

2 'So there I sit in a Catch-22 situation': remembering and imagining trauma in the District Six Museum

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It made you feel like a second-class citizen, defiled, demoralised, you felt depressed, I always [wondered] what is wrong with me? You know, what is different about me?... You know, and you have to, um, you have to keep on fighting back. You know. Not physically, but in your mind also you have that ongoing battle, you know... Why?... And now I am saying it very mildly. (laughing) But I felt, I always used to think, you know, um, if I had a bomb, or if I had a gun, I'll shoot everybody. You know, that, that made me feel like that... You know, you just have to swallow it, you just have to, you know, brush away your tears. And because... you know, you felt so helpless! You know. What did we do about it? (Linda Fortune)

Introduction

These are the words of Linda Fortune. She was one of the 60 000 people forcibly removed from District Six, an area in the centre of Cape Town. Her words powerfully evoke what it felt like to be thrown out of her house and neighbourhood, because she didn't have 'the right colour'. This physical violation of her very home and identity caused feelings of disorientation, anger and powerlessness. She was not just thrown out of a house. Her identity and agency were violated. As a result, she didn't only have to fight a daily, physical struggle to survive in an entirely new environment. She also had to fight a mental battle. She had to make sense of what had happened and the question 'why?' recurs over and over again until this day.

Tourists ask what that vast open space is at the foot of Table Mountain, when they visit Cape Town for the first time. In the beautifully decorated Methodist Church in Buitenkant Street, now the District Six Museum, people tell you the story of that scar on the landscape. As the name indicates, the area was the sixth district of Cape Town, which was called Kanaladorp before 1867 (Bickford-Smith 1990: 36; Hart 1990: 119). It was a very heterogeneous place that housed workers and artisans from various countries and cultures. Although there were dynamic hierarchies according

to class, ethnicity and gender, a sense of community and cosmopolitanism prevailed. People intermarried and several religions were practised side by side (Bickford-Smith 1990: 37–38, 50ff; Soudien 2001a: 90–101).

This cosmopolitanism was problematic for the rulers of the country well before the actual implementation of apartheid in 1948 (see Goldin 1987). When the apartheid government came to power in 1948, the colour segregation which had been a reality before then was systematised and legally enforced. Two acts impacted on the lives of millions of people in a tremendous way. The Population Registration Act (No. 30 of 1950) classified people according to race. And the Group Areas Act (No. 41 of 1950) mapped out a racial, spatial system, in which black populations were forcibly removed from areas, such as the inner city, which were reserved for whites only (Hart 1990; McEachern 2001: 225–226). Ironically, officials called these forced removals ‘resettlements’ and ‘community development’. Living separately, they said, would benefit the people; in reality, the whites were the only beneficiaries (Frescura 2001; Delpont 2001).

The housing conditions in District Six deteriorated from the first half of the 20th century onwards because of a rapid influx of people from rural areas. In 1901, African residents were blamed for spreading disease and were removed from District Six to the newly created township of Ndabeni (Bickford-Smith 1990: 41; Goldin 1987: 158). There was a general unwillingness on the part of landlords and the local City Council to guarantee healthy housing conditions and functioning public services in the area. Under the apartheid government, officials used this situation to label the area a slum and to justify the forced removals (Bickford-Smith 1990: 35, 48–49; Hart 1990: 120–123; McEachern 2001: 225–226; Rive 1990: 111; Swanson & Harries 2001: 64–65).

PW Botha declared District Six a white area on 11 February 1966. During the following 15 years between 55 000 and 65 000 people were displaced and the District was bulldozed house by house (Hart 1990: 126). The general reaction of the inhabitants was, as Crain Soudien describes it, ‘apathy’, which could be read as a ‘rejection of politics’, though there were several attempts to counter the decision of the national government by local resistance initiatives, organised by the middle class and educated workers, such as the District Six Defence Committee and the Friends of District Six Committee; there were also individual outcries published in the newspapers (Soudien 1990: 145, 178; Martin 2001).

Most of the inhabitants were dumped on the Cape Flats, a vast, sandy landscape with barely any infrastructure such as shops, schools and workplaces. People were separated from friends and family and now had to pay expensive bus and train fares to commute to their schools and workplaces in town. Although the government renamed the District Six area Zonnebloem, and dreamed of populating the area with white residents, this didn’t happen because of resistance from former residents, such as the Friends of District Six with their Hands Off District Six Campaign in the

1980s (see Hart 1990; Soudien 1990). The area remained a wasteland of the apartheid policy of resettlement, but also – with its isolated, untouched churches and mosques – an icon of resistance (see Jeppie & Soudien 1990; McEachern 2001).

