The Cultural Politics of "Community" and Citizenship in the District Six Museum, Cape Town

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Abstract: This paper examines the representation of "community" in the District Six Museum, and its deployment in citizenship struggles in District Six and Cape Town. It discusses the connection between the Museum's participatory project of memorialization, and its positioning in relation to the land restitution and redevelopment process in District Six, as well as in urban reconstruction in Cape Town more broadly.

Keywords: District Six, community, citizenship, land restitution

Résumé : Cet article examine les représentations de l'idée de "communauté" dans le musée de District Six et le déploiement des luttes relatives à la citoyenneté à District Six et à Cape Town. L'article traite aussi des liens entre le projet participatif de commémoration du musée et la prise de position de ce musée sur les questions relatives à la restitution des terres et aux processus de redéveloppement à District Six, ainsi que sur la reconstruction urbaine à Cape Town de façon générale.

Mots-clés : District Six, communauté, citoyenneté, restitution des terres

> What had to be collected was, in fact, this intangible spirit of community. The Museum is attracting people who care and want to understand what was destroyed in the name of "community development" and what needs to be done in terms of community redevelopment. [Prosalendis et al. 2001:77]

The District Six Museum (D6M) has achieved considerable international repute for its work with memory in the context of displacement. It prides itself on being a "community-museum," first and foremost dedicated to those who suffered the trauma of being forcibly removed from District Six as a result of past laws and practices of racial discrimination. It was founded by a highly committed group of activists and intellectuals on the eve of apartheid's collapse, and in the dawn of a new era opened its first exhibition in one of the lone, standing churches spared from the bulldozers. Some of the key elements of this exhibition were a large floor map of District Six onto which former residents were invited to write, as well as the original street signs—remarkably acquired from one of the men who bulldozed the area. These elements continue to occupy centre stage in the Museum in its new location on the boundary of the district, and—along with a range of other elements largely consisting of artifacts contributed by ex-residents and sympathizers as well as media that capture "the voices of the people"—provide "a focus for the recovery and reconstruction of the social and historical existence of District Six" (Delport 2001:11). While the D6M is often admired for its innovative ways of obtaining the participation of District Sixers in its project of memorialization, there has been less attention to and study of its broader position in processes of land restitution and urban reconstruction—the focus of the present paper.

District Six was a high-density neighbourhood adjacent to the Central Business District of Cape Town that consisted of a largely low-income population. It was

racially diverse, but the majority of its residents were classified "coloureds"—a residual racial category designating a very diverse group of people who were not considered "white" or "African" or "Indian" but somewhere in between.[1] District Six was proclaimed a "whites-only" area in 1966, after which the majority of its 60,000 odd residents were forcibly removed progressively until 1982 to the barren and windswept Cape Flats, although many African District Sixers had been removed dating back to the turn of the 20th century. Removals were carried out by the cynically titled Department of Community Development, which rationalized that District Six was a dilapidated slum, and that moving people to state housing projects on the Cape Flats contributed to their "social upliftment." In fact the overarching rationale for the removals was not just to expel blacks from the city centre, but to excise the fact of heterogeneity and hybridity of which District Six was emblematic. Today a large portion of District Six remains undeveloped, lying empty as what is often referred to as a scar in the centre of the city. The apartheid government was largely unsuccessful in its bid to turn District Six into a white residential neighbourhood due to concerted opposition first from the popular sectors—who made the case known internationally—but also from developers and corporations—who did not want the mark of District Six on their name (see Soudien 1990). However, due to the construction of the Cape Technikon (a post-secondary college), some wide boulevards, and a few other smaller developments, only about 40 hectares (le Grange 2003:6) of the original 90 hectares is left for urban reconstruction.

With the possibility of moving a large population of low-income people who formerly were racially excluded back into the *centre* of the city on prime real-estate, District Six represents a prize-case for the ongoing land restitution program. However, the majority of restitution claimants have thus far opted for monetary compensation instead of eventual resettlement in District Six. Nevertheless, the District Six Beneficiary and Redevelopment Trust (D6BRT)—which formally represents claimants—and the D6M are actively campaigning to increase the numbers who will resettle, and it is hoped that some 4,000 homes will be built on the remaining vacant land in District Six, mainly for settlement by ex-residents. This entails a huge development effort—a *re-development*, since its ultimate aim is ostensibly to rebuild "community."[2] Consonantly, the fundamental signifier of the work and identity of the D6M is the community, consisting of ex-residents of District Six.

As Coombes notes, promoting community is the predominant way in which government expenditures are rationalized in the South African public heritage sector. She argues that this can be seen as "a genuine attempt to incorporate a more representative multicultural diversity in many aspects of public life but can also be a slipshod way of 'managing' the more contradictory and potentially troublesome aspects of cultural and political diversity" (Coombes 2003:4). In the District Six case, an older idea of a diverse—"multiracial" and "multicultural"—community is seen as offering normative guidance for a new South Africa dealing with the deep-seated wounds of segregationism, and as a potential impetus for transcending hardened group identities. Such an idea of community can also in part be seen as animating a political project spearheaded and led by a certain minority. Since the formation of the Museum, and the advent of the land restitution process, community in District Six has been an instrument of political mobilization, and the context for citizenship struggle.

It is important that the conception of community in the Museum is anything but uniform and stable over time. This paper begins by examining the history of the politics of community in the D6M. How has community been conceived and manifested at different times of its life span, and what were the factors producing such outcomes? In keeping with the central concern of the analysis of community in anthropology (Amit 2002:42), these questions are in the first instance about *incorporation*—about the symbolic construction of community (Cohen 1985) as a vehicle for complex forms of social inclusion and exclusion. The analysis of community leads, in turn, to a broader line of analysis framed in terms of citizenship: in its political engagement with those it designates as part of the community, as well as other actors, how does the Museum influence emerging patterns of urban citizenship? To address this question, it is necessary to analyze how, as a structured "participatory" space of memorialization, the Museum has positioned itself vis-à-vis the land restitution process, as well as within a broader arena of citizenship struggle.

