

By Renata Campielo

The visit of the Workers Museum in the Newtown Compound was as enriching experience that complemented the classroom work. There we had the chance to walk around a former hostel, a term that does not refer to the modern-day backpackers' accommodation. Instead, the hostel in this context was the lodging of workers who served the municipality, cleaning latrines all over Johannesburg. Most of those workers were also migrants from neighbouring countries.

The museum focuses in the poor conditions of living. It has an emotional appeal in order to drive the visitor through the bad experiences faced everyday by its inhabitants. The lack of privacy, the uncomfortable beds, the cold showers, the mistreatment by the authorities and the weak heating are felt and seen when visiting the actual installations. Pictures and objects of time are placed in the rooms to portrait similar conditions as lived at that time.

The curatorship is efficient to promote the feeling of injustice. The conditions of living were poor, and it was rooted in the racist system in place. Understanding the dynamic in place at the time – with its injustices – helps understand the South African society of today. And for that objective, the Workers Museum contributes vehemently.

While visting the museum, a parallel was traced in my mind. I spent my visit comparing it to the Brazilian museums I know and how they approach the country's darkest period in history: slavery of natives and Africans. I do not know any museums in Brazil that acknowledge the memory of victims of slavery the way the Apartheid is remembered in South Africa.

Museums in Brazil have a tendency of focusing more on objects and historical milestones than in the feelings and experiences that those objects and facts inflicted on people. They tend to be impersonal and to disregard that the historical events happened *to* people. As if talking about the horrors of that period would keep visitors away. Perhaps they fear that an exhibition that conjures emotions is not a technical or scientific accurate. I disagree. In fact, I believe it is a teaching tool. When emotions are evoked the learning process is more efficient, leading people to remember details better. Also, it gives representation to those whose lives were influenced by historical events.

Just like in South Africa, the repercussions of that period still reflect in Brazilian contemporary society. It is therefore important to have spaces that act as reminders of those experiences and how this has shaped generations of people.