With the opening of the District Six Museum on 10 December 1994, the year of the first democratic elections in South Africa, District Sixers not only claimed the right to tell their stories in a public space, but also started the official process of restitution of the area to its original inhabitants (Field 2001c: 119–120; McEachern 2001; Rassool & Prosalendis 2001). The museum, situated in the old church of the Central Methodist Mission at 25A Buitenkant Street, is a living, people's museum. Its beginnings lie in a working project, 'Streets', that was open to the general public but more specifically was designed for ex-residents to reclaim the social and 'memory' space of District Six, or as Peggy Delpont argues, to generate meaning through 'visual catalysts'. This was done not only by means of the exhibition of pictures and artefacts that ex-residents donated, but also through a process of inscribing and re-inscribing a large street map that covers the central floor space of the museum. Since then the idea of a museum as a lived space has been taken further in the ever-changing and growing construction of memory cloths, audiovisual installations, and new exhibitions on forced removals in other areas in Cape Town (Delpont 2001). The idea of a people's space that is ever-changing also highlights the narratives discussed below, as contested, ever-changing and dynamic.¹

In this chapter, I am concerned with how the District Six Museum facilitators talk about the traumatic events of the forced removals to the new, younger generation of a country in transition. I look at how five individuals narrate and deal with trauma, and how a community is (re)constructed at a heritage site such as the District Six Museum.²

I interviewed five museum facilitators who work or have worked at the District Six Museum: Linda Fortune, Joe Schaffers and Vincent Kolbe, all educators at the museum, Stan Abrahams, a trustee of the Beneficiary Trust of the District Six Museum, and Terence Fredericks, the chairperson of the District Six Museum Foundation.³ All five interviewees talked spontaneously about their experiences relating to the demolition of District Six and the resettlement on the Cape Flats.⁴ In what follows, I have tried to allow as much space as possible for the interviewees' voices to be heard, without, however, silencing my own empathising and questioning voice as a young, non-South African historian.

'When I remember District Six...': narrating District Six

When I remember District Six, I, I don't just remember District Six. I remember Cape Town, my city. District Six was just a label and the label became famous, because it was destroyed...So when we were thrown out of District Six. I mean District Six was destroyed...as, as neighbourhood. You were thrown out of your city, and that's the trauma...besides the very personal trauma of being thrown out of your house. (Vincent Kolbe)⁵

People such as Vincent Kolbe talk about their past experiences and daily lives mostly in fragmented ways, with their kin and friends. When an oral history interviewer pays a visit, as was the case here, people are invited to look back at their lives and create a more holistic narrative which links up their images and dreams of their past, present and future (Portelli 1997: 3–6). The oral history interview is less about events and more about the meaning behind these events for the narrator (La Capra 2001: 86–87; Delpont 2001: 43). Events become memories in the mind, an ever-changing group of thoughts, images and emotional responses (Field 2001c: 117). These memories are not stored historically (as in an archive) but in a moral space of real and possible personal stories (see Hynes 1999: 219; McAdams 1993: 29; Portelli 1991: 59–76). In Portelli's words, 'oral sources tell us not just what people did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did' (Portelli 1991: 50).

This moral space of 'real' and 'possible' stories often occurs when people have had traumatic experiences, such as the forced removals of District Six. With the destruction of the space and community that was District Six, the inhabitants lost their *place*, one that created and was created by their cosmopolitan identity as individuals and as a community (Richard Rive, quoted in Rassool & Prosalendis 2001: 31).⁶ For the five interviewees the actual loss was traumatic because with it they also lost their trust in others and in the safety of the world.⁷ This trauma caused uncomfortable feelings, such as disappointment, anger, helplessness, and bitterness (Benezer 1999: 29; Field 2001c: 118–123; Hart 1990: 128–131).

In 1994, with the transition to a democratic South Africa, previously excluded historical narratives of this sort became politically acceptable (Davison 1998: 147). Now we find these traumatic memories not only in fragmented form in the privacy of homes and families (see Portelli 1991, 1997). We find them also in more consciously constructed forms in therapy rooms, in public arenas such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and on television, in newspapers and magazines, in the heritage sites of museums and in the discourse of schooling.⁸

District Six became a national and international symbol for the brutality of apartheid only after the demolition of the area, and especially after the victory of the democratic elections in 1994. In Vincent Kolbe's words, 'District Six was just a label and the label became famous, because it was destroyed.' Writer and ex-District Six resident Richard Rive also points out how District Six's image changed over time: 'When I was young people hid the fact that they came from District Six in their back pockets. Now it is a mark of great social prestige to have come from there' (Rive quoted in Adhikari 2002: 222).⁹

Place can be described as a mental construction in which the physical space is pivotal in creating and sustaining social relationships. This is important in the complex process of reconstructing one's identity. For the District Sixers, part of this process is the reclaiming of the lost space and community, if not physically then at least mentally (Field 2001c: 118–120).¹⁰ Stan Abrahams expresses this as follows:

My larger sense of the, the, the place, was for me a place that was safe, where it was a, it was a place certainly that um, I believe, I, I sort of grew up in a situation where I wasn't, we weren't really *conscious* of the, the kind of differentiation and the, between races. (Stan Abrahams)

The destruction of District Six had such an impact on them that both Stan Abrahams and Linda Fortune became conscious that they had previously lived or *must* have lived in another world, physically and morally, a world opposite to the racially differentiated world they were forced into. In the words of Linda Fortune:

