

# ‘Digging [D]eeper than the eye approves’<sup>1</sup>: Oral histories and their use in the *Digging Deeper* exhibition of the District Six Museum.

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In this article the role of oral history practice and its relation to the exhibitionary and curatorial practice of the District Six Museum is explored. Its focus is on the 2000 exhibition known as *Digging Deeper*, in order to examine the precedents for how oral histories are actively translated, managed and staged within a museum setting.

The District Six Museum works with the memories of the former residents of an area situated in the heart of Cape Town that was destroyed by the Group Areas Act. Located on the slopes of Devil’s Peak, District Six developed from a community of freed slaves as well as those immigrants who found lodging in the area after disembarkation at Cape Town’s harbour. ‘The District’ was known as an area with a rich political, musical, cultural and architectural history. It was characterized by a large working-class community whose members found employment in the city and its immediate surrounds. In February 1966, District Six was proclaimed a ‘White Group Area’, and over a period of thirty years 66 000 people were removed to areas on the Cape Flats on the outskirts of the city. Buildings that were used for commercial purposes, living quarters, educational, cultural and religious activities, were bulldozed. As a result of the piecemeal removal, residents both witnessed and lived with the physical destruction of their neighborhoods. By the early 1980s the empty landscape of District Six became a scarred one – evoking memories of the tightly-knit community as well as the trauma of removal. The District Six community’s forced removal, and ex-residents’ memories of growing up, living and working in the area, is a central feature of the Museum’s work and exhibitions.

The origins of the District Six Museum lie in the *Hands off District Six* campaign of the late 1980s which sought to galvanize resistance to plans by British Petroleum (BP) to redevelop District Six. A *Hands off District Six* conference was held in 1988 with the involvement of a broad range of community-based organisations. The District Six site, approximately 42 hectares, was proclaimed ‘salted earth’ and a group of conference participants was tasked to develop a memorial project around the area. The programme for the conference included sessions and efforts to visualise and ‘perform’ District Six, and included slide presentations, videos, poetry readings and a photographic exhibition.<sup>2</sup> In support of the mandate

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1 V. Woolf, *Street Haunting* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2005), 3. The full quotation reads, ‘We are in danger of digging deeper than the eye approves; we are impeding our passage down the smooth stream by catching at some branch or root. At any moment, the sleeping army may stir itself and assert all its oddities and sufferings and sordities.’

2 *Hands off District Six* conference programme, Saturday, 9 July 1988, *Hands off District Six Committee*.

to mobilise memories around the area, a District Six commemoration week took place four years later in 1992.<sup>3</sup> The photographic exhibition which launched this week also served as the launch of the District Six Museum project. The exhibition included the work of six photographers as well as 'material from personal records and archival sources'.<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein to that of the *Hands Off* conference, processions to the District Six site, poetry, plays, music and audio-visual presentations comprised the commemorative week's events. The programme components of the *Hands Off* conference and the commemorative week underscored a broad acknowledgement of the importance of performance and visuality in sustaining and evoking meanings around District Six. The launch of the museum project together with a photographic exhibition, and the accompanying performances of poetry, music as well as a narrated audio-visual presentation, is significant for the supportive *context* it provided for the recall of testimonies by ex-residents.<sup>5</sup>

The success of the 1992 photographic exhibition further sanctioned the use of a Methodist Church building in Buitenkant Street as the site of any future museum of District Six. The Museum was constructed as a space where one was able to articulate a sense of the razed spaces of District Six and its communal life, as well as one where that community could be mobilised towards the objective of land restitution. Oral history and testimonies were key features of the Museum. Alongside these testimonies, however, ranged the debate around the appropriate form a District Six memorial project could take, one that would take into account the active participation of ex-residents. Today, while the institutional character and organisational structure reflects on a superficial level the features of a Museum, it is in the contestation of these that spaces were created where the role of oral history - as a dynamic methodological element - was emphasized as an example of both a curatorial and research practice.<sup>6</sup>

The visual history of the Museum cannot be recounted without a brief description of the two seminal exhibitions that have been crucial for thinking about how oral histories have been used in its exhibitionary strategy. These are *Streets: Retracing District Six*, which opened in 1994, and the main focus of this work, *Digging Deeper*, which opened in 2000.

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3 District Six Commemoration Week programme, 31 October - 7 November 1992, District Six Museum Foundation.

4 Commemoration Week programme, 1992. The six photographers were George Hallett, Jimmy Matthews, Rashid Lombard, Willie de Clerk, Geoff Grundlingh and Jansje Wissema. The opening of the exhibition was accompanied by an audiovisual presentation, music performances, poetry and a short story readings, as well as performances of two scenes from a play, *Avalon Court*. Bill Nasson spoke about the mission statement and the aims of the District Six Museum Foundation and on the last day led a panel discussion entitled 'Film and memory'.

5 In 1988, in a more controversial use of photographic portraiture and ex-resident testimony, British Petroleum South Africa (BPSA), amidst pressures to cease their proposed redevelopment of District Six, commissioned a photo-journalist, Ingrid Hudson, to construct a photographic essay as part of an informal survey and for their annual report. Entitled *Voices from the Street*, she 'spent four days wandering around, taking photographs, knocking on doors, talking to people'. Eleven portraits of former District Six residents and current residents from Woodstock, 'Zonnebloem' (District Six); Surrey Estate and Athlone were accompanied by quotations illustrating either remembrances of District Six or opinions on the proposed redevelopment.

6 V. Layne and C. Rassool, 'Memory rooms: Oral history in the District Six Museum', in Ciraj Rassool and Sandra Prosalendis, eds., *Recalling Community in Cape Town: Creating and Curating the District Six Museum* (Cape Town: District Six Museum, 2001), 146-153.

### ***Streets: Retracing District Six (1994)***

The exhibition which marked the official opening of the District Six Museum was that of *Streets: Retracing District Six*, which looked at the people and streets that made up the District. Its aim was ‘not to recreate District Six as much as repossess the history of the area as a place where people lived, worked, loved and struggled’.<sup>7</sup> Central to the exhibition were three curatorial features, namely the street/floor map of District Six, the 75 original blue and white street signs salvaged by the foreman of the demolition team tasked with razing the area, and a length of calico on which ex-residents could write remembrances and messages about District Six.

The floor map was an artistic rendering of the geographical boundaries of District Six. It was hand-painted and was covered with a protective layer of transparent plastic. Situated along the edges of the map were artists’ and poets’ prints, poems and paintings depicting life in and experiences of the District. The names of streets were printed by hand (in the same blue of the original street signs) and ex-residents were encouraged to inscribe the names of streets, institutions, as well as family names, onto the surface of the map.<sup>8</sup> The map was centrally located in the centre of the church building.

At the northern end of the map, clearly visible as one entered the building from Buitenkant Street, hung three columns of street signs in ladder-like formation. At the base of each column was an ‘archaeology box’ made of perspex which contained soil and fragments from an archaeological excavation conducted in District Six. The length of calico mentioned above was situated just alongside the pulpit of the old Methodist Church. This length of the calico became known as the memory-cloth.

Along the map, alongside the western wall of the church, were five alcoves depicting the interiors of five streets in District Six, namely Hanover, Horstley, Tyne, Vernon Terrace and Constitution Streets. A number of portraits of community leaders and public figures from District Six were printed onto transparent architectural paper and hung in the gallery space, between the balustrades, looking down onto the central area of the church. The eastern wall of the exhibition was populated with historical information and photographs, as well as artistic representations of District Six. *Streets* is considered the curatorial framework for all other exhibitions held in the Museum space since 1994.