I shall demonstrate that the D6M—along with the D6BRT—has increasingly come to symbolically position itself as the social and cultural epicentre of the community of District Sixers at large, and indeed as the very place of community in the absence of the real thing. This centralism is reflected by what I take to be the most pivotal component of its interior material culture—a large street map of the former District Six on the museum floor—which supplements the remains of the destroyed neighbourhood adjacent to the museum building. However, I shall contend that the community which the Museum most clearly serves to anchor consists of a relatively small core group

of District Sixers and activists and intellectuals—some of whom are ex-residents—among whom a more or less cohesive ideological framework informs a relatively well defined political project. Following Handler and Gable's lead, I see this hegemonic project of the museum not so much the product of ruling "interests" as of a set of "assumptions and entrenched cultural patterns" (2000:221) born of the history of political activism of this core founding group. The centralist orientation of the Museum has much to do with its historical and ongoing positioning as a cultural and political vanguard for the transformation of the apartheid city. In working to assimilate District Sixers at large to this project in the particular terms of a small group of activists and intellectuals, and thus to a particular conception of community, I suggest that the Museum risks effecting a new kind of social exclusion. This is because the reality and ideological dispositions of the majority of District Sixers stand to be misrepresented—as proxy representations of community are wont to do (Bourdieu 1991, 1997).

Community and Citizenship

The relationship between community and locality has become increasingly complex as efforts at "place-making" have intensified in the context of increasing displacement and deterritorialization in late modern society (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:41). While primordialist or essentialist approaches have now widely been discredited in the social sciences, the alternatives continue to be problematic. Barth's treatment of community as a situationally based form of identification whereby putative cultural differences are organized according to social boundaries that are established between "us" and "them" (Barth 1970; Verdery 1994:34-35), tends to take community identifications as merely arbitrary constructions occurring in a vacuum. A related alternative is Anderson's famous study of nationalism (1991) as a kind of "imagined community"—a community imagined as historically continuous and as consisting of a profound horizontal solidarity between nationals, despite most of them being unknown to one another. However, Amit cogently argues that in the concept's increasingly widespread usage to represent deterritorialized social relations (e.g., Appadurai 1996), it "has been stripped of much of its social and interactive content so that it looks increasingly like little more than a categorical referent, the possibility of attributing social connection without the complications of place, commonality or even regular interaction" (2002:36).

Amit also argues that both the Barthian and Andersonian focus on boundaries and exclusion distort what those who identify as community in most cases take as most essential: what "we" share, namely, a set of substantive social relations. Even in cases where the exclusionary dimension of community seems to be primary—where those deemed insiders would seem to have little else in common—the foremost problem for leadership is still the internal one of how to override division and dissent within in order to generate a sense of unity (2002: 60-61). Amit criticizes Anderson and Appadurai for assuming

> that if people imagine themselves, even when they do not know each other, to share a distinctive collective identity, then they can mobilize themselves as a community, and to move on from there to presume that to imagine community is already to constitute a community.
>
> To indulge, however, in this kind of slippage between personal network and social group, between category and collectivity, is to minimize the considerable difficulties of structure, logistics, persuasion, ideology and opportunity involved in constructing actual as opposed to imagined communities. [Amit 2002:24]

I would like to extend this critique to develop a more ethnographically situated critique of the way in which the construct of community is deployed towards political ends.

The concept of community can be seen as symbolically anchoring a sense of collective identity (Fardon 1987; Wilson 1993), thus concentrating and intensifying meaning in such a way as to stabilize the field of signification in a more or less durable way. However, to merely speak of community as a symbolic ground is to risk analytically abstracting what is most essential to community (a durable "structure") from social process, as in Smith's (1986) approach to *ethnie*. As Cohen argued (1985:12), the meaning of the term *community* is not merely lexical; *community* is meaningful in a more consequential way than is implicit in its *use* in social conflict. Attention thus needs to be paid both to the ways in which collective identity is symbolically *anchored* in community, and the social and political processes in which collective identities are practically manifested. I shall argue that despite claims to the contrary, the version of community imagined in the D6M does not line up with the substantive social relations amongst District Sixers at large, nor with the way in which they tend to "imagine community." The particular ways in which these levels relate at different times is important to understanding the changing nature of the Museum's political positionality.

How is community related to citizenship? In recent classically-inspired approaches, citizenship is defined as contiguous with the nation-state. Somers (1993) proposes

an understanding of the relationship between community and citizenship that is much more amenable to the present case. She challenges the idea that citizenship is "a status or attribute of a category of persons" that, in Marshall's influential formulation (1992), connects state and capitalism in a progressive expansion of rights. Citizenship for Somers is rather "a set of institutionally embedded social practices" which "are contingent upon and constituted by networks of relationships and political idioms that stress membership and universal rights and duties in a national community" (1993:589). She argues that "citizenship practices emerge from the *articulation* of national organizations and universal rules with the particularisms and varying political cultures of local environments (types of civil society)" (1993:589). The extent to which rules of national membership are turned into practicable universal rights depends upon the ability of civil society to democratically appropriate public spheres through a set of participatory activities.[3] In a similar vein, Isin and Wood move beyond the classical Marshallian approach to citizenship, as mediating the contradiction between formal political equality and social and economic inequality, to take citizenship as a *relationship* between legal status and social practice, such that it consists of "*both* a set of practices ... and a bundle of rights and duties ... that define an individual's membership in a polity" (1999:4). Citizenship is not simply opposed to identity, as universalism is to particularism, but rather bears historically specific relationships with processes of group *identification* (Isin 2002).

These overlapping ideas allow us to move beyond the fallacy of presuming that the problems of defining citizenship can be resolved theoretically or normatively, whether under the guise of communitarianism or liberalism (see Cowan et al. 2001; Cowan 2006; Young 1990). As a phenomenon that exists vis-à-vis dynamic social relations and political struggle, citizenship can only be adequately understood through a context specific analysis of processes of group formation and the articulation of rights claims by group representatives in the wider political sphere.

In the struggle for restitution in District Six in particular, community appears to stand in an intimate relationship to *local urban* citizenship: it is not just about a sense of belonging and identity, rooted in a common past; it is also about the expression of that sense of belonging and identity as a form of entitlement—namely, the right to symbolic as well as physical "return." At the same time, as a form of identification, this sense of belonging to a community is no doubt more primary than citizenship, and thus more deeply felt as the ground of commonality. The D6M and D6BRT tap this well of affective ties in consolidating and mobilizing community as the primary agent of citizenship struggle in the city. And yet community can not be discussed in isolation of public institutions and the state. In its particular form, the present understanding of community as a form of collective identity and agency arises in response to the possibilities generated by the process of land restitution as well as by the political struggle leading up to it. Community is the mediating construct linking the individual experience of relocation and oppression under apartheid with human rights-based nation-building in the "new" South Africa.