[T]here is one vital link that is missing [on the Cape Flats]! And that was your community! You know. We knew everybody, and *then we realised* how important your neighbours are to you, how important the church, that you belong to, your school. It's, you know, it's, it's vitally important, it's, you know, and, um, that for me was a major traumatic experience. (Linda Fortune)

The construction of place implies a mental reconstruction of the physical space and the community where one lived, worked, had parents, children, friends, neighbours and had one's leisure time. This is an orientation in a moral space (Samuel & Thompson 1990: 2–4, 41).¹¹ This moral space envelops possible worlds. Joe Schaffers locates these possible worlds not only in an ideal place, as Utopia, but also in the past, as Uchronia (note his use of the present tense):

[I]t has all been destroyed. And it proves that District Six, that Utopia can exist, because people of different creeds, colours and cultures, live together harmoniously in this area. (Joe Schaffers)

Uchronia is a term introduced by the oral historian Portelli; it points to the possible worlds interviewees construct by telling 'stories that emphasise, not how history went, but how it *could*, or *should* have gone, focusing on possibility rather than actuality' (Portelli 1991: 100, his emphasis).

These possible worlds are orientated towards past and future. Talking about the reconstruction of District Six, Terence Fredericks conflates the past, present and future. His question to me, 'don't you think it's possible?' clearly indicates that these possible worlds can only have meaning and become reality through individual belief and foremost through dialogue, the construction of a community of people, which includes the listener:

Um, initially we will be strangers – at some point we must talk! You know...[P]eople come from a whole wide area, called the Cape Flats, where they don't know family. Most of them, they live in fear for their lives, and the children's lives. So you don't trust people. But in District Six people trusted one another! If I come from school, and my mom is not there, then auntie, she is not my auntie, but she's auntie and she's going to make sure that I'm not left on the street. But I'm given a cup of

tea or a cold drink and a slice of bread or an apple or whatever. That is how it was! OK? It is not like that on the Cape Flats! There are exceptions I know. But by and large it is not like that. And that's how it must be, you must help this, this body of families to become a community...I believe that this can happen, what I talked about. Helping to develop, you understand? Although, making a commitment, make sacrifices and being prepared to work at it, you know...Don't you think, don't you think it's possible? (Terence Fredericks)

In this process of creating possible worlds, the interviewees engaged in a complex process of remembering and forgetting.¹² Silences and forgetting are shared absences that shape what is remembered (Field 2001c: 117; Zur 1999: 50). The interviewees were cut out of the place they belonged to and this lost place ran the risk of being erased from their memories. This happened in two ways. On the one hand, apartheid officials tried to recreate the numerous places by naming streets and housing complexes in these new areas according to the names of streets and flat buildings in the destroyed neighbourhoods, such as Hanover Park and Lavender Hill (Delpont 2001: 39; Hart 1990: 128–129; Rive 1990: 112). On the other hand, the people who directly experienced eviction often tried to erase their memories in an attempt to overcome the trauma of having lost that very space that made their home, their identity as an individual and as a community.¹³ This trauma is expressed in the constant tension between wanting to remember and wanting to forget.¹⁴ Linda Fortune and her family, for example, never spoke about 'the change', they cut it out of their memory, 'like we wanted to forget'. Stan Abrahams expresses the tension between wanting and not wanting to visit that world, where people do something like that to one another, as follows:

[Y]our place and space is...that is significant to you because it IS your identification...I wanted to just, to pull it out of my mind. But I *had* to, for my own healing, come *back* to it, and say 'yes, but that is exactly where I lived'...So, I had to re-, re-look at myself again and say 'well, no, I can't um, compartmentalise my mind!' you know. And I think because apartheid already wanted to do that!...So what we have to do now is to create this in our mind again. Um the fear about forced removals, um, one sometimes don't know how they could have act- actually...done something like this, you know. And, yet, the, the world out there, it's, it's possible today. (Stan Abrahams)

Stan's reflection and the very language he (and we) use clearly points to the tension of wanting to forget and wanting to remember. The memory is still there, in a 'compartment' of the mind that he tries to 'take out', so he will feel less pain and cope with the loss.

To remove the memory completely, however, is not possible. It will be there, in the compartment of the mind that bears the label 'to forget'. But traumatic memories

have the potential to recur, whatever the individual's will to recall might be (Brink 1998: 35–36; Rogers et al. 1999; Winter & Sivan 1999: 15). The two actions, forgetting and remembering, shape each other.

Stan perceives the (re-)‘creation’ of the mental place as pivotal for his ‘healing’. This healing is intrinsically morally orientated: it is an acknowledgement of his own agency. ‘Shutting out’ the memory would be a surrender to the ideology of apartheid and a denial of his own identity.

This healing does not entail a complete upheaval of all that was or is forgotten. In memory work, and especially when one has to deal with traumatic memories, possible worlds go together with a selective memory. For the five interviewees it is important to be able to deal with their traumatic past and to construct a morally defensible self-image.¹⁵ Listeners to these narratives, however, might question this selectivity and these possible worlds.