### ***Digging Deeper (2000)***

*Digging Deeper* - the exhibition that marked the opening of the newly renovated Museum space - is considered one of many exhibitions that have been added to the core *Streets* exhibition. While the role of *Streets* was to speak to the lives of

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7 District Six Museum web-site, [www.districtsix.co.za](http://www.districtsix.co.za), accessed 20 September 2006

8 P. Delpot, ‘Signposts for retrieval: a visual framework for enabling memory of place and time’ in Rassool and Prosalendis, eds., *Recalling Community*, 34

individuals in District Six, *Digging Deeper*'s focus began to include the value of its history for a broader South African society. As noted in the exhibition guide:

*Digging Deeper* engages with the multiple ways in which the collections, resources and spaces of the Museum are used, and expresses the central intention of the Museum to enquire into the pasts of South African society and the workings of memory.<sup>9</sup>

In the Methodist Church there are three interlinking exhibitionary spaces which house the exhibition. The core of the exhibition is contained within the main hall of the church, while temporary exhibitions and displays are found in an interleaving passage space and the Memorial Hall which is located at the back of the main hall.

The **main hall** of the church is a double volume space that contains the ground floor and gallery area. The street map of the District created for *Streets* retains its foothold in the centre of the church. The original District Six street signs are now constructed into a single, four sided pillar that rises to the ceiling of the church. At the centre of the pillar is a mound of earth, symbolising the earth of the District Six site. An embroidered memory cloth can be found near the entrance of the Museum, and is mounted as part of the exhibition. Two lengths of calico – one for visitors and the other for ex-residents, are located near the pulpit, and continue to capture messages of ex-residents and visitors to the space.

The **ground floor** of the main hall is dedicated to the broader socio-political narrative of District Six. *Timeline* panels – form the spine of this narrative namely: *Arrivals/Formation* (1800s - 1930), *Resistance* (1930 -1970), *Restitution* and *Demolition* (1970s to the present day). These are located along the walls of the hall. A theme that focuses on the 'interior' spaces of the District is reflected in the construction of *Nomvuyo's Room* alongside the map on the ground floor, and is a reconstruction of a room occupied by Nomvuyo Ngcelwane and her family when they lived in District Six. *Nomvuyo's Room* contains a soundscape (a collage of oral history testimony, music and excerpts from old radio programmes), as does another 'interior' located on the upper floor, *Rod's Room*.

The **upper floor** of *Digging Deeper* is divided into six alcoves. The alcoves are representations of different social spaces in District Six. These are the Bloemhof Flats, Barbershop/ Hairdresser, Langarm Bands, Places of Work, Public Wash-house, Hanover Street and Bioscopes and Carnival. In the Barbershop/Hairdresser alcove a soundscape comprising the voices of District Six barbers and hairdressers may be heard. In the Langarm alcove, one hears a recording of music. The portrait gallery, a series of portraits from a 'wide cross-section of District Six inhabitants' is suspended along the balustrades of the upper floor.<sup>10</sup>

At present there are two features of the **Memorial Hall**. Firstly, a recent exhibition entitled *Memory Traces* (2005) speaks to the Museum's shift towards work-

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9 A Guide to the District Six Museum and the Digging Deeper Exhibition

10 A Guide to the District Six Museum and the Digging Deeper Exhibition.

ing with, and on the site of, a redeveloped District Six. A proposed memorial park at Horstley Street – the site of one of the first forced removals in 1901 and the last in the early 1980s – is the focus of the exhibition. A permanent feature of the hall is an artistic rendition of the foundations of a Horstley Street house, which is sunken into the Memorial Hall floor. Brightly lit, this 'sunken cavity' depicts archaeological fragments and shards excavated from Horstley Street. As noted in the guide to *Digging Deeper*, the foundations represent a 'space symbolic of the layering of lives that accrued within those simple boundaries'.<sup>11</sup>

The second and more permanent feature of the Memorial Hall is that of the 'Writer's Floor'. It consists of painted tiles of poetry and prose embedded in the floor. These tiles reflect writers' experiences of District Six and Cape Town. The hall is seen as a space for temporary exhibitions which reflect the theme of 'beyond District Six'.

A range of components make up the *Digging Deeper* exhibition. Enlarged, hand-tinted photocopies of images from the area, as well as enlarged historical maps, form the backdrop to the displays. Photographs are an important part of the display and take the form of family photographs from family albums, echoing their source. Their significance, as noted by one of the curators of *Digging Deeper* and a Museum trustee, lies in their value as the 'records of lives and identities, forming elements of a recovered public history'.<sup>12</sup> Artefacts may also be found on display. The use of text – as interpretive exhibition text or extracts from oral history interviews – is a key feature of the exhibition.

The origin moments of the District Six Museum in the 1980s, and later its official opening in the year of the first democratic election in 1994, has both directly and indirectly framed the Museum's approach to uncovering the history of District Six. The 1980s, a period during which social and popular history movements became key in the writing of a progressive South African history strongly influenced the early 'institutional' language of the Museum. Thus the focus of its early displays was to render the hidden voices of a District Six story in a public forum where they could be recovered. This rendering was often identified as an organic process, one which sprung from the ex-resident's need to narrate and share their stories about District Six, and the trauma of being forcibly removed from the area. The Museum, in its tentative phase of becoming a more formalised institution, provided a receptive space where these stories were told, *heard*, and co-operatively incorporated into its displays. Its agency, however, in ensuring that these voices were heard by others and made visible, became a key role that defined its own institutional narrative and was later re-narrated institutionally as well. Situated in a newly renovated space, the new *Digging Deeper* exhibition signified attempts to bring to the fore the importance of District Six not only to its ex-residents, but also to a broader Cape Town and national public. One of the ways sought to sig-

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11 A Guide to the District Six Museum and the Digging Deeper Exhibition.

12 T. Smith and C. Rassool, 'History in photographs at the District Six Museum' in Rassool and Prosalendis, eds., *Recalling Community*, 132.

nify this importance was through the voices of ex-residents themselves. Within a framework where ‘expressive elements [were] woven together in an interrelated whole’,<sup>13</sup> oral histories, particularly life histories, became the basis through which the story of forced removals and experiences of District Six were narrated.

The body of work available on oral history - how to conduct interviews, how it may be used, and the construction of meaning from interviews - is vast. However, key to this study has been a reading of oral histories as a constituent part of oral, literary and performative contexts – contexts which ultimately shape the orality of spoken traditions and storytelling.<sup>14</sup> The work of Isabel Hofmeyr in collecting oral historical narratives around the siege of Makapansgat has been useful for thinking through how oral narrative and the telling of oral historical tradition have not been ‘pure’ renditions of the siege, but have drawn from the interplay between oral, literary and performative accounts of the event.<sup>15</sup> In identifying how elements of the oral and literary representations of the forced removals were used in exhibitionary form, and taking into consideration the performance of interviews within the exhibition space, Hofmeyr’s position that oral historical tradition cannot be divorced from the socio-political contexts that have shaped it, provides a foothold into thinking of oral history practice as a context-specific practice, particularly in relation to how its products are disseminated and consumed within an exhibitionary strategy.