Towards the project of post-apartheid nation-building, the ANC (African National Congress) government set up two parallel processes to deal with injustices of the past: the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the Commission for the Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR), both of which are important for District Six. Both Commissions had, as their broad objective, bringing about justice, reconciliation and healing, although with different emphases and in different ways. The TRC's business was to establish "truth" by revealing past human rights abuses to an incumbent nation, while the CRLR's aim was to begin undoing the structural effects of the injustice of land dispossession under racial laws—at least in those cases involving development.[4] With the TRC now officially completed, it is debatable whether it succeeded in its goal of promoting "reconciliation" among the broader public and thus paving the way for a new nationhood (Wilson 2000). However, its privileging of individual oral testimony and witnessing as the building blocks of a new post-apartheid national history had significant consequences for how history was perceived in certain public domains, such as in museum practice and debate (Coombes 2003:10). With regards to the CRLR, on the other hand, the process of land restitution is still far from complete. The much slower rate of delivery is due in large part to the tremendous complexity of bringing about effective restitution, particularly when this involves negotiating and planning a large scale development effort, such as in the case of District Six (see Beyers 2007a). From the vantage point of the national discourse on reconciliation and development, District Six is to be a model for rainbow nation-building and to contribute significantly to the goal of transforming and reintegrating Cape Town, one of the cities where the legacy of apartheid continues to be most clearly in evidence.

The Museum's vision is broadly consonant with this discourse, with some important qualifications. The political persuasion of the majority of Museum-associated intellectuals is ideologically rooted in the non-racialism move-

ment in the Western Cape, and the Non-European Unity Movement in particular.[5] Due to this background, their orientation is to be distinguished from the dominant perspective of multiracialism that characterizes the official rhetoric of nation-building. While Museum-connected academics also promote a "human rights culture" in the context of nation-building, they insist that the experiences of different racial groupings can not be addressed separately, since their very social and politico-legal definitions emerged as part of the same history of social construction.

The District Six Museum as "Centre"

The Museum was the product of a relatively cohesive group of highly politicized activists and intellectuals, which were born of the struggles of civic associations in the 1980s, as well as of the direct opposition to redeveloping District Six in the "Hands Off District Six" (HODS) Campaign. Activists and intellectuals associated with the HODS alliance—consisting of 21 organizations—rallied together in 1988 against the proposed redevelopment of an "open residential area" by the multinational company BP (South Africa), objecting that any such initiative would be palliative while certain basic demands such as lifting the State of Emergency and releasing detainees failed to be met (Soudien 1990:172). Among the many determinations of this meeting, two key ones were to establish a museum in honour of District Six, and to publish a book on the history of District Six. The book, *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, proclaims "the demand that the people of District Six, having once before been the victims of callous bureaucratic and politically-inspired diktats, make their own decisions about the fate of the area" (Jeppie and Soudien 1990:12). The book's authors saw District Six as a symbolically contested space that could not be reduced to single or essential truths—an approach which continues to characterize the dominant intellectual vein of Museum-associated thinking to the present.

The District Six Museum Foundation was established within a year of the HODS-organized meeting, and included trustees from HODS, the Ratepayers and Residents' Association, the Roman Catholic Church and the Methodist Church. The Museum's Board of Trustees continues to act on behalf of the Foundation to ensure that the Museum abides by its democratic and participatory founding principles (Terrence Fredericks, personal communication, June 28, 2005).

A banner that has been hanging from the balcony of the church building in which the Museum is housed reads: "In this exhibition (museum), we do not wish to recreate District Six as much as repossess the history of the area as a place where people lived, loved, and struggled." The "repossession" is framed as a participatory and interactive process—as a process of active *incorporation*—in which "community members" are relied upon to reveal the past. A democratic vision lies at the heart of the Museum's exhibition policy, which is

> fundamentally about finding ways of incorporating the subjects of the stories of District Six—the people themselves—into the exhibition process. In the process, attempts are made to have people participate in the decisions about how they are to be represented. The past is not so much an archive awaiting unveiling, but a tapestry on which individuals and groups are able to inscribe themselves. They announce their positions and interests and take responsibility for their self-portrayal. [Prosalendis et al. 2001:85]

The Museum has sought to promote popular participation as a source of renewal and innovation, to guard against the iconization of its exhibits. Indeed, it relies on former residents of the area to reveal the past, and thus in a sense to co-author a composite sense of the past as a work that is continually "in progress." The intention is that aesthetic forms will be generated, or at any rate influenced, by popular expressions of the experience of removal, and that these will continually inform and subvert the interpretive frameworks of academics, curators and artists (see Delport 2001). At the same time, the frameworks of the latter are taken to contribute a "self-critical and reflexive pedagogy," where the concern is "to examine the different modalities, methods and discursive strategies employed by different knowledge genres" (Mpumlwana et al. 2002:256).

There is, then, an implicit tension between the intellectual and the popular. While academics, curators and artists have been concerned to emphasize "a society of 'many cultures' and a history of 'great lives of resistance and reconciliation'" (Rassool 2001b), popular understandings tend to be more apolitical, and to read cultural diversity in more static and unproblematized ways. While there is general agreement about the District's ethos of mutual support and generosity and its lively informal street culture, there is much less agreement about whether it was truly as "harmonious" as many popular narratives have it, or whether it was rather a place where identities were negotiated in complex and shifting ways, sometimes with attendant forms of social and racial exclusion. Now, the kind of detailed ethnographic study by Handler and Gable (2000) of how different "theories of history" are manifested at and translated through various institutional levels in various ways is beyond the scope of

this paper. However, it can minimally be asserted that there are significant differences of interpretation of the role of the museum in relation to community within the Museum itself, among, for example, "front-line" workers on the floor, artists, and academics. Nevertheless, a sense of common purpose and unity is maintained by the common foe: the brutality and inhumanity of those who destroyed District Six. Against the apartheid state's rationalization that District Six was a dilapidated "slum," there is general agreement that instead the District was rich in "community spirit," a spirit which continues to live, against all odds—although there is little agreement about what this means for the future.