‘That is where I sit in a Catch-22 situation’: imagining a community in the District Six Museum

The possibility of engaging with questioning listeners creates tensions between those who experienced the forced removals firsthand and those who didn't. These tensions are crucial in understanding how District Six and the District Six Museum play a role in creating a new community in post-apartheid South Africa. High-school learners are a significant audience at the District Six Museum, not only because of its educational role but also because of the cross-generational communication that takes place.

In this context, the physical space of District Six is part of the memory work of both the ex-residents and the visitors to the museum. As Joe Schaffers' narrative highlights, the identity of the museum is in an important way shaped by the open, physical space of the District. This space is a heritage site, a vehicle for storytelling that facilitates empathy amongst visitors to the museum, and Joe defends this role of the open space fervently:

I firmly believe that Cape Town, being the gateway to South Africa, that open space should have been left as such. Nobody must benefit from it. Because a lot of people suffered and died, died of depression, committed suicide, died of broken hearts. And no amount of money can compensate for those lives that were lost. Cape Town being the gateway to South Africa, when people arrive here, you can start telling the story again, of that horrendous apartheid regime... The minute you close up District Six, it is gone. There is nothing, people will never be able to relate to. They wouldn't be able to feel, now they feel it when they see the [expanse] and when they come to the museum, and the story gets told, then they can. And you have other people crying here, because they could relate. You know, to it, in, in a sense. (Joe Schaffers)

This role of the open space of District Six as a monument conflicts, however, with the reality of human empathy for the victims who want to rebuild their home in this very same space:¹⁶

And, um, but then you must look at the other side of the coin again... Whereby people who are living in these depressed areas like the Manenberg, and the Grassy Parks, the Blue Downs, where there is gangsterism, where there is gang fights, where there is shooting. And people want to get out of this! And in getting a place in District Six, is a way of getting out of it. Then, by all means, give them the place! Because there is a way for them to get out of the misery that they are in.
(Joe Schaffers)

Joe Schaffers is very aware of the contrasting practices of empathy and tries to relieve the tension by stating that a 'realistic' point of view is pivotal:

So there I sit in a Catch-22 situation, from where I look at it from both sides. I put myself *in their place*, and I want to get out, I got a family and I want to get out of here, and here is an opening. And it is being offered. I would take it! So, um, that is where I sit in a Catch-22 situation. So I haven't got a problem with people coming back, but I've also got a problem with, you know, with what you're going to be losing. The, the heritage of, of, of the open space of District Six. Where the sorrow and the pain happened. Maybe it is a healing process!... I want to be realistic about it, and people want to come back, then that's the way it is then. You've got to be prepared to sacrifice. (Joe Schaffers)

In Joe Schaffers' narrative I see the complex nuances of the relationship between place and empathy. As Joe Schaffers explicitly says, empathy is about putting oneself in somebody else's place. Empathy is not identification but an appreciation of that very place that the other person is in (Bauer 2001: 17, 19; La Capra 2001: 27 n31, 211–213). And this 'place' has a literal and a metaphorical meaning. Both meanings are linked to empathy. As Richard Rive amply explains, there cannot be a place without people and without the capacity to empathise (Rive quoted in Rassool & Prosalendis 2001: 31).¹⁷

But what happens when the 'scar' in the landscape disappears? It is an opening for those who live on the often violent Cape Flats and want to escape that unsafe space by returning to the lost space of District Six. It is also an opening for those who live on the Cape Flats, but are satisfied by pointing to that open space and telling their stories, to heal that scar, to close it. For the latter the open space is a pivotal part of the storytelling and it has a metaphorical meaning: it stands for the victory of the human spirit.¹⁸

Joe Schaffers claims that this physical space, especially in correlation with the stories told in the museum, is a vehicle for outsiders to feel the lost space, to feel what it is

like to be thrown out of your neighbourhood and to empathise with those who are represented in the museum. Therefore the physical space needs to be seen and felt to allow one to imagine what it was like. It is a space one needs to commemorate by making it a heritage site. But for those who survived and want to return, that same space, as a heritage site, might have to be sacrificed.

Let us explore further the possibilities of imagining an experience you didn't experience firsthand. *Can* we, the listeners and readers, imagine that place that was once District Six?