Therefore, a key focus of this work is on how the poetics of exhibiting oral histories may be brought to the fore. As noted by Henrietta Lidchi, the poetics of exhibiting may be defined as the ‘practice of producing meaning through the internal ordering and conjugation of the separate but related components of an exhibition’.<sup>16</sup> It is this interplay between oral history extracts in relation to visual representations found in the *Digging Deeper* exhibition itself, as well as to each other, that this work seeks to decode. In the process it sketches how the exhibition, in its attempts to provide meanings to the forced removals which affected District Six, took on the practice of social history and, in certain moments, embodied the critique of this movement initiated by historians in the 1990s. The process of decoding, however, is not a practice which provides an objective, unbiased telling of what the meaning of an exhibition might represent. As Lidchi notes, in order to decode meaning a simultaneous process of encoding inevitably takes place. Therefore, as one decodes meaning and translates this into interpretive text for a range of audiences, these processes of selection, translation and interpretation encode a new set of meanings.<sup>17</sup> With an exhibition such as *Digging Deeper*, the poetics of exhibiting are of a complex nature - if only in relation to the myriad of texts dedicated - particularly by those involved in its genesis - to decoding the exhibition and its

13 ‘Curator’s note’, in *A Guide to the District Six Museum and Digging Deeper Exhibition*.

14 The following work is not that of a dedicated oral historian in the conventional sense and research undertaken for this work did not involve conducting oral history interviews.

15 See I. Hofmeyr, ‘We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told’: Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994).

16 H. Lidchi, ‘The poetics and the politics of exhibiting other cultures’, in S. Hall, ed., *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 168.

17 Lidchi, ‘The poetics and the politics’, 166

processes.<sup>18</sup> In a sense, interrogating the poetics of *Digging Deeper* lies in the attempt to understand how, in the process of laying bare (and decoding) its curatorial and methodological processes, the Museum continues to encode meanings about its representations.

### The Museum as ‘voice’

The role of an emerging oral history practice in the Museum, as a means of preserving the memory of District Six, cannot be disassociated from the organisation’s founding moments within the *Hands off District Six* (HODS) campaign. The organisation that emerged from the mandate of the HODS conference sought to work with the memory of the area, acknowledging the stories and voices of District Six, but at the same time seeking to establish a voice of its own. This institutional voice sought to entrench the struggle for District Six (through an anticipated restitution and redevelopment process) and to speak of the historical shaping of the Cape Town, thereby acting as the city’s historical conscience.<sup>19</sup> Through this role, the Museum undertook to negotiate the historical and dynamic links between Cape Town’s apartheid past and what it termed its post-apartheid present and future.<sup>20</sup> As a space and institution which spoke for the broader symbolic role of District Six in highlighting forced removals, it is primarily through its interpretive displays and research drawn from family, institutional and documentary archives that the Museum as the voice of ‘the people’ was created. The manner in which this intention was sustained was primarily through its displays which stimulated the articulation of voice but also took on the embodiment thereof. The creation of the Museum as voice or as *a* voice is linked to ways narration and memory has been stimulated and visuality has been deployed in the Museum. Charmaine McEachern, in her observations of ex-resident interactions with the exhibitionary elements of *Streets* - in particular the floor map – notes how the institutional narrative of the Museum is entrenched with *how* people remember and verbalise their remembrances.<sup>21</sup> In the act of walking over the map and remembering, the performance of memory as McEachern has proposed, was ‘on behalf’ of the Museum itself - part of its display - and entrenched in the ‘narrative of itself’.<sup>22</sup> With *Streets*, orality took precedence over the written word, and as McEachern notes the ‘graphic minimalism’ - the lack of written texts to depict factual information and experiences of District Six - provided a space for this orality to take form.<sup>23</sup> McEachern’s observations rest on the notion of oral acts of remembrance as ‘oral cultural representation’<sup>24</sup> which is

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18 The guide to the *Digging Deeper* exhibition begins this process with a ‘Curator’s note’ which explains the rationale of the exhibition, but the exposition of the Museum’s processes is comprehensively recorded in C. Rassool and S. Prosalendis, *Recalling Community*.

19 ‘First steps in the planning of the Museum: An overview’. Draft proposal to the Methodist Church, District Six Museum Foundation, May 1993. Box marked ‘D6M’, District Six Museum Archive. All reports and minutes relating to the history of the District Six Museum cited in this article are in this box located in the Museums’ archives.

20 ‘First steps’.

21 C. McEachern, ‘Working with memory: The District Six Museum in the new South Africa, *Social Analysis* 42(2), Jul. 1998, 61.

22 McEachern, ‘Working with memory’, 61.

23 McEachern, ‘Working with memory’ 62.

24 McEachern, ‘Working with memory’, 62.

enabled by the aesthetic framework of *Streets* and its ability to evoke memory and narrative through fragments. As she notes ex-resident (verbal) narratives were anchored around these visual fragments. That ex-resident narratives told in the space of the Museum contributed to the layering and filling out of the graphic representations of District Six further helps to provide a basis for looking at the role oral history representations play within *Digging Deeper*. The link between oral acts of remembering and the role of the Museum's visual strategies in stimulating these and shaping the notion of a living Museum remains key to understanding how oral history practice emerged in its spaces. As the Museum progressed away from the 'graphic minimalism' of *Streets* to the intense graphic layering of *Digging Deeper* the emergence of a sound archive alongside this process further cemented its institutional identity and voice.<sup>25</sup>

### Oral histories and the sound archive

In their draft proposal for the use of the Buitenkant Street building as the site of the proposed museum, trustees and project managers emphasised the Museum as being a receptive space – one which was determined by responses to its activities, its potential role as a museum, and the needs and desires of visitors.<sup>26</sup> While it derived authority for this voice from the active voicing and inscription of ex-residents within the exhibition space and, therefore, their shaping of the exhibition<sup>27</sup>, this voice also functioned in ways that became increasingly institutional and archival – being expressed in the Museum's own need to collect and oversee the safeguarding of those objects and documents collected from donors in its early years.<sup>28</sup>

Early tendencies towards collecting and archiving were seen to exist as separate from, yet necessary for, the function of the Museum.<sup>29</sup> The Museum envisioned its role as *not* being archival and seeing itself rather as a generative space for working with and interpreting memory. The establishment of the sound archive in the Museum in 1997 and the fundamental role it played in oral history research for *Digging Deeper* brought about a productive tension where the relatively spontaneous oral acts of reminiscence which would accompany visiting ex-residents in the Museum's early years – and which marked it as a living Museum – became part of a proactive research approach where voices were recorded, transcribed, archived and displayed. The tension lay in the use of these recordings and transcripts as extracts, captions and audio installations, and the challenges it brought for the Museum as it became a more formal, systematically engaging space where memory was both facilitated and collected.

25 Where oral histories are to a large extent the *result* of the design process with *Streets*, with *Digging Deeper* oral histories are designed into the layers of representation, in a more formal and organised way.

26 'First steps'.

27 See McEachern, 'Working with memory', 62.

28 Early foundation members sought to create lists of material that belonged to the Museum project, and which potentially could be housed in the Museum. Minutes of meeting of District Six Museum Foundation Trustees, 21 July 1993.

29 Notably, the Museum sound archive was first located off-site from the Buitenkant Street location, in Church Street, in Cape Town's city centre. The opening of *Digging Deeper* marked the strategic inclusion of the sound archive and its memory room in the gallery space of the Museum.