The Museum achieves internal coherence by promoting itself as a centre for and of community, as well as the leading edge of a common cause. According to the D6M's guiding policies, it is a "heritage project" that "offers itself as a centre for former residents of District Six and others to recover, explore and critically engage with the memories and understandings of their District Six and apartheid pasts, for the purpose of remaking the city of Cape Town" (D6M n.d.).

One might interpret *centre* in several ways. The more obviously intended meaning is a space of convergence for the purpose of memorialization. In this respect, it is not only—or even primarily—a meeting space for former residents. As a primary contact zone (Clifford 1997) in the city, the Museum acts as a space of convergence for the production of knowledge about the past in the service of a postcolonial and democratic future, but also as a space of tourist consumption.

A second meaning of *centre*, which shall be elaborated in the next section, is as an anchor for community: the Museum has positioned itself not only as the prime agent for reconstructing a social history of District Six (de Kok 1998:63), but as the central place for community, a place where community happens. Indeed, in the absence of the "real" District Six, it posits itself as *the* locality *of* community—where it is housed in the interim. As some of the leading figures in the Museum put it:

> What had to be collected was, in fact, this intangible spirit of community. The Museum is attracting people who care and want to understand what was destroyed in the name of "community development" and what needs to be done in terms of community redevelopment. [Prosalendis et al. 2001:77]

A third meaning of *centre*, implied in the above quote, is political vanguard—in the struggle for restitution, but also in a broader struggle for urban citizenship. According to Terrence Fredericks, a prominent figure in the leadership of both the D6M and the D6BRT, the Museum's involvement in the land restitution process was initially incidental and loose, but it soon intensified and took on a central role in the negotiations about how to redevelop the District's vacant land (Fredericks, personal communication, April 12, 2001). Indeed, like Fredericks, a number of trustees of the D6BRT are trustees of the D6M. It was decided in the early years of the Museum that its primary political goal would be "to mobilize the masses of ex-residents and their descendants into a movement of land restitution, community development and political consciousness" (Rassool 2001a:viii). The Museum also provides infrastructure, resources and space for meetings by community organizations, and for official meetings relating to restitution. It was chosen as the site for the Land Claims Court's session to ratify the decision against the Section 34 Application under the Restitution of Land Rights Act (see below), as well as for the signing by key stakeholders of the Record of Understanding.[6] Moreover, by recording the history of District Six and promoting community, it acts as a platform for securing funding from national and international funding agencies. In 2003, the bottom floor of the newly acquired Sacks Futeran complex was established as a Homecoming Centre, a meeting place for ex-residents and other victims of forced removals, where assistance is provided regarding the settlement of claims and resettlement, and where functions related to redevelopment are conducted (*Voice of the Cape*, May 5, 2003).

Following on its active role in community-building and politicization, the Museum has served to lead and facilitate the D6BRT's push for concientization and building a culture of rights. Like the D6BRT, the Museum actively encourages claimants to opt for resettlement over monetary compensation and promotes the idea of non-racialism. According to Anwah Nagia, Chair-person of the D6BRT and the principal leader and inspirational figure in the struggle for restitution in District Six, the Museum acts as a cathartic space to unpack feelings of pain and loss, thus encouraging victims of removals to direct their trauma in ways that will be conducive to both healing and a politically constructive pursuit of redress. In his view, the Museum leads and facilitates the debate about the reconstruction of District Six, and acts as a sounding board for people's ideas about the future (Nagia, personal communication, June 14, 2002).

In more general terms, the Museum takes on a pedagogical role in seeking to promote a certain (broadly defined) vision of the city, which shall be elaborated shortly. The Museum has run a number of public educational projects and programs, and is a popular destina-

tion for school field trips, which are often framed in relation to Richard Rive's novel, *Buckingham Palace* (1986)—now a regular component of the English curriculum of many schools. At the broadest level, the Museum's public education programs are about transforming the nature of urban citizenship: "How does one develop creative, reflective, critical and resourceful citizens who value and respect humanity, culture and nature?" (September 2001:24). According to Crain Soudien, former member of HODS and one of the founders of the Museum, many elements of civility have been lost during the thirty odd years since the removals, and the role of the Museum is thus to resuscitate civility using civic resources from the past (Personal communication, August 22, 2002).

In the community-building practice of the Museum, the ideal is that three meanings of "centre"—meeting place, anchor for community and political vanguard—converge, and during large and symbolic restitution meetings with a critical mass of people and activity, this would seem to occur. These few cathartic and euphoric occasions are designed to generate the sense of a unitary community.[7] However, this is of course a partial take on the reality of the community. While the Museum was often a place of encounters between people who had not seen one another since their removal from District Six during the earlier years of its existence, such encounters have become much rarer (Personal communication, Noor Ebrahim, June 8, 2005 and Joe Schaffer, June 6, 2005). Moreover, in an extensive set of interviews that I conducted with former residents between 2001 and 2005, I found that while it was not uncommon to hear pride expressed at the existence of such a museum, the large majority of interviewees had spent little time there, and looked at it as a source of momentary nostalgic commemoration, a place of "old pictures and things" which "brings back memories." Their construction of community refers itself to a much broader ambit of social relations and symbolic referents than those actualized at the site of the Museum. Many had not visited the Museum at all. Indeed, tourists of various kinds comprise the majority of visitors to the Museum, with school children on field trips making up a significant minority (Personal communication, Joe Shaffer, June 8, 2005), and while some intellectual activists are understandably highly ambivalent about the effect of tourism on the Museum, most ex-residents saw the extensive tourist interest as a mark of pride and as something to be promoted further.

It is much more accurate to see the three meanings of *centre* as lining up for a particular small group: "community-connected academics—some of whom see themselves as 'activist intellectuals'" (Rassool 2001a:xi). To be sure, others have progressively been brought into the fold, but they continue to cohere around this core group with varying degrees of involvement. But this is not to say that the museum is driven by the "interests" of a set of rulers (Handler and Gable 2000). To be sure, there exists a hegemonic project, but I shall argue that it is animated by a set of more or less implicit understandings which link an emancipatory political vision born of a particular history of activism to a sense of belonging and community. Lucien le Grange, architect and technical advisor to the D6BRT, thus remembers the capacity of the Museum "to engineer a collective spirit and camaraderie amongst all who were involved with it," "to inspire a shared purpose," which "had as much to do with the prevailing political situation we found ourselves in, during the late 1980s and early 1990s as it had to do with the memory of District Six itself" (le Grange 2001:7). The stakes are defined in terms of citizenship: this sense of solidarity owes itself most practically to the project of restitution as a vehicle for claiming "rights in and to the city" (see Isin 2000; Holston 1999). And this, in turn, links up to a deep sense of collective identity, as le Grange claims: "in a strange way the Museum at that time gave some of us a sense of belonging—belonging not only to a memory and a history but to this city of ours" (2001:7).

