. I examine whether (or how) education and inclusive representation can be used as a way to address the gaps and as a way to encourage local participation.