The inauguration of a Museum sound archive was premised on that of a living archive – one with a focus on performance, music and the enhancement of the quality of *Streets* through the integration of life histories and sounds into the Museum space.<sup>30</sup> Alongside its main function of being a ‘memory booth’ for ex-residents which sought alternative ways to document their historical presence, the Museum lay an emphasis on traditional archival practices of identifying what was ‘collectible.’ This necessitated the introduction of professional standards to ensure the safekeeping of materials and their accessibility for students and researchers. Collectible materials included interviews with ex-residents, video material and music recordings.<sup>31</sup> This focus on memory, visuality, sound and performance reflected an approach sought by the Museum in its exhibitionary strategy as a whole.<sup>32</sup>

The relationship between the sound archive and the exhibitions strategy of the Museum is a closely knit one, and both areas claim a defining and interdependent role in the public and visual history of the organisation. The basis of this interdependency can be seen in both conceptual and practical ways. Both areas of work relied on the value and primacy of memory for the historical reconstruction (and construction) of District Six. Peggy Delport notes that it is through the ‘oral and material contributions’ of ex-residents that the basis of a research strategy is formed.<sup>33</sup> As noted by Valmont Layne, at the time a sound archivist with the Museum, *Streets* illustrated the challenges of working with memory and, in particular, the ‘creation of a public memory’ about District Six.<sup>34</sup> The influx of memorabilia and objects provoked questions as to the role of the Museum as an institution that collects and, as noted by Layne, memory and the processes accompanying it were a key principles according to which the collection of objects and the display thereof was approached.<sup>35</sup> While curators of the Museum placed an emphasis on an ‘applied aesthetics’ to stimulate remembering and ways of telling – a dynamic means of capturing stories and accounts of District Six for posterity,<sup>36</sup> – a firm emphasis was placed by the emerging sound archive on the creation of a space which addressed the question of what happened to these dynamic ways once they were remembered and told. The idea of the sound archive as a memory booth, as a ‘space in which to render and capture memory in electronic form’ (own emphasis), underpinned a shared concern of the curators of the exhibition, namely that of giving form to the experiences and memories of ex-residents.<sup>37</sup>

30 V. Layne, ‘District Six Museum starts a sound archive’, *District Six Museum Newsletter*, 3(1), Aug. 1998, 4.

31 Layne, ‘District Six Museum starts a sound archive’, 4.

32 See S. Prosalendis, ‘A Museum within a Museum’, *District Six Museum Newsletter*, 3(1), Aug. 1998, 15. This is further echoed in Bill Nasson’s emphasis on visuality and memory in earlier historical accounts of District Six. See B. Nasson, ‘Oral history and the reconstruction of District Six’ in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien, eds., *The Struggle for District Six, Past and Present* (Cape Town: Buchu Books, 1990), 44-66.

33 P. Delport, ‘Signposts for retrieval: A visual framework enabling memory of place and time’ in Rassool and Prosalendis, eds., *Recalling Community*, 37.

34 V. Layne, ‘The sound archives at the District Six Museum: a work in progress’ in A. Seeger and S. Chaudhuri eds., *Archives for the Future: Global Perspectives on Audiovisual Archives in the 21st Century* (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2004), 186.

35 Layne, ‘The sound archives’, 186.

36 See Prosalendis in Layne, ‘The sound archives’, 188.

37 Layne, ‘The sound archives’, 188 (own emphasis).

In the late 1990s the vision for the sound archive focused on its ability to serve as a ‘holding point’ for the various forms of remembering which were taking place in the Museum – acting as a space where, as Layne notes, the ‘reconstructions of *Streets* (could) be arrested until we decide what to do next’.<sup>38</sup> The vision of the sound archive further sought to situate it as the ‘generator of knowledge’ and to establish documentation projects that would inform a new public history.<sup>39</sup> The forms of recording envisioned by the sound archive – be it electronic or field recordings - represent an ironic and technocratic moment in the Museum’s approach to sources of evidence and to how the history of District Six was to be constructed. The vision of the archive was steeped within a popular and activist discourse - seeking to bring about a community’s empowerment through the creation of a ‘memory bank’, one which would be at their service as a cultural resource. However, this was offset by questions of technology and the format through which the collection and the preservation of memory would be possible.<sup>40</sup>

Emerging as it did within a digital age, and with the success of the *Streets* exhibition, a Museum concern with collecting and documentation espoused by foundation members as early as 1992, found a conceptual and practical home in the sound archive. The vision of the sound archive as laid out by Layne raises, however, the subtle separation between the respective roles of the exhibitionary strategy and the sound archive as driving forces in the work of the Museum. For the archive, its role was one that was indebted to the exhibition for the principle of community based interventions in producing knowledge and a history of District Six.<sup>41</sup> While the *Streets* exhibition focused on how people came to remember and sought aesthetic and creative forms of documenting, the sound archive saw the lack of a systematic approach to collecting and consequently an opportunity to rectify this through its future work, this being a mandate which it saw congruent with the development of the Museum project into an institution.<sup>42</sup>

To an extent, the above focus on developing a system for the sound archive, and the concern with a format which would enable the preservation of memory, counteracts the Museum’s accounts of the archive’s organic beginnings with popular District Six figures. These beginnings are embedded in the role of non-academic, public intellectuals who have been placed at the forefront of the Museum’s work and the narrative of itself.<sup>43</sup> With the sound archive, it is the formative role of District Six ex-resident Vincent Kolbe, as noted by Layne and Rassool, which grounds the archive within a community-based research methodology and its interest in researching musical traditions in Cape Town.<sup>44</sup> As community based intellectuals, these ordinary people were lauded as literally being able to ‘speak themselves’ within a public, post-apartheid construction of their history- to tell of their

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38 Layne, ‘The sound archives’, 188.

39 Layne, ‘The sound archives’, 188.

40 Layne, ‘The sound archives’, 189,191-192.

41 Layne, ‘The sound archives’, 192.

42 Layne, ‘The sound archives’, 193.

43 See V. Layne and C. Rassool, ‘Memory rooms: oral history in the District Six Museum’ in Rassool and Prosalendis, eds., *Recalling Community*, 146 -153.

44 Layne and Rassool, ‘Memory rooms’, 147.

history and experiences. However, with the opening of *Digging Deeper* the forms and the approaches undertaken by the sound archive - and its very existence - suggests that to a large degree, and at later stages of the Museum's development as a 'voice' in the city - people were *made to speak for themselves* and a District Six history.

In the Museum's narrative, the origins of the Museum's sound archive have largely been attributed to three influences on oral history practice within the institution. These are social history, a 'radical historical practice that is both committed and engaged' and, lastly, the impact of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's framework of 'telling, confessing, healing and catharsis' which emerged in the years after the first democratic election in 1994.<sup>45</sup> However, influences were localised within partnerships and resources identified by the Museum and a range of practitioners were consulted as the archive began to take root.<sup>46</sup> As the documentary record of the Museum reveals, the vision for the sound archive project was not wholly defined from the outset, and a deliberate move towards self-reflexivity in its processes was perceived as part of its growth – with its methodology developing through practice itself.<sup>47</sup>

The sound archive, in its initial 'project' form became a platform from which to begin to articulate an oral history practice in the Museum and attempted to define this practice in relation to the Museum's growing needs.<sup>48</sup> In taking into account the potential value of including audio/sound components within the exhibition that could comprise 'voices', a self-reflexive methodology was nevertheless challenged by the need to establish clear parameters for defining its role and the practice of the methodology itself.<sup>49</sup> In the exhibitions and collections reports for 1998, it becomes clear that a more collaborative working relationship between the sound archive and these areas of the Museum were advocated and plans were made to visit other museums to investigate how they incorporated audio-visual elements into their exhibitions.<sup>50</sup> Out of these attempts to establish the practice of the sound archive – and to incorporate its work into an exhibitionary strategy for the Museum, oral histories became pivotal to the development of the *Digging Deeper* exhibition. How these oral interviews were translated into the physical, visual framework of the exhibition therefore requires further examination.