I used the word 'remember' when I talked about the ways in which people who have had firsthand experience of the forced removals make sense of these experiences. One could say that for this group of people, there is a thin line between remembering and imagining, because of the moral and emotional character of this process of giving meaning to past, present and future. Remembering implies imagining, or re-imagining, a past one experienced, though this happens selectively.¹⁹ For some of the ex-residents, entering the museum might be a challenge to remembering and forgetting. Visiting the museum asks them to enter that forgotten place and experience those painful feelings again. As Linda Fortune recounts:

[W]ell...hm, people that have lived here, and they are coming here, and you know they hm, sometimes, hm, some of them would stand at the door and say 'I can't come in here.' And they will stand at the door. They haven't been in here. And they look at the street signs. They are tempted to walk in further to explore and most people do come in. Ja, and then they talk about what happened to them and they are feeling sad about it and share their emotions. And then, they will say 'I am so glad I came in here. But, actually, I was afraid to come in here, and you know, I didn't know how to face this.' And I had many, many experiences of that in this place. (Linda Fortune)²⁰

However, imagining does not necessarily imply remembering. Some of the museum facilitators questioned the possibility of imagining for those who didn't experience the forced removals firsthand. High-school learners for example, who visit the museum and listen to the museum facilitators, do not remember these experiences, because they did not experience them. They can only try to imagine what it was like by placing themselves in the shoes of the narrators. Terence Fredericks and I had the following dialogue:

T: ...the children don't and I can't exp- I don't know, I don't expect them to fully understand and appreciate, they can read about it and they can say 'I hear what you're saying.' But they *can't* identify with it.

G: Why?

T: Because they've not experienced it! So what does it need now, is for them to know the *history*, and to accept when people *tell* the...that when

you are stripped of your humanity, this is what happens to you! Now I need you, if you are the, the student, I need you to accept my word!

G: To believe you.

T: To believe me! And to believe what other writers have written about hum– humankind’s behaviour towards humans. OK?...It is one thing to have it described to you, it is another thing to really experience it. Let me take a knife, let me take a needle and push it into your arm (T acts it out as if he is going to do it) OK? That experience will be one thing, my telling you what that pain is like is another thing. It’s too different! And the best thing of course is to push [in the needle], not so? But you can’t do that!...And here understanding is linked to seeing, and hearing it, and also feel. And the best way is to be able to use a vehicle, use words, which could be a vehicle, use sounds, which could be a vehicle, use visuals, which could be a vehicle to help you to...to *transport* yourself into that situation. And, and, and imagine that you are experiencing that pain, that hardship. It’s not easy! It is not easy for the children, descendants of those, those parents, those grandparents who suffered forced removals to *fully* appreciate what mommy and daddy and granny – all they can know is that we are living here on the sand dunes and of what they hear we could have been living up there...and sit in the city, but without knowing what it was about to live here. They never lived here. (Terence Fredericks)

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the verb ‘to imagine’ as follows: ‘to form or have a mental picture or idea of something’. Also: ‘when you imagine something, you think it exists, has happened or is true, although in fact it is not real or true’ (Simpson & Weiner 1989: 704). To imagine implies a complex relationship between believing in possibilities and in similarities. As Bauer explains, you can’t feel a child’s pain when he cuts his finger, but you know how it feels because of your similar experiences (Bauer 2001: 17).

In the context of trauma narratives ‘truth’ is often evasive, because the trauma is seen as something that normally does not happen and something one does not want to be confronted with. It is not only difficult for those who experienced trauma to remember and imagine it. Human beings universally have the tendency not to think about or to build an emotional wall against painful experiences, also when these experiences are not theirs (Bar-On 1989, 1999; Bauer 2001: 40, 262; Bergmann & Jucovy 1982; Krondorfer 1995; McCully et al. 2002; Sichrovsky 1988).

The five interviewees make claims to authority regarding their museum as a place where history is made and remade and their own place or role in this process. District Six Museum is unique, Linda Fortune says, ‘because we are passionate about what we do here’. But who is represented in the museum (Soudien & Meltzer 2001: 66–68)? Does *the* District Six community exist? These questions are important because the authority claim of representation is closely linked with the possibility

of empathising. What is told and exhibited in the museum needs to be believed and perceived to be true by the visitors, for the facilitators to claim authority. And this is only possible when visitors can empathise.

Joe Schaffers' narrative highlighted the importance of space in the working of the museum. But space is not the only crucial aspect in memory work: memories change constantly according to the present context and position of the narrator (see Hayden 1999: 142–144). The process of representing and empathising is complex, because both visitors and facilitators will constantly reshape identities of insiders and outsiders for themselves and those they talk to or listen to (Soudien 2001b: 125–126). This is not only the case in the facilitators' relation to younger generations. It is also the case in their relation to people who lived in District Six but benefited from the forced removals and have other memories. The relationship between the museum facilitators and those who have other memories of the removals influences the relationship between the facilitators and those who didn't experience the removals – such as the younger generations.

