

Barriers

Boundaries

Fabian Saptouw

Beaufort West
Victoria West
Carnarvon
Upington

This doctoral research project examines the Bleek and Lloyd collection through the lens of immaterial traces of the past in the land. The term trace has particular resonance as something that belongs to both the past and the present. The trace of something is a partial remnant of an action or event that can be found in the present, while the act of tracing something is an active process of following the call to action of the trace. This pursuit of the traces of the past inspired my journey of more than 2,000 kilometers that connects Cape Town, Beaufort West, Victoria West, Carnarvon and Upington. Driving the extended route along tar, gravel and dirt roads made me aware of the poetic vastness of the Northern Cape, and the scale of the journey that ||kabbo undertook during his incarceration. His account of travelling as an incarcerated labourer along with |han≠kass'o and Witbooy Touren from town to town was what prompted my interest in these specific sites, and one of the reasons why I ensured that I visited his home the Bitterpits on my journey. My awareness of the issues of ownership and control of the land and its resources directed my attention to markers indicative of how the land is occupied, ownership is transferred and borders are protected through particular interventions.

This research journal series traces the line drawn by various barriers and boundaries through the Northern Cape. Visual emphasis is placed on the materiality of the fence as an object that demarcates territory and declares ownership. The fence is presented as an obstacle to movement, an articulation of power, but also as something that is potentially porous and in need of continual repair or maintenance. The disruption of space through these particular structures have been observed through the following modes of production; photographs, audio recordings, video recordings and the collection of objects from each location. The additional resources will be used as the foundation for subsequent creative projects.

Within the broader research project this idea of the barrier or the border will feature in relation to the process of searching for what remains. Each of the research journals approach this topic through slightly different ways to look at the land. The first journal contrasts moments of deterioration and attempts at repair in Beaufort West; the photographic series starts at the correctional services facility and extends to the farmlands on the outskirts of town. The

second journal starts at the Victoria West Correctional Services facility and includes visual transitions from images of the clear blue sky interrupted by fencing, to the ground and plant growth over the course of a few pages. The third journal examined traces of time trampled underfoot, looking particularly at markers of movement, change or disruption in Carnarvon. The fourth journal examines the Department of Transport, Roads and Public Works' Road Camp, a fence manufacturing plant and a recycling centre in Upington. The narrow focus on the Correctional services in the first two booklets is linked to their appearance in the Bleek and Lloyd Collection as sites of incarceration. The images attempt to negotiate how institutions control movement, create barriers and manage the generation of waste.

When viewed as a series these four research journals hint at the tangible and intangible traces of power and control that exist in the land. The majority of these fences were experienced as obstacles while moving through the land on foot, often with polite but tense questions regarding my intentions, my positionality and often my camera. There were some sites where photography was prohibited and I was not allowed access, for example the interior of the Upington road camp and the interior of the correctional services facility. These photographs therefore function as a way to navigate the land and the occupants, seeking moments of connection to space and place. The next research journal will investigate how the act of walking is a manifestation of the liminal state of in-between-ness, and will be situated in parallel to key journeys and narratives in the Bleek and Lloyd Collection. This will be engaged with reference to the second intangible element, wind, which is also a major research interest and will form part of the focus of the digital publications planned for 2023.

This research has been generously supported by the National Research Foundation and the University of Cape Town. This publication is part of my methodology to utilize the book-object as a means to render process-based artistic productive tangible and contributes to the creative practice of my PhD in Fine Art.





01

01
A light photographed through a gap in the chain-link fence surrounding the Department of Transport, Roads and Public Works' Road Camp: Uppington.

02
A close up of two layers of fence around the Road Camp; twisted loops of wire on a fence in Uppington

02



Boundaries

Beaufort West
Victoria West
Carnarvon
Upington
Brandvlei



05



05
Loops of
wire around
an eye bolt
securing
a fence in
place

06
Spools of
metal shav-
ings found at
a recycling
plant on the
outskirts of
town

06



07



07
A photograph of roll of chain-link fence with an abraded protective purple plastic sheet by Agri-Wire (EDMS).

08
A close-up image of two rolls of wire, the kind of weave is unclear but minor deterioration can be seen on the surface of the wire at the same location.

08





09
A close-up image of an electric fence with wire threaded through a Y-standard and secured with an additional coil of wire by Agri-Wire (EDMS).

10
A close-up image of three rolls of wire, the top seems like a chain-link fence while the bottom fence's weave is less rigid. Minor deterioration can be seen on the surface of the wire.

11 (next page)
A sullied feather caught in a fence, with a deep shadow of the razor wire cast on the ground.





Uppington