A Place of Community

If, as I have been suggesting, the D6M anchors a particular community, it needs to be demonstrated how it is able to do so in symbolic terms through its material culture. Situated on the boundary of the ravaged District Six, the Museum acts to punctuate its landscape of absence and invasion. By trying to unearth and record memories of life in District Six, the Museum is working within a space of erasure: the ruins of District Six were, after all, tipped into the ocean. The Museum thereby stands in for District Six in its absence; better, the reality of the Museum *supplements* the real District Six.

In 1992 the Museum found a permanent home in the Buitenkant Methodist Church, and in December of 1993 it opened its *Streets: Retracing District Six* exhibition, which sought to provide an interactive space for ex-residents to reconstruct their neighbourhoods by focusing on the streets that made up the district. The most notable feature of this exhibition was a large plastic covered street map, onto which ex-residents were invited to inscribe their identity and the location of their former homes. This map, along with the recovered original street signs of District Six, a name-cloth, and a series of portraits of life in District Six, were the principal elements of the Museum's first exhibition. Space limitations preclude any compre-

hensive description of the material culture of the Museum,[8] but I shall focus on the map, which I see as most clearly demonstrating how the Museum works to "anchor" a sense of collective identity. The map has proved to be a tremendously successful medium for directly involving ex-residents who have etched the names and addresses of families and other places of significance on the cloth, but also have registered their sense of loss and suffering through written messages and poems around the outside.

Originally intended as a short-term exhibition, *Streets* became the core permanent exhibition due to its tremendous success, and it continues to cover the floor in the centre of the Museum. I would suggest that this is not just because it offers a highly innovative and participatory medium, but because it is such a potent way of "imagining community" in the context of dislocation and estrangement. Representation on the map has been a matter of contestation (Soudien 2001; McEachern 2001). Some Museum trustees have criticized the map for reifying the district as a bounded and self-contained space, and have attempted to encourage a self-critical form of engagement. Thus Vincent Kolbe, librarian and pre-eminent connoisseur of the district, emphatically avers that "District Six didn't have walls around it; we were Capetonians!" (Personal communication, August 7, 2001). Most former residents visiting the Museum, however, are content with a more reified interpretation, as it reinforces the idea of the special character of the District and community. The disagreement is never critical though, because even if intellectual activists construe community as a plural and multifaceted entity characterized by difference and contestation and porous borders, they implicitly posit its centrality. As Soudien puts it, "it is not a place apart. In some senses it is *the* place" (2001:125).

Streets has since been followed by the *Digging Deeper* exhibition, in which the Museum was concerned to "deepen our knowledge of District Six, to ask deeper questions, and to begin to look beyond the geographic space of the District" (D6M n.d.). Subsequently, a series of exhibitions, displays and initiatives that fall under a broad rubric of *Beyond District Six* have been and are still being undertaken. These have aimed to address other areas that were subject to forced removals, as well as areas to which people were relocated. Finally, a recent exhibition that focuses on Horstley Street is the basis for going both "deeper" and "beyond" (Personal communication, Donald Paranzee, July 14, 2005), since it deals with its history as the area in District Six from which the first removals of African people to Ndabeni occurred in 1901, as well as the last removals in 1982. This exhibition is linked to the intended formation of a "Cultural Heritage Precinct [which] will provide opportunities for communities to reclaim the city while also engaging with the legacy of apartheid on the Cape Flats" (Museum inscription 2005).

In spite of these developments, and the expansion of the Museum, the floor map—it seems to me—has been the pivotal element of the material culture of the Museum through most of its existence. The privileged vantage point in the Museum is the map at the centre from which one can see most of the other components. Even the "memory rooms" off the main hall and the exhibitions staged in the back room of the Museum have to be entered by first encountering the map. Moreover, the map most clearly embodies the supplementary logic of the Museum vis-à-vis the destroyed landscape that was District Six—where "supplementation" means both the addition of something to make up for a deficiency, and a "process of new knowledge acting upon prior (never total or sufficient) knowledge, and in consequence destabilizing it" (Battaglia 1999:120). Through its supplementary logic, the street map implies both a loyalty to the original and a certain inevitable rupture from it. Moreover, it bears an inherently frought and difficult relation to the future, as it implies a potentially powerful standard against which to hold the redevelopment of the area (or lack thereof).

District Six as Vanguard

I have suggested that the Museum's "centralism" ought to be understood as the outcome of a series of value orientations and ideological presuppositions carried by activists and intellectuals, and born of their involvement in a history of political activism. I now want to elaborate this with respect to two dimensions: its historical positioning as a political vanguard for broader causes, and its ongoing ambivalent relationship with the City Council.

The Museum came out of a broader anti-apartheid politics in Cape Town during the state clampdown in the 1980s, where, given that revolutionary movements were forced underground, legal civic associations that tackled local level grievances from inadequate housing to the segregation of sports clubs were used as fronts to criticize and undermine government processes, the local city council, and the local-level tricameral parliament. As Nagia put it, "District Six was one of the areas that we used as an agent of change and used as a shield to expose the apartheid government, and the local city council" (Personal communication, June 14, 2002). The Museum continues to self-consciously take a strategic and principled political stance. There is a central core of academics and activists committed to the "possibility of a non-racial community, as it emerges out of and is reflected in the history of District Six" (Rassool 2001b).

Perhaps the most eloquent expression of the general framework informing Museum practice is found in its Memorial Text:

REMEMBER DIMBAZA.
REMEMBER BOTSHABELO/ONVERWACHT,
SOUTH END, EAST BANK,
SOPHIATOWN, MAKULEKE, CATO MANOR.
REMEMBER DISTRICT SIX.
REMEMBER THE RACISM
WHICH TOOK AWAY OUR HOMES
AND OUR LIVELIHOOD
AND WHICH SOUGHT
TO STEAL AWAY OUR HUMANITY.
REMEMBER ALSO OUR WILL TO LIVE,
TO HOLD FAST TO THAT
WHICH MARKS US AS HUMAN BEINGS:
OUR GENEROSITY, OUR LOVE OF JUSTICE
AND OUR CARE FOR EACH OTHER.
REMEMBER TRAMWAY ROAD,
MODDERDAM, SIMONSTOWN.