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45 Layne and Rassool, 'Memory rooms', 146.

46 Minutes of Projects Committee meeting, 10 June 1997. Museum staff consulted Sean Field of the Western Cape Oral History Project (WCOHP) based at the University of Cape Town (now the Centre for Popular Memory). In 1997 a staff member visited four African countries to investigate regional methods in sound and music recordings. Another staff member also undertook a Western Cape Oral History Project internship. See M. Nixon, 'Archiving African style', in *District Six Museum Newsletter*, 3 (1), Aug. 1998, 7 and S. Field, 'Oral history for District Six and beyond', *District Six Museum Newsletter*, 3 (1), Aug. 1998, 13. Other sites visited were the Archives of Traditional Music in Bloomington, Indiana. See Layne, 'The sound archives'.

47 Minutes of Projects Committee meeting, 2 June 1997.

48 With the success of the *Streets* and the *Digging Deeper* exhibitions, the role of the Museum expanded to include acting as model for community Museums. It consciously sought to promote the sector by identifying and presenting the forms and strategies of *Digging Deeper* as a tool for emerging community Museums. Minutes of Curatorial Committee meeting, 27 August 2001

49 Minutes of Projects Committee meeting, 10 June 1997

50 Exhibitions Monthly Report, February 1998, Collections Monthly Report, February 1998. The Exhibitions and Collections functions were not formal departments at this point, and reports reflected defined working areas of the Museum e.g. reports from staff who worked as narrators on the 'floor' of the Museum were also tabled.

## Locating oral histories in *Digging Deeper*

Oral histories are located throughout *Digging Deeper* and they take on various forms or functions, depending on the way that they are utilised in the space. *Digging Deeper* itself is divided into three main exhibiting areas namely the Ground Floor; Upper Floor (gallery space) and Lower Floor (Memorial Hall). Oral histories – in the form of written extracts and audio excerpts – are located on both the ground floor and gallery space. The gallery space consists of a series of alcoves which represent recreations of actual spaces in District Six (the Barbershop/ Hairdresser, Bloemhof Flats, Hanover Street and Seven Steps, Public Wash-house alcoves) or depict the working, social and recreational habits of District Sixers (the Langarm; Places of Work alcoves) In addition, the gallery space houses Rod's Room<sup>51</sup> and the west wall of the space depicts Peggy Delport's mural, *No Matter Where We are, We are Here*.<sup>52</sup> The ground floor consists of three major panels that provide a historical and political timeline for District Six. These panels are the *Formation*; *Resistance* and *Demolition* panels. *Nomvuyo's Room* is also located on the ground floor. The Memorial Hall is traditionally the location used for temporary exhibitions that relate to the theme of 'Beyond District Six'. The discussion regarding the uses of oral histories in *Digging Deeper* will encompass the gallery and ground floor spaces of the Museum.

The Museum's research strategy for *Digging Deeper* included a large number of oral history interviews, but only 25 interviews were used for the exhibition. Interviews took place from 1998 - 2000, with the large majority of interviews occurring in 1999, a year before *Digging Deeper* opened. Within the exhibition itself, life history interviews are the greatest source of extracts and text found on display. These interviews occur occasionally in the exhibition e.g. Joe Schaffers interview (1999: Bloemhof Flats alcove), while other interviews are referenced throughout the exhibition e.g. Vincent Kolbe's interviews (1998, 1999) which are found on the Demolition panel and in the Seven Steps and Langarm alcoves.

Audio components of oral histories occur within two rooms in *Digging Deeper* (Rod's Room and Nomvuyo's Room), two alcoves (the Langarm and Barbershop/Hairdresser alcove) and the area in front of the mural, *No Matter Where We are, We are Here*, as well as the Games display directly below it. Within these spaces, oral history extracts are interwoven with audio snippets of music, old radio

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51 Rod's Room was created by the artist Roderick Sauls, who grew up in District Six. Like *Nomvuyo's Room* on the ground floor of the Museum, it explores the theme of the interior, private spaces of those who lived in District Six. A key feature of the room is the protrusion of fragments of everyday objects in the plastered walls of the room. See *A Guide to the District Six Museum and the Digging Deeper exhibition*.

52 The wetting of the mural wall took place on 16 March 2006. It is the most recent addition to the *Digging Deeper* installation. The wall corresponds with the audio extracts from Museum's oral history and sound collection, as well as its photographic collection. As Delport motivates the mural is the result of consultation with the overall Museum collection, but interviewee and ex-resident voices drive the meanings behind the mural. The title itself is that of a message written by an ex-resident on the name-cloth in the early years of the Museum. It echoes the process of Delport's *Res Clamant* mural (on the wall of the Holy Cross Catholic Church in District Six), with its emphasis on voices and narrative in the shaping of the content of the mural. See Commemorative leaflet, *Dedication of Fresco Wall*, 'No Matter Where We are, We are Here', 21 March 2006 and P. Delport, 'Res Clamant' *The Earth Cries Out: Background and Pictorial Guide to the Holy Cross Mural* (Cape Town: District Six Museum Foundation, 1991).

programmes, audio extracts of oral history interviews as well as ambient sounds of the District. The result is a soundscape meant to evoke memories of District Six, and at the same time to ‘integrate the testimony of voices with the interior spaces’.<sup>53</sup> However, throughout *Digging Deeper* oral histories primarily take the form of written extracts and are in English. Some interviews retain the original Afrikaans phrasing and colloquialisms used by interviewees.<sup>54</sup> Viewers experience the oral history extracts through their sense of sight – and the forms in which the extracts are seen and made visible within the exhibition, impacts on the orality of the texts.

Extracts from oral histories have been displayed in *Digging Deeper* in three ways. The most common form is that of a **printed, extended caption** of extracts, which situates viewers in relation to the display and photographs depicted in them. These are found throughout the exhibition. These extended captions provide a first person narrative for the story being told in the display. Secondly, **enlarged extracts/quotes** are transferred onto perspex sections, and mounted onto panels e.g. the Demolition and Resistance panels. The *transparent*, perspex material onto which extracts are printed reinforce the role of oral histories as primary source through which history is seen and verified (literally and figuratively), but being displayed in a larger format, and separately onto the panels, emphasises an ‘apartness’ in the way it is read by the viewer. Thirdly, oral history extracts are displayed through a **lettering transfer process**, directly onto the display, where they are made to appear as seamless interventions into the display.

There are other instances where oral extracts form part of the exhibitionary elements of *Digging Deeper*. These include the street map and memory cloth (also known as the name-cloth). These two elements, in relation to the rest of the *Digging Deeper* exhibition represent an earlier approach to the collection of oral histories which was prevalent during the *Streets* exhibition in 1994, and which was driven by the need for research and the need to represent this research in aesthetic forms. In this period however, the piecemeal collection of ex-resident names, street addresses, and related memories (in the form of an anecdote or quote on the map or the name-cloth), while systematic in its intention, nevertheless did not attain the same level of systematic collection that occurred for *Digging Deeper*.