The position of people who benefited from the removals is one of the most contested areas in the District Six Museum. They are not represented in the museum. Linda Fortune characterises people who experienced the removals differently from District Six survivors, those who work in or regularly visit the museum, as follows:

And they may have prospered. And so they don't have empathy you know, with what has happened. And maybe they don't have the insight or they don't want to acknowledge that apartheid was a cruel and evil thing that happened. So they don't see beyond what they want to see, they don't want, I think they don't want to acknowledge and, um, maybe they are ignorant. (Linda Fortune)

Linda Fortune's positioning stresses her individual identity as someone who wants to reclaim the lost space of District Six. She and her family never accepted the situation they were put in. One by one they moved out of the Cape Flats, although they could only go to another designated coloured area. In her narrative, people who had different experiences of the District Six removals are described as outsiders. The perception is that they don't have empathy with those who are represented in the museum, and nor do they acknowledge or know what the forced removals were about, in the view of Linda Fortune and the museum.²¹

It is clear that people dealt with the forced removals in their own way, and they claim their agency differently.²² These differences are also found within the group of museum facilitators. In contrast to Linda Fortune, the construction of his home in the townships was pivotal for Joe Schaffers to reclaim not only his own agency but also the agency of his community. And this agency carries through to the symbolically very important date of 1994. His metaphor of 'the coloured' as a 'rubber ball' carries this message strongly:

[L]iving in Hanover Park to me wasn't a disgrace. I didn't feel anything other than it was home. Because I maintained, that what's inside your home that is important. And how you rear your children inside the home. And what you do inside your house, that's important. When you shut that door, whether you stay in Hanover Park, and your place inside has been made your ideals and specifications, with your carpeting and your whole trimming and painting and cleaning that the house looks great. Then it was equivalent to living in Bishopscourt, because it was yours, and your own. The minute you shut your door, you cut off that, that sort of, um, um, stigma that you are living in a housing estate. And um, that is how I lived, but I must say that I had, as usual, fantastic neighbours. We had a fantastic um, um, relationship amongst the people staying there. Because people were there not of their own making. They were all forced there. But *we* managed to make a life for ourselves in that area. I always maintain that this so-called coloured is like a rubber ball. The harder you throw it down, the higher it bounces. And that is what happened. We went into those areas and out of those areas, these depressed areas, you've got teachers, you've got doctors, you've got lawyers, you've got academics coming out of those areas. So we didn't let the disadvantages keep us down. The youngsters went ahead, we encouraged the youngsters to learn, since it is going to end some day. And when came 1994, it ended.

(Joe Schaffers)

It is important for Joe to stress both his own and the community's strength. As an outsider, I read his narrative easily as a 'good old times' story. This is not to say that it is not true or without meaning. Stories in which agency and a good feeling are central are an attempt to deal with loss, to reclaim the ability to make individual choices and to retain a sense of self (Field 2001a: 100; Field 2001c: 118; McEachern 2001; Omar 1990: 193; Swanson & Harries 2001: 79–80). These 'good old times' stories are also part of the museum's role in reshaping public memory for a new and better South Africa (Davison 1998: 147). In these stories idealisation and demonisation of characters are clues to unrealised hopes or hidden fears (Samuel & Thompson 1990: 7). Silences are created and insiders are positioned in contrast to outsiders, victims in contrast to observers, and members of older generations in contrast to younger generations (Hayden 1999: 145).

This tension between insiders and outsiders highlights the crucial balance between empathy and critical reflection. Even within the same narrative there might be a conflict between the insider's empathy and the outsider's critical eye (Portelli 1991: 38). Vincent Kolbe, who, being retired, is very aware of his safe position, is able to reflect critically on the workings of the museum. He questions the high prevalence of 'good old times' stories in the museum as follows:

It's affecting the children...The children think that only heroes lived in District Six when they come to our museum...[but the District Sixers]

still have memories of these people...[and the collaborators'] children are alive, hey? It's like take the white, no white person comes now in South Africa today, you know 'I voted for the apartheid government', nobody voted for the apartheid government! And there again, you've got a problem with memory, selective memory, you see? [sigh] So, all these things are taken into consideration, you know. And maybe history has to be reviewed every ten years, you know, and retold in a relevant way for its time. (Vincent Kolbe)

This reflection of Vincent Kolbe on the selectivity of memory exemplifies the tension between wanting to forget and wanting to remember, and the ever-changing process of making history. As a remedy, he argues that the museum should put up a rogues' gallery, to show the kids of today that in that time there were bad people as well:

You can't destroy history and you can't destroy bad history. You understand? It is it is not what happens, but what do people do with that information?... You must tell the children there were bad people, because the children seem to think that in our time there were good people and now in their time there are good and bad people. (Vincent Kolbe)

Vincent is, however, aware that his stance contrasts with that of other District Sixers who don't want to talk about 'memories that might reflect negatively on others' (Field 2001c: 123). They prefer to memorialise and honour those who struggled and sacrificed. Stan Abrahams, for example, wants to 'pay tribute to the ordinary men and women who sacrificed much in the quest for freedom' (Abrahams in Rassool & Prosalendis 2001: 3–4). They are for him role models for the present society. Those who didn't fight for justice and peace don't have a place in his narrative.

Vincent Kolbe mentions a second constraint: the families of those 'rogues' are still alive. He gives a possible solution: 'you can tell a story without names'. And he links this with the necessity of revising the museum policy every ten years, retelling the story 'in a relevant way for its time'.²³ This is not easy to negotiate because for other District Sixers, there is only one way to memorialise District Six and that is by honouring those who paid tribute to a democratic and non-racial society. Additionally, they do not want to be reminded of their humiliation, a distinct source of the trauma (Benezer 1999: 38).²⁴ '[M]aybe in ten years' time, when everybody is dead it – the story will be told differently, but there was lot of passion and emotion' (Vincent Kolbe).