IN REMEMBERING WE DO NOT WANT
TO RECREATE DISTRICT SIX
BUT TO WORK WITH ITS MEMORY:
OF HURTS INFLICTED AND RECEIVED
OF LOSS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND OF SHAMES.
WE WISH TO REMEMBER
SO THAT WE CAN ALL,
TOGETHER AND BY OURSELVES,
REBUILD A CITY
WHICH BELONGS TO ALL OF US
IN WHICH ALL OF US CAN LIVE,
NOT AS RACES BUT AS PEOPLE.

This inscription indicates very clearly how District Six was seen by early activists in the Museum as a kind of vanguard. While it expresses the expansive vision of Museum activists in wanting to transcend the idea of District Six as a sacred cow, it also paradoxically has a centripetal effect whereby District Six is taken as the centre. The text begins by setting out the relevant frame of reference for representation—the areas of forced removals in South Africa—and situates District Six within this context (lines 1-5). It then identifies racism as the cause of injustice (lines 6-10), and takes the will to survive as a testament to the humanity of victims of removal (lines 10-15). This humanity is in turn identified with the virtues of generosity, justice and mutual care (lines 14-15), which are taken as constitutive features of community, as the historical counterpoint to this injustice (lines 11-15). Notably what follows is to extend the experience of District Six to other areas in Cape Town, thus rendering its problematic coextensive with the city, and implicitly identifying it with the city (lines 16-17). What is interesting here is a movement by which the history of apartheid, and specifically of forced removals all over South Africa, is *brought to bear* upon District Six, which is then in turn taken as the centre from which the city will be rebuilt. The second stanza brings us into the current phase, and projects the *work* of memory, a memory of harms (lines 18-20). With non-racialism as its rubric, the ultimate aim of this work is to transform the city (lines 24-29).

The D6M and the D6BRT have continued to take a wide-angled approach to restitution, but the primary antagonist is now seen to be the local state. Although it is beyond the scope of the paper to address the complicated politics of negotiation between the D6BRT, the Land Commission, and the local state, it should be noted that the D6BRT came into being in a struggle over an application made in mid-1996 by the City Council and the Provincial Government in terms of Section 34 of the Act, which sought to preclude an individual claims process in favour of a state-controlled development project (see Beyers 2007b). The Application was defeated in August 1997, and opposition to the Application had the effect of consolidating "the community" as a political entity, thus setting the stage for the current politics of rights-based claims. In order to defeat the Application, District Sixers had to be seen to act with one voice since the Applicants claimed to be representing the community and the public at large. Various disparate ex-resident organizations and sectors were thus brought together under what was known as the District Six Land Restitution Front, led by Anwah Nagia (*Argus* June 12, 1996). After several months of consultation with and mobilization of potential claimants, a large meeting was held in the Museum in 1998 at which a Constitution for the D6BRT was democratically adopted (Nagia, personal communication, June 14, 2002). The D6BRT had to be seen to be fully representative in order to become the vehicle which would ultimately have control over the redevelopment process. If the D6BRT was to advance a political-legal struggle for restitution rights in the name of community, the Museum was seen as the cultural space par excellence of community, where representational struggles over the nature of the community could occur.

In order to demonstrate how, in spite of losing the Section 34 battle, the City has continued to weigh in on the process, it is useful to discuss a recent controversy over heritage, which directly implicated the Museum. According to Peter de Tolly—City Council Director of Special Projects and the head urban planner working on District Six in the early 2000s—while the Restitution Act contains clauses that preclude the local authority from denying

people the right to settle and develop the land for residential uses, it does not take into account legislation such as the Environmental Management Act and the Natural Heritage Resources Act, legislation that was passed after the Restitution Act had been promulgated (Personal communication, June 11, 2002). The City thus refused to move ahead with the redevelopment process (in particular, in terms of committing to putting bulk services in place) until a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) were carried out. The HIA, for example, is designed to ensure that heritage resources—i.e., any place or object of cultural significance, including aesthetic, architectural, archeological, historical, social and spiritual significance—are managed and integrated into the planning process from the outset.[9] The national body responsible for the management of heritage resources and ultimately for the approval of the HIA is the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA).

Members of the D6BRT were understandably annoyed at the prospect of potentially sidelining the urgent need for social redress in favour of accommodating District Six as an archeological site, especially as its history could be considered to be rather recent in the archeological record. From a heritage perspective, their objection reflected the Museum's emphasis on the primacy of "intangible heritage," consisting mainly of narratives of dispossession. In broader terms, members of the D6BRT complained that the most high-profile urban development project in Cape Town since 1994, the Waterfront, was built without any consideration of such things because it occurred before such legislation was put into place. They also expressed suspicion of SAHRA because "it is an inherited structure" from the apartheid era.[10] However, after the D6BRT exerted considerable pressure upon both SAHRA and the City, at the same time as asserting that it was not in principle against the assessment as long as it was not used as a stalling tactic, relations with SAHRA improved considerably (Personal communication, Terence Fredericks, June 28, 2005) and the HIA was completed in May of 2003.

As in the case of the Section 34 Application, the City had all along claimed to be acting in the interest of the broader public. It was therefore also an essential political matter for the D6BRT and Museum to assert themselves as fully representative of—and even inseparable from—the broader District Six community. This tendency carries into the present, and is manifesting itself in a new way as the D6BRT and Museum turn their attention fully to the redevelopment phase. The ongoing and intensifying centralism of the Museum is the result of a combination of an anti-apartheid tradition of activism of which the Museum was born, which took District Six as a vanguard, and a response to the political imperatives of representing a large and fragmented group in antagonistic political engagements with the local state.

Recent Shifts

An international conference in May 2005 put on by the Museum called *Hands on District Six: Landscapes of Postcolonial Memorialization* (henceforth "Conference") marked a highly critical juncture in the history of the Museum. As the processing of restitution claims was drawing to a close, and the objective of engaging the community and mobilizing it towards restitution had effectively been achieved, the future of the Museum was seen to be in question. It was no longer a "project" seeking to establish and consolidate itself. Having secured a stable base of international funding, it has grown considerably (Personal communication, Terence Fredericks, June 28, 2005). The Conference also marked the completion of a pilot phase consisting of the construction and occupation of twenty four new homes. This conference was thus intended "to reflect on ten years of [the Museum's] growth as an institution, and to prepare to play a role in the return of the community to the barren landscape of District Six" (D6M n.d.).