With the opening of *Digging Deeper* in 2000, the continued presence of the name-cloth and the street map reflected an iconic status that was being accorded to these exhibitionary elements. Devoid of the original *performative* context in which the recollection was uttered, ex-residents’ vocalisations of their memories were inscribed in coloured ink onto the floor map and in coloured thread onto the memory-cloth. This transformation of the *oral* act of remembrance into a image/sign speaks to a dilemma which has arisen in the way oral histories are displayed and ‘frozen’ within a curatorial framework, and therefore unable to signal the original performative context to the viewer. Notably, the curator’s efforts to provide

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53 J. Thorne, ‘The choreography of display: Experiential exhibitions in the context of Museum practice and theory’, (MPhil diss., University of Cape Town, 2003), 113.

54 See Amina Gool extract (interview 1999), AT093dEC, District Six Museum sound archive.

images and texts that act as catalysts for personal interpretations and processes of history-making reflected an attempt to move away from the danger of ‘iconographic fixedness’. The oral history extracts in *Digging Deeper*, in becoming what Delport notes as the ‘word image’<sup>55</sup> thus reveals a research and curatorial practice that sought to provide entry points for making meaning. Oral history extracts were therefore modified, fragmented and curated into a broader, cohesive exhibitionary framework that foregrounded visual fragments of oral histories as whole representations of history.

Oral history extracts in their fragmentary form (as extracts) took on a representative, visual importance within *Digging Deeper*. This visuality was ocularcentric, overloading the visitor’s sight with many, dense texts which affirmed a history which was written and documented. The density of texts took the form of both oral history extracts and exhibition text. It is the extensive amount of text on view that greets a visitor to the District Six Museum.<sup>56</sup> A result of the process of ‘digging deeper’ into the history of District Six,<sup>57</sup> this visual and textual presence allows visitors the comfort of identifying with a documentary form of history. On closer inspection however, it is the type of text – that of the oral history extract – which reveals a process through which the voice of the ex-resident has been visually mediated and circumscribed, at the same time revealing how the reliance on documentary evidence has been circumvented. The process that marks the transition from the oral history interview, to the transcript and eventually to the oral history extract used in the exhibition is important. Coupled with the visual and audio deployment of oral histories within *Digging Deeper*, it reveals a concern with layering voices, and the building of a composite, yet fixed narrative around District Six.

### Modifying oral history transcripts

Much consideration has been given to the process that accompanies the transformation of oral recordings into textual form namely the process of transcribing oral interviews and the implications for the making of meaning by those who speak and those who transcribe. This acute sense of the ‘peril of the transcript’<sup>58</sup> is a key factor when examining transcripts of oral histories and how they’ve been employed in *Digging Deeper* and the discussion below is tempered by the incongruencies apparent in writing about oral histories and their use in textual form. For those who have devoted a large amount of research and discussion to this form of analysis, it is in making their referencing systems or language conventions explicit as they traverse the terrain of oral texts that the subjective presence of the researcher is always known and felt – albeit in ways that seek to reveal a standardised objec-

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<sup>55</sup> See P. Delport, ‘Digging Deeper in District Six: Features and interfaces in a curatorial landscape’ in Rassool and Prosalendis, eds., *Recalling Community*, 158.

<sup>56</sup> In particular, the Timeline: *Resistance* panel.

<sup>57</sup> The research project that underpinned *Digging Deeper* was funded by the National Research Foundation.

<sup>58</sup> See R. Samuel, ‘Perils of the transcript’, in R. Perks and P. Thomson, *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), 389–392.

tivity.<sup>59</sup> The analysis of oral histories used in *Digging Deeper* reveals a concern with engaging oral material with this standardised objectivity and the challenges to this brought about by visual, aural and aesthetic emphasis on the oral source. The nature of an analysis of the way oral histories have been deployed in *Digging Deeper* therefore builds on, yet at the same time relies on moving beyond textual and literary readings of oral extracts merely as text. It is further useful to locate oral history interviews in relation to oral historical narratives and oral traditions – and how, within *Digging Deeper*, the influence of a visual and aesthetic form marks a transition from life history recordings about District Six towards broader oral historical narratives about the area (and the Museum).

The method used here to distil oral history extracts from the exhibition largely centered on:

- i. identifying the oral history extracts used in *Digging Deeper* and locating their form in the display;
- ii. listening to the oral history recording and reading the transcript of the interviews;
- iii. locating the extract used in the display in the interview transcript;
- iv. identifying those elements that have been modified; and
- v. comparing the audio, transcribed and visual representations of texts in relation to these modifications.

For the purpose of highlighting other forms of transcription that pay close attention to the human voice, oral history extracts are accompanied by an ethnopoetic transcription made from the oral history recording. Where examples of modified oral history extracts are used, three textual versions of the oral source appear: the oral history extract as found in the display, the extract as it appears in the oral history transcript and a new ethnopoetic transcription of the extract.<sup>60</sup> In discussing the ways that oral history extracts have been modified in the exhibition-making process, the purpose of the discussion is not only to identify how the Museum recognises and uses the oral source and its transcript, but also to consider the implications of using oral history extracts as a visual form in the making of meaning.

An examination of the oral history extracts used in the *Digging Deeper* exhibition reveals three types of modification to the original transcript. These are:

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59 See I. Hofmeyr, 'Preface and a note on the text' in 'We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told': *Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press), xii.

60 An ethnopoetic approach to transcription involves the use of lines, not sentences as the basic units of speech. They allow the transcriber to acknowledge pauses and interruptions i.e. the 'grammar of the human voice' as the interviewee speaks. It mediates in part the subjective placing of grammatical conventions (commas, full stops etc.) onto the voice of the interviewee, by the transcriber. See D. Hymes 'Ethnopoetics and sociolinguistics: Three stories by African-American children', in *Ethnography, Linguistics, Narrative Inequality: Toward an Understanding of Voice* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996), 165-167. It should be noted that this method was discovered in the course of my employ at the Museum, which currently transcribes oral history interviews in this manner.

1. Omission through the editing process
2. Changes to grammar
3. Rearrangement of extracts to form narratives

Below are examples of the above modifications.

## 1. Omission through the editing process.

The following is an extract from an oral history interview with Amina G (1999). It is found on the placed on perspex sections and then onto the larger display panel.

### 1.1. Original caption used in *Digging Deeper*:

So there on the picnic is Ray Alexander, Eli Weinberg, Gomas, Leepile and another two or three people. Now they're all discussing. Now what are they discussing? The Republic. Die meer is ek 'n esel, die meer weet ek nie wat gaan aan nie. I mean, let's now just face facts. Hulle se vir my 'and comrade, what do you think.' So comrade replies, 'it's so lovely to be out in the open air.