In each of the five interviews, the need to imagine a progress towards an ideal society without racism and prejudice is strong.²⁵ While this might be difficult to understand at first, when one looks at the moral message and much-needed positive self-image lingering in between the lines, the 'goodness' they claim for their past stands for the claim that 'we have made something of ourselves'. Again, Vincent illustrates this when he says that the museum did make conscious choices:

So, you get the whole range of responses, you see and when I'd say the museum makes a decision to remember the people who made – who had positive thoughts the people who should not be forgotten. The people who campaigned you know? Because people will come and say... 'where is his photo?' He says 'that man, you must be joking, we'll never waste our our our bloody money on his bloody face!' It's a prejudiced museum, it's a biased museum and it's the museum's policy to be biased and if anybody wants to start their own District Six museum and put up their photos. They are welcome to do so.

It is clear that present and past positions of the narrators, the insiders and outsiders within their narratives and their audience are crucial in understanding how memory works in a museum setting, and especially in a cross-generational interaction. The politics of representation and ownership play a role in these narratives. Similarly to Robben Island, the District Six Museum can be perceived as 'a symbol of the future of the new South Africa rather than its past' (Deacon 1998: 164; Soudien 2001b: 125). This symbol is important in the narratives of the five interviewees. But it can (and maybe must) also be questioned.

To make this point clear, let us return to the quote of Linda Fortune at the beginning of the chapter in which she reflects on how apartheid and the removals made her feel: Linda uses 'gun' in a metaphorical sense to express her strong feelings and humiliation. Others have used guns in a literal sense during the apartheid era, in the context of resistance but also crime. In the new South Africa, apartheid survivors are acknowledged in their narratives with their metaphorical guns. Narratives with literal guns used under apartheid are acknowledged as long as they can be labelled as resistance. Meanwhile youngsters are confronted with the challenge to choose for literal and/or metaphorical guns in their own lives, where crime, gangsterism and drug addiction are a daily reality. Looking at this complex interaction of language, one realises that this kind of narrative implies a reflection on the choices one has to and can make in the past, present and future.

Reconstructing their traumatised identity, the museum facilitators want to represent their old District Six as a good place, and do not represent District Six as a slum in the District Six Museum. This selectivity, however, seems to create a tension between the remembering of the District Six survivors and the imagining of the younger generations. The younger generations, growing up in a post-apartheid South Africa with poverty, crime and unemployment, might think that good and bad people only exist in their present. For them District Six might be an unreachable place, not necessarily situated in the memories of the facilitators, but more importantly situated in their own future.²⁶

Conclusion

The images that Linda Fortune, Joe Schaffers, Stan Abrahams, Terence Fredericks and Vincent Kolbe create of District Six merge into an idealised place, at once a 'lost place' from their past and an imagined new community projected into the future. These images tell us something about how people feel and deal with the trauma of being thrown out of their homes and having to survive in an unknown environment. More specifically, the narratives exemplify the choices that one made and that one can, and according to them, *should* make in remembering and reacting to discrimination in one's life, and in imagining a better future.

In this context there is no place – according to most of the interviewees – for representing the darker realities of District Six, the slum and the rogues of District Six. These narratives imply a flexible, selective way of dealing with silences and shadows. This might be problematic because there is a potential tension between the real choices the youth of today have to make, for example between education and gangsterism, and the metaphorical coping mechanisms that the older interviewees choose in their narratives.

The younger generations will have to choose what to do with what the museum facilitators tell them. There is no guarantee that they will use the narratives and moral messages the way the elders want them to. The elders will have to give them the freedom to exercise their own agency in remembering and imagining District Six.²⁷

Notes

- 1 As Soudien and Meltzer put it, '...all the narrations of the District, because they are human are also partial, incomplete and unavoidably ideological.' Racial, class and cultural prejudices are unavoidably lodged in many of the stories that are told of the District, even those from within it. They include and exclude different people at different times (Soudien & Meltzer 2001: 68). Compare Davison (1998: 145–147).
- 2 This chapter only focuses on the meaning-making processes of the museum facilitators. An analysis of interviews with teachers and learners is part of future research.
- 3 *Stanley John Abrahams* (1928) was born in District Six. He worked for 47 years in a factory. He was and still is an active leader in the Methodist Church, and facilitator of the Healing of Memories Workshops, which were set up by Michael Lapsley. He is also a trustee of the Beneficiary Trust of District Six. *Linda Fortune* (1949) was born in District Six. Together with her mother and siblings she was forcibly removed from her home in 1971. She worked as a secretary for many years. In 1996 she wrote 'The house in Tyne Street', memoirs of her childhood. She first got involved in the museum as a volunteer in 1994 and developed an educational programme together with Sandra Prosalendis and Vincent Kolbe. Currently she is active as one of the educators at the museum. *Terence D. Fredericks* (1937) was born in the Bokaap and lived in District Six, Bokaap and Walmer Estate during his childhood years. He went to school in District Six and had his friends there. He was a teacher, not only in District Six but also in previously coloured-designated areas. From the mid-seventies

