

News - SU engages community on 'lost memories' of...



"The Hardekraaltjie cemetery is our only link to the lost memory of this area."

Mr Melvin Arendse's clan name is Korana, which means "brown face" in the language of the Khoikhoi. He grew up in an area formerly known as Tiervlei (now Ravensmead) and spoke these words at Stellenbosch University's (SU) Hardekraaltjie cemetery restitution event, which was held on Human Right's Day, 21 March 2022. The event was hosted in partnership with members of the Tiervlei community.

Members of the former Tiervlei community – representatives of amongst others, the Arendse, Olivier, Basson, Bastian, Afrika, Fortuin and Dietrich-families – shared memories of their formative years, with Hardekraaltjie cemetery, which is partially situated on

SU's Tygerberg campus, at the heart of it.

SU's Human Rights Day event's discussions were hosted by Dr Leslie van Rooi, SU's senior director of Transformation and Social Impact, Dr Therese Fish, Vice-dean of SU's Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences (FMHS) and Prof Aslam Fataar from SU's Department of Education Policy Studies, who is also linked to the University's Transformation portfolio. "This initiative, which aptly takes place on Human Rights Day, is aimed at restitution," said Van Rooi. "We are committed to a restitution process for Hardekraaltjie which is underscored by research and community participation to remind us of a past when the dignity of the people in this area was tragically violated."

Fataar, who led the series of discussions held at FMHS' Tygerberg campus, said SU intended engaging with community members for at least two years to ensure a "deep human-centred community participation process" that would lead to the appropriate commemoration of those laid to rest at the site. Fataar explained that archival and community-based research is an important part of the restitution process. This research will "provide a complex story about the Tiervlei community's everyday lives linked to the cemetery. We aim to develop a culturally-defined story about the grief, trauma, and dislocation caused by the cemetery's violation. The community participative process will decide on the manner in which the cemetery site will be developed as a

meaningful community space for memorialisation, education and on-going conversation," said Fataar.

The Hardekraaltjie cemetery research process to date

SU's Human Right's Day community participation process was prefaced with a research presentation by Dr Handri Walters, lecturer in SU's Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology. "We cannot talk about Hardekraaltjie cemetery without talking about apartheid and the Group Areas Act of 1950. According to official records, the Hardekraaltjie cemetery was in use from 1910 until its closure in 1947. In the years between, SU's Rector, HB Thom (1955 – 1970) regularly corresponded with the then Cape Provincial Administration about the acquisition of property to establish a Faculty of Medicine with an adjoining public training hospital that would serve all South Africans, including people of colour."

The cemetery had a central place in the then Tiervlei community, which was subjected to forced removals under Group Areas Act (1950) of the apartheid regime. Today the site where the cemetery used to be extends across sections of land owned or controlled by SU, Tygerberg Hospital (the Western Cape Government Health Department through the Department of Public Works), and the Passenger Rail Agency of South Africa (PRASA).

Records of correspondence from the 1950s and 1960s

outline a series of discussions between the former government and the university's former management structures about the location of the proposed training site for would-be white doctors. The site had to accommodate lecture halls, residences and sports fields. Old maps show that Hardekraaltjie cemetery was (and still is) located on the (former) geographical border between people of colour and white people.

Walters' research highlighted the systemic effects of apartheid that had manifested in the work of several institutions which led to the end of the cemetery's documented existence. She presented a news report published in *Die Burger* on 17 May 1971 with the heading "Begraafplaas word dalk sportveld vir Maties". Upon reflecting on what happened to Hardekraaltjie cemetery after this report, she presented a blank screen.

The collection of oral history in the former Tiervlei community

Mr Chefferino Fortuin, a social historian and community member who is researching the history of Tiervlei, presented a talk about the oral history collection process. "The point of community participation is to bring the history of what is in our memory to the fore." Fortuin emphasised that it is inordinately difficult to paint an accurate picture of history in a place like South Africa. "But memories and specifically the memories of the older people still in our midst, are crucial to the memorialisation

process."

"Cemeteries act as an institution of a person's life. In many cases, it is the only record of when you were born and when you departed. I remember the donkey carts carrying the coffins of our loved ones and the ritual of visiting the graves of those who came before us, my grandparents included. Hardekraaltjie was our place of sanctity and it is important that we acknowledge it as such, for us and the generations after us," said Ravensmead community member and former staff member of the FMHS, Mr Daniël Dietrich.

Mrs Anna Afrika Valentyn remembers coffins on a wagon and walking carefully to ensure they didn't cross (colour) lines. "My grandparents, Anna and Petrus Afrika, are buried here."

Ms Shantal Fortuin said she was grateful for the opportunity to speak freely about a part of her history she uncovered at SU's community engagement process. Fortuin learned who her great-grandparents were at SU's first Hardekraaltjie memorialisation event on 24 September 2021.

Community member and Khoisan leader, Mr Melvin Arendse said Hardekraaltjie is the epicentre of brown people's history in the northern suburbs of Cape Town. "In this cemetery lies human remains that is more than 150 years old. The entire Tygerberg area was one of the last

spaces of conflict. The people buried here are linked to more than 230 coloured families across the Western Cape."

Mr Tromp, an 80 year old resident in the area, passionately argued for a view of restitution that provides a platform for addressing the community's on-going poverty and social problems, which he argued, is tied to the impact of forced removals in the area since the 1950s.

Hardekraaltjie memorialisation process

SU and the Tygerberg Hospital has committed to a restorative process to decide how the cemetery site and those buried there would be memorialised. Van Rooi led discussions about the memorialisation process at the Human Rights Day event. "There is a plea that we memorialise this site in an effort to work toward greater heritage acknowledgement as we continue our interactions with the community."

A contextualisation board explaining the historical importance of the site and the process SU has embarked on, will be erected in due course.

"Ultimately, we are looking to community members to give input into how we appropriately recognise both the tragedy of Hardekraaltjie and the restitution process." Ideas at the 21 March event included a wall with the names of the family members buried there and a memorial garden.

According to Fataar, the Hardekraaltjie restitution process will include the creation of a digital archive, so that the story of the "lost" memory of the area in question could be further memorialised for a younger audience.

The Hardekraaltjie restitution process will be guided by SU's Visual Redress Policy, which emphasises restitution, inclusivity and cohesion in the University's visual, cultural and symbolic activities. Ongoing community participation will involve several stakeholders, including Tygerberg Hospital, PRASA, members of local communities and the Tiervlei community, and Heritage Western Cape.