A strong underlying tendency in the Conference, reiterated by a number of speakers, was towards defining the Museum less as a "site museum" and as a space for memorializing loss—which it was felt had become somewhat ossified—and more as an organization or "social movement" actively asserting itself in urban reconstruction. The Conference thus appears to have intensified a shift on the part of the Museum towards a vision of itself that was first announced at the August 2003 "Hands On District Six" media and donor function held at the recently refurbished Sacks Futeran Complex, where the new Director of the Museum, Valmont Layne, and a five-year plan for the Museum were publicly presented. Layne articulated this vision as follows in his introductory address at the Conference:

> What does it mean to rebuild District Six, in order to be *true to the spirit of District Six*, to the intentions of the people who founded this place, and the many thousands that look to us? It means that we've got to be sure that as we engage with that land, that that land becomes in a sense...from a memory point of view, an extension of what happens here [i.e., in the District Six Museum]. When you walk into District Six say in twenty years time, in ten years time, you need to be able to engage with what happened here, what is happening here at the moment, and how that reflects upon

> the desires of the citizens of Cape Town to change the way their city functions for them, and hopefully also reflect the way we think about being citizens of South Africa. [Emphasis added]

More than ever, the Museum is seen as the vanguard for advancing a broader vision of urban reconstruction, a claim that rests not only upon the prominence of the legacy of forced removals in the moral conscience of Cape Town, but also upon the central and strategic location of the land in District Six that is to be redeveloped with regards to broader urban development. According to Fredericks at the "Return of the Elders" official ceremony to open the latest fifteen homes built (June 4, 2005), the Museum sees itself playing a "very very important role" in promoting urban community-building.

Broader designs include the nomination of District Six as a National Heritage Site, and the subsequent creation of a Cultural Heritage Precinct consisting of the Museum, the Sacks Futeran Complex, the District Six Memorial Park at Horstley Street, and about eighty other memorial sites. The recently acquired Sacks Futeran Complex, a block away from the main premises of the Museum, is intended to

> become the key ENGINE ROOM of the District Six Museum, serving as a base for support to a range of heritage sites and developing community museums in the broader Cape Town area.
>
> The Complex will serve as a centre for the reclamation of community life in the District, where a culture of activism and engagement is cultivated whilst drawing on the rich cultural heritage around which the museum's educational, exhibitionary, performative and research activities are centred. [Museum inscription 2005]

This new centre notably implies a significant addition to the main part of the Museum, with the street map at the centre, and, it would seem, something of a shift from the latter's supplementary relation to the district. Aside from serving as a meeting space and housing the D6BRT, plans for the complex include "a theatre project, arts programmes and new exhibition spaces, as well as commercial shopfront dedicated to creation of crafts and products indigenous to the Cape" (Museum inscription 2005). The idea is that people resettling in District Six will come "down" to the Homecoming Centre in groups, and then socialize and form clubs, depending on the particular area within the district that they are living in. It is hoped they will then take ideas to which they are exposed to in the Centre back into their regular lives in District Six (Terrence Fredericks, personal communication, June 28, 2005).[11]

This more proactive involvement in community-building is in keeping with the shift for the D6BRT from being a forum designed to mobilize claimants, and facilitate the processing of claims, to becoming a partner in the planning and rebuilding of District Six, and most of all, in the active promotion of a particular social and moral version of substantive social relations. The D6BRT requires all claimants moving into their new homes in District Six to sign a "social compact." The compact stipulates that property sold within the first five years of occupancy will revert to the D6BRT and pledges that the home to be occupied will not be used for shebeens (unlicensed private bars), prostitution, rent exploitation or gambling, and that the occupants will be tolerant towards all religions (Cape Times, June 13, 2004)—a move that has raised questions about continuities with practices of "social engineering" during the apartheid era. It seems as if the role envisioned for new Sachs Futeran Complex is as a place where these norms can be socialized. Indeed, given that the D6M has been much more successful in obtaining funding than the D6BRT (Personal communication, Crain Soudien, July 25, 2004), it makes sense to have it more closely share some of the functions that might otherwise be the domain of the D6BRT if it were better resourced.

All of this signals a move towards a more assertive politics of intervention in broader processes of community-building, urban reconstruction, and indeed, social control, and away from an understanding of the Museum as a space of contemplation, reflection, and listening. Such a shift towards a politics of presence potentially carries with it the danger of supplanting the all important space of erasure, thus eliding the constitutive relationship of community to loss, and perhaps to a certain extent foreclosing the imaginary possibilities that the latter entails. Note, for instance, the slippages in meaning in Layne's quote above in terms of the successive usages of the word *here*, whereby the Museum is effectively equated with District Six itself. The very figure of "District Six" has come to emphasize the active future-oriented community-building project, more so than a community of those engaged with memory. It is as if the space which the D6M had supplemented is increasingly perceived as an extension of the Museum and its activities.

As the diverse conceptions of community among claimants and Museum-associated intellectuals and activists gradually come up against the realities of a post-claims settlement phase, especially in the case of redevelopment, the disparities between them become more evident and consequential. As the Museum works to

expand its influence amongst District Sixers, particularly those who will resettle, the question will be who will be most competent and predisposed to participate in its culture of intellectual self-reflection and critical community-building. (Indeed, this begs the question of who will be able to resettle—and thus be able to access and be involved in the Museum.) Can the poor majority of District Sixers living in peripheral urban townships and suburbs like Guguletu, Lentegeur (Mitchell's Plain) or Manenburg really participate, and if so, in what capacity? A certain impatience among many in these sectors with intellectual antics is perhaps understandable, especially given their historical exclusion from the benefits of higher education. It is not surprising that museum-associated intellectuals would weigh in most strongly on "the culture of the Museum" during significant transitional moments in the history of the Museum as an institution—such as at present. But there are concerns that intellectual practice has come to be fetishized and dissociated from the criteria of relevance central to the Museum's putative historical constituency. As one worker from the Museum emphatically put it to me at the *Hands on District Six* Conference, "they can't think because they are too clever!" The ongoing challenge for the Museum would seem to be to bring the realm of the popular and that of the academic, curator and artist into relation in a strongly substantive, politically progressive and democratic sense.