Amina Gool, interview 1999

### 1.2. Extract from interview transcription. Text omitted is indicated in bold:

“So there on the picnic is Ray Alexander, Eli Weinberg, **Dora Alexander**, Gomas, Leepile and another two or three people. **Don't ask me whom hey. Kagan, I think. He became the Distributed Worker's Union and he was a bus driver. He became secretary to the Distributor's Worker's Union. Right.** Now they're all discussing. Now what are they discussing? The Republic. Die meer is ek 'n esel, die meer weet ek nie wat gaan aan nie. I mean, let's now just face facts. Hulle se vir my 'and comrade, what do you think.' So comrade replies, 'it's so lovely to be out in the open air.' **But just sitting there and eating dry bread and sprats. You know sprats is in a tin which they open. And that was going to be our lunch. And I'm using picnics where we have pots and food – pots and food and cake and bread. And here they come near the sea... Here they only want to talk. And talking something that I don't know. I became completely disgruntled and moerin and everything that you shouldn't be when you come out. And Hans is happy. He's talking and they're all talking. And before I know Hans has got blisters on his face. And he's moaning and groaning and saying we must go home. And we leave everybody – he's haeliophile, get blisters, he burns.” (...)**

Amina Gool, interview 1999

ATO 93dEC, District Six Museum Sound Archive

### 1.3 Ethnopoetic transcription

...so there on the picnic is Ray Alexander  
Eli Weinberg  
Dora Alexander  
Gomas  
Leepile  
and another two or three people  
don't ask me whom hey  
Kagan I think  
he became uh  
the Distributive Worker's Union he was a bus driver  
he became secretary to the  
Distributor's Workers Union  
right  
now they're all discussing  
and what are they discussing the black republic  
die meer  
ek  
is  
esel  
die meer weet ek nie wat gaan aan nie I mean let's now just face facts  
hulle se vir my en comrade what do you think?  
so comrade replied  
it's so lovely to be out  
in the open and the fresh air  
but just sitting here and eating rye dry rye bread and sprats you know  
sprats is in a tin  
which they open  
and that was going to be our lunch  
and I'm used to picnics where uhm  
where we have pots of food  
pots of food and cake  
and bread  
and swimming  
and here they come near the sea  
and here they only want to talk  
and they're talking something that I don't know  
and I became completely disgruntled  
and moerin  
and everything you shouldn't be when you come out  
and Hans is happy  
he's talking  
they're all talking  
and before I know Hans has got blisters

blisters on his face  
and he's moaning  
and groaning  
and saying we must go home  
and we leave everybody  
he's a haeliophile  
he gets blisters he burns  
(...)

Amina Gool, interview 1999

## 2. Modifications to grammar (tense, plural, colloquialisms)

The following caption is taken from an interview with Menisha Collins (2000). In terms of grammar, not content, the caption has been significantly modified. The interviewee's manner of talking has been adapted into point form and indicated as such in the exhibition. In listening to the original recording however, it is the caption used in the exhibition, and not the first interview transcript that reflects the interviewee's staccato like listing of the activities in the Bloemhof Flats Community Centre.

### 2.1. Original caption used in *Digging Deeper*:

The Bloemhof Community Centre had the following activities:

- Table tennis and badminton were run by Johnny Schaffers
- Ballet was run by Pauline, Gwen Michaels, Elise Barlow, Mr. Herbert, Mrs. February, Cecil Jacobs and David Poole.
- The nursery school was run by Mrs. Feder, Sister Berry and Mrs. Kolbe.
- Gymnastic was run by Mr. Stoffels, Mr. Floris, Mr. Johannes, Moira, Maureen Ford, Sylvia, Lorraine and Mr. Claasen.
- The cooking classes were run by Mrs. Solomons
- Sewing classes were run by Auntie Maudie and Mrs. Swartz. Auntie Maudie used to make all the outfits for our fashion shows, modeling, costumes for our fancy dress and things like that.
- Weightlifting was run by Alex Thomas. They used to call him Boere.
- The library was run by Willy Mullins and Mrs. Mussen.
- Boxing was run by Percy Wilkinson and Mrs. Solomons.
- First aid classes

Most people who were involved in the Bloemhof Community Centre are doing community work today. I am involved in community work through the District Six (Museum). People are doing community work in Tafelsig, Mitchell's Plain, Heideveld and Manenberg. So you can say Bloemhof Flats people are involved.

Menisha Collins, adapted from interview, 2000

## 2.2. Extract from interview transcript. Text omitted is indicated in bold:

That was we had table tennis. That was run by Johnny Schaffers. Badminton, Johnny Schaffers. We had ballet. People involved was in charge of the ballet was Pauline, Gwen Michaels, Elise Barlow, Mr. Herbert, Mrs. February, Cecil Jacobs and David Poole. We had a nursery school. Mrs. Feder was assisting. Sister Berry was our principal and Mrs. Kolbe was also assistant. We had gymnastics. It was girls and boys. It was run by Mr. Stoffels, Mr. Floris, Mr. Johannes, Moira, Maureen Ford, Sylvia and Lorraine and Mr. Claasen. The cooking classes was Mrs. Solomons. Sewing was Auntie Maudie and Mrs. Swartz. Auntie Maudie used to make all the outfits for our fashion shows, modeling, costumes for our fancy dress and things like that. Our weightlifting, Alex Thomas. They used to call him Boere. Our library was run by Willy Mullins and Mr. Mussen. Boxing was run by Percy Wilkinson and Mr. Solomons. We had First Aid. The Red Cross was below the caretaker's house. Mrs. Botha and Mrs. Carelse. I must actually get the age of Mrs. Swartz. She is still alive and very and she is very, very old. At our housing office, Mrs. Daniels, we had kerrim, Mr. Johannes and we had scouts community, second Cape Town. Vera Taylor and Lionel Harding. Today Lionel Harding is still in the community. He is youth leader at St. Paul's church. Most of our people that was involved in the Bloemhof Community Centre are doing community work today. So I am involved in community work with the District Six. People that danced with me in the community centre are doing community gymnastics and ballet in Tafelsig, Mitchell's Plain, Heideveld, Manenberg, all over. So you can say Bloemhof Flats people are involved. We always found something to do. **We could relate to our children today if the communities have community centres, the example would be the Bloemhof Flats if the communities was run in our communities today, and more children could be involved because what we had in District Six was very much treasured and we can have a history, and that is children history, if we could call back the past. And our streets along Bloemhof Flats.**

Menisha Collins, interview, 2000,  
AT 295EC, District Six Museum Sound Archive.

## 2.3. Ethnopoetic transcription:

...that was we had  
uhm  
table tennis  
that was run by Johnny Schaffers  
badminton  
Johnny Schaffers  
we had ballet

people involved  
was in charge of the ballet was Pauline  
Gwen Michaels  
Elise  
Barlow  
Mrs. Herbert  
Mrs. February  
Cecil Jacobs and David Poole.  
we had a nursery school  
Mrs. Feder was assisting  
Sister Berry was our principal  
and Mrs. Kolbe was also an assistant  
we had gymnastics  
it was girls and boys  
it was run by Mr. Stoffels  
Mr. Floris  
Mr. Johannes  
Moira  
Maureen Ford  
Sylvia  
and Lorraine  
and Mr. Claasen  
those were the people in charge of us  
the cooking classes was Mrs. Solomons  
sewing was Auntie Maudie and Mrs. Swartz  
Auntie Maudie used to make all the  
outfits for our  
fashion shows modeling costumes for our  
uhm fancy dress and  
things like that  
our weightlifting  
Alex Thomas they used to call him Boere  
our library was run by Willy Mullins and Mr. Mussen  
boxing was run by Percy Wilkinson and Mr. Solomons  
we had First Aid the Red Cross was below Mr.  
the caretaker's  
house  
Mrs. Botha and Mrs. Carelse  
I must actually get the age of Mrs. Swartz she's still alive and she's  
very very old  
at our housing office Mrs. Daniels we had kerrim  
Mr. Johannes  
and we had scouts  
in the community  
second Cape Town  
was run...