onwards he was rector of several teachers' colleges. He retired in 1996. He was involved in the establishment of the District Six Museum and is currently the chairperson of the District Six Museum Foundation. *Vincent Kolbe* (1933) was born in District Six. He has been a librarian and a cultural activist his whole life. He is known for his passion for music and storytelling. He was among the first to come up with the idea of setting up a museum, in a public meeting in 1988 (Layne & Rassool 2001: 147). He has until recently been actively involved in the District Six Museum as an educator. He is now retired. *Joe Schaffers* (1939) was born in District Six. He married and moved out before the forced removals. He worked in several factories before he became a health inspector for the City of Cape Town. He retired in 1998. He is still occasionally involved in the museum as an educator. Since his youth he has been actively involved in youth programmes and music.

- 4 Only Linda Fortune experienced the forced removals from District Six firsthand. The other four interviewees married and moved to other areas before the actual demolition of District Six. The Group Areas Act and the Population Registration Act affected them by the restrictions they placed on the areas to which they could move and in the daily discrimination they encountered.
- 5 See also his contribution in Rassool & Prosalendis (2001: 15–16).
- 6 See also Field (2001a: 102); Field (2001c: 118); Hart (1990: 137); McEachern (2001: 226); Swanson & Harries (2001: 77).
- 7 Harvey (2002: 5) defines major loss as 'the loss of something in a person's life in which the person was emotionally invested'. He borrows the definition of trauma from Janoff-Bulman (1992: 6): 'unusual events involving loss to the individual – whether a death, a loss of body parts or functioning, the loss of a job, the loss of one's home, or the loss of one's trust in others or in the safety of the world'.
- 8 Traumatic memories can be objectified in various ways in these different discourses as objects of knowledge, but also as means of social networking and establishment of identity and accountability. See La Capra (2001: 23). Compare Soudien (2001a: 104).
- 9 See also Frescura (2001: 108).
- 10 See also Hayden (1999: 142–44).
- 11 See also La Capra (2001: 91); McEachern (2001: 232, 236); Zur (1999: 54).
- 12 This also happened within communities and nations. Delport (2001: 36), for example, mentions 'a national impatience to move away from the dark times into a more hopeful future'. See also De Kok (1998: 61).
- 13 See also Sean Field's chapter in this volume.
- 14 In the words of Hayden (1999: 144): 'Memory also becomes more important when losses accumulate. The inability to forget traumatic experiences may become as much of a problem as wanting to remember positive ones.'
- 15 Memory is an active process of creating meanings, in which most people tend to struggle with describing painful experiences or experiences they can't defend anymore on current moral grounds (Portelli 1991: 52–53; Samuel & Thompson 1990: 38).
- 16 Compare Portelli (1991: 133).

- 17 See also Soudien (2001a: 98).
- 18 Compare Nasson (1990: 46); Delpont (2001: 41).
- 19 See also Omar (1990: 193); Swanson & Harries (2001: 79–80).
- 20 See also Fortune (2001: 48).
- 21 See Taliep (1992: 71, appendix 19). Taliep makes the point that some people might have gained some advantages such as more 'lebensraum', but the disadvantages outweighed these – such as the increased distances they had to travel to work, and related transport costs.
- 22 See also Portelli (1991: 202).
- 23 See also Rogers et al. (1999) and Winter & Sivan (1999: 31), who stress that the transgenerational mediation is difficult because of 'the inevitable change in social priorities'.
- 24 Compare with Davison (1998: 159).
- 25 For the latter see Portelli (1991: 112).
- 26 In the near future, I will explore the ways in which teachers and learners deal with museum facilitators' narratives, by observing history classes and high-school visits to the museum and by interviewing the teachers and learners about these interactions.
- 27 I would like to thank Linda Fortune, Stan Abrahams, Joe Schaffers, Vincent Kolbe and Terence Fredericks for sharing their insights with me. The five interviews formed part of my internship programme, 'Trauma, Memory and Space in Cape Town', at the Centre for Popular Memory in 2003. The interviews took between 1½ hours and 4 hours. The first half of the interviews focused on people's life stories of their childhood, family and friends, schooling, work, politics and recreation. In the second half of the interviews, we discussed ways of passing on these very traumatic experiences to young citizens in the contemporary setting of the District Six Museum. For this project I also interviewed five museum facilitators of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre and two holocaust survivors who are involved in the programmes of the Holocaust Centre. The interviews on the Cape Town Holocaust Centre are not part of this chapter. The project is part of my PhD research in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town, in which I study approaches to the mediation of traumatic memories amongst teenagers by teachers and by museum facilitators in Cape Town schools and museums. Lastly, this chapter would not have existed without the valuable feedback I received from Felicity Swanson, Sean Field, Renate Meyer, Lucia Thesen and Anne Verbist. I wish to thank the NRF for funding this project.

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