Conclusion

For institutions like museums that are actively engaged in community-building, the figure of community can help to generate a sense of unity among otherwise disparate actors, and can do much to mobilize the efforts of various stakeholders towards a common "project." While Barthian and Andersonian understandings of community currently prevalent in anthropology would appear to allow the conceptual flexibility to deal with the increasingly complex relation between community and locality, their limitations become evident in examining how community figures in processes of social citizenship struggle in cases such as District Six, where non-coterminous "boundaries" and diverse "imaginings" between different social actors—all of which claim an allegiance to overlapping but not identical constructions of community—come into play, and where, moreover, a range of evolving concrete social relationships dynamically frame processes of symbolic identification. Indeed, those who identify with community tend to be concerned in the first instance with constituting an authoritative sense of interiority, and critically reflexive community-based projects such as the D6M are concerned primarily with *incorporation* through community-building. In this light, the analytical question is how collective identity is symbolically anchored in community at different times and by different actors—particularly those who most authoritatively speak for others—so as to manifest dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, to be sure, but ones that are grounded in substantive social and political processes. It is thus necessary to frame contestations over community within a context-specific discussion of the politics of group-formation in relation to the broader social and political ambit within which they are situated, and in particular, to examine the ways in which collective identities are more or less effectively mobilized by proxy representatives in rights-struggles.

The formation of the Museum was occasioned by a symbolically rich "imagined community," primarily engendered by a relatively cohesive group of intellectuals and activists connected to the historical struggle for District Six. By offering a space in supplementary relation with the "empty space" of District Six, and through devices such as the floor map, the Museum anchored a sense of collective identity for this group as well as, to a certain extent, for a broader group progressively incorporated into its fold. The explicit mission of the Museum was and continues to be to further the cause of community in District Six, where community-building consists of an often highly sophisticated form of critical memory work towards the ends of a conscious political intervention in a broader project of urban reconstruction and citizenship struggle. Until recently, the work of memorialization was to an extent an end in itself for the Museum; the politics of restitution was largely left to the D6BRT. The Museum's work complemented that of the D6BRT by helping to consolidate a symbolic sense of community and thus contributing a cultural dimension to the broader process of mobilizing District Sixers. It thus buttressed the D6BRT's struggle for control over the direction of the restitution process. Although the resulting Museum construction of community was in a sense somewhat disembedded from the rather tenuous and fragmentary social relations among District Sixers that spanned a diverse set of localities of displacement, it was broadly consonant with their imagination of community through nostalgic commemoration. For these distinct groupings, the Museum thus served the general aims of healing and mobilization.

With the beginning of housing construction in District Six, and the resettlement of the first claimants, the Museum is trying to respond to an increasing need to cultivate a more future-oriented idea of community better adapted to present-day practical circumstances and constraints, and consisting of thicker social relations and networks. In this respect, the Museum is being repositioned

in a more interventionist role, acting in concert with the D6BRT in its community-building initiatives—as is perhaps epitomized by the "social compact" and future plans for the Homecoming Centre. The resulting idea of community would appear to be less open-ended, and to carry greater risks of social exclusion. While community-building has always been seen by the Museum as a means for advancing a broader program of social citizenship, the context appears to be shifting: having achieved a prominent symbolic and cultural position in the city, it has set for itself the ambitious future challenge of establishing its relevance for the redevelopment and renewal of an active neighbourhood by acting as a vital link to its past, and at the same time effecting a certain broader transformative agenda for the city. The degree to which it will succeed in this agenda will surely depend significantly on its ability to maintain and indeed expand its relationship with the broader popular constituency of District Sixers.

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Notes

1 Race is a social fiction, but a very powerful one that shapes social reality and subjectivity. This paper makes analytical use of racial categories wherever they are significantly consequential in such a socially-determined way. With regards to the especially contentious classification of "coloured," this paper follows the frequent popular usage of the term in District Six in its all-encompassing sense, as including Muslims classified as "Cape Malays."

2 While a central concern of the paper is to problematize various usages of the term "community," quotations are dropped after this point in the interest of readability.

3 Public sphere is defined as "a contested participatory site in which actors with overlapping identities as legal subjects, citizens, economic actors, and family and community members, form a public body and engage in negotiations and contestations over political and social life" (Somers 1993:589). I do not wish to try to rigorously adapt her usages of the terms of "civil society" and "public sphere" towards my own ethnographic purposes, but I find Somers' approach useful for moving beyond other practice-oriented theories of social citizenship that continue to privilege the nation-state, and for emphasizing the place-making activities of would-be members of community in local public domains and arenas instead.

4 See Mesthrie 1999.

5 See Kies 1953, 1959; Soudien 2001.

6 The Record of Understanding document outlined the form of the development vehicle that would drive the redevelopment process in District Six, including the roles of key stakeholders and the principles defining its operation.

7 Even on such occasions, there are individuals and subgroups who actively contest and undermine the sense of unity: groups of ex-residents who did not submit their claims on time and thus are not party to the process; individuals who question the motives and integrity of leaders; claimants who openly express fear and prejudice at their potential co-beneficiaries; and so on.

8 See Rassool and Prosalendis 2001; D6M n.d.; McEachern 2001; Soudien et al. 1995; de Kok 1998; Bohlin 1998.

9 *District Six Steering Committee Meeting: Proposed Items for Inclusion on the Agenda.* April 25, 2002.

10 Steering Committee Meeting, April 25, 2002 (attended in person).

11 Other initiatives linked to this more proactive, outward-oriented strategy are the Museum's assistance in the formation of "community museums" in other areas of forced removals in Cape Town such as Simon's Town and Protea Village. Recently the Museum has also begun to engage with interested parties in the Cape Flats areas of Manenburg and Langa in order to assist with memorial projects there. In addition to the in-house exhibitions of other areas of forced removals such as Tramway Road (1997) and Protea Village (2002), and ongoing displays of removals in Claremont and Constantia—areas which were subsequently developed as exclusive wealthy white neighbourhoods—another important but thus far limited initiative has been to take the Museum to the places to which people have been forcibly removed on the Cape Flats. For instance, a travelling exhibition was set up in a school in the low-income area of Lavender Hill in 2003, which "made explicit the link between District Six and Lavender Hill" (Museum inscription 2005).

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