Vera Taylor and Lionel Harding  
today Lionel Harding is still in the community he is the youth leader at  
St. Paul's church  
and uh  
most of our people  
that was involved in the Bloemhof Community Centre are doing com-  
munity work today  
so I am involved in community work with the District Six  
people that danced with me in the community centre are doing commu-  
nity gymnastics and ballet  
in  
Tafelsig  
Mitchell's Plain  
Heideveld  
Manenberg  
all over  
so you can say Bloemhof Flats people  
are  
involved  
we always found something to do  
we could relate to our children  
today  
if the communities have community centres  
example would be the Bloemhof Flats  
if the communities was run in our communities today  
and more children could be involved  
because  
what we had in District Six  
was  
very  
much treasured and we can have a history  
and that is children history  
if we could call back the past  
and uh  
our streets  
our streets around Bloemhof Flats  
(...)

Menisha Collins, interview, 2000

### **3. Rearrangement of extracts to form narratives**

The extract below is from an interview conducted with Molly Herman (1999) and is found on the *Timeline: Formation* panel. The extract is introduced as a biographical narrative of the interviewee. It was knitted together from three separate responses to three distinct questions asked during the interview process. These three separate responses are seen here as three extracts, and for this purpose num-

bered (i) – (iii) below. Extract (ii) occurs as the first response in the original transcript, extract (i) as the second response and extract (iii) as the third response in the original transcript.<sup>61</sup>

### 3.1. Original caption used in *Digging Deeper*

**Molly Herman** lived with her family at **Eaton Place** in District Six, she recalls:

“Yes, they (my mother and father) came from Russia (and) he was a corporal in the Russian Army. I don’t really know if he wasn’t happy there. But things got difficult. Times were difficult. He decided to emigrate. He had a cousin...by the same name Bailen and he got her to come out with him to South Africa and he married her. And she never changed her name... (i)

Yes, my parents owned two bioscopes. And one was called the Union and that was run by my mother who was a very active woman. As you can see she, had a family of 10... And my father had another bioscope which was called the Empire and he charges 6 or 7 pence. But my mother said that she felt that the children didn’t get so much spending money and she’d like them to enjoy the shows as well. So she charged one penny per person. (ii)

Although their business was still in District Six ... my father decided to turn the Empire bioscope into a shop that was linked to Katz Furnishers. (iii)

Molly Herman, interview, 1999

### 3.2. Extracts from interview transcripts. Extracts used in the caption is indicated in bold:

*Extract (i) occurs on page 3 of the original transcript:*

I Beautiful. Can I ask you about where our dad and your mom are from?

M **Yes they came from – I’m not certain if it was ... or Russia but he was a corporal in the Russian army. And if he wasn’t happy there, I don’t really know. But things got difficult. Times were difficult. He decided to emigrate. And then he got a cousin of his by the same name and...Bailen and he got her to come out with him to South Africa and he married her. And that ... she never changed her name**

Molly Herman, interview, 1999,  
CD113EC, District Six Museum Sound Archive

61 Also see Lionel Davis extract, interview 1999, *Demolition* panel

*Extract (ii) occurs on page 1 of the original transcript:*

I I guess your popularity or your relationship was that your mom or your parents owned a bioscope

M **Yes my parents owned two bioscopes. And one was called the Union and that was run by my mother who was a very active woman. As you can see she had a family of 10. So she was very active – in between wars. And my father had another bioscope which was called the Empire and he charged 6 or 7 cents a week. But my mother said that she felt the children didn't get so much spending money and she'd like them to enjoy the shows as well. So she charged one penny per session. And the place was absolutely teeming with people. I think she had to turn some of the children away which was very sad for her because she loved children**

Molly Herman, interview, 1999

CD113EC, District Six Museum Sound Archive

*Extract (iii) occurs on page 4 of the original transcript*

I Very powerful. You have memories of District Six after you left

M Only what my family were able to tell me because I was only a year old when the family decided to move out of the district. **Although their business was still in District Six, their bioscopes. When the talkie bioscopes were in vogue, my father decided to turn one of the bioscopes that was the Empire into a shop. And it was linked to Katz Furnishers.** And by strange co-incidence there was a exhibition at the – is it the Muir Street – the one in the National Gallery, that's right. I'm thinking of a National Gallery. Not a museum. There was a combined effort of National Gallery with the District Six Museum. And so, picked people who had pictures taken of District Six were able to display those pictures in the Museum. Not Museum, art gallery

Molly Herman, interview, 1999

CD113EC, District Six Museum Sound Archive

#### 4.3. Ethnopoetic transcriptions

*Extract (i)*

...yes they came from

uhm

I'm not certain if it was Tomsk or

Russia

but he was a corporal in the Russian army

and

uh

if he wasn't happy there I don't really know

but  
uh  
things got  
into  
difficult  
times were difficult he decided to emigrate  
and then  
he got  
a cousin of his  
by the same name  
Anastasia Bailen  
and he got her to come out with him  
to South Africa and he married her  
and that's where the ten children come from  
she never changed her name

Molly Herman, interview, 1999

*Extract (ii)*

...my parents owned two bioscopes  
the one was called the Union  
and uh  
that was  
run by my mother who was a very active woman  
as you can see she had a family of ten  
so she was very active  
in between worlds  
uhm  
and  
my father had another bioscope  
which was called  
the Empire  
and he charged  
six or seven cents a week  
but my mother said  
that she felt the children didn't get so much spending money  
and she'd like them to enjoy the shows as well  
so she charged  
one penny  
per session  
and the place was absolutely teeming with people  
I think she had to turn some of the children away  
which was very sad for her  
because she loved children

Molly Herman, interview, 1999

*Extract (iii)*

...uh  
only what  
uh  
my family were able to tell me  
because I  
I was only a year old  
when  
the family decided to  
move out of the District  
although their business was still in District Six  
their bioscopes  
uh  
when the uh talkie  
bioscopes  
were in vogue  
uh  
my father decided to turn one of the bioscopes that was the Empire  
into a shop  
and it was linked to Katz  
K-a-t-z  
furnishers  
and by strange coincidence there was a exhibition at the  
uh  
not is it a museum  
one in the in the in the uhm  
Nat  
National Gallery  
I'm thinking of the National Gallery  
it's not a museum  
uhm  
there was a combined effort of National Gallery  
with the District Six Museum  
and so  
picked people who had  
pictures  
uh  
taken of District Six  
were able to display those pictures in the Museum  
not the Museum art gallery  
the art gallery

Molly Herman, interview, 1999

From the changes made to the above transcripts, it becomes clear that a key question to consider is why - when the pursuit is to represent a dispossessed com-

munity through what appears as *their* voices (the voices of the everyday) - are these voices then edited, knitted together and translated? Is this done to accommodate the viewer/visitor by curators who seek balance between design and content? And what then is the relationship between the sound of the oral source and the oral source in written form? In *Digging Deeper*, there is an important interplay between sound and the spaces they inhabit, but the written text – whether exhibition text or oral history extracts – remains a key visual element throughout the exhibition. How text is then modified to suit a visual, design context should then be considered.

In relation to *Digging Deeper*, oral history transcripts may be seen to have been modified for the following purposes:

1. *To have them make narrative sense* e.g. in the case of the Molly Herman extract where fragments of oral history extracts have been rearranged and knit together to provide a biography of the interviewee that is contained and ‘whole’.
2. *To make reading easier* - in a conventional sense, but also in terms of a visual reading (framework) for the particular display/installation concerned. This can be seen with the Amina Gool extract, which is transferred on perspex and then placed onto the *Resistance* panel.
3. *To give authority* to the exhibition. This is denoted by the presence of the extract alone, which affirms the role of the Museum as a community Museum ‘for’ and ‘of’ the everyday person.

A key question that emerges from the above extracts is the extent to which an aesthetic or narrative process drove the practice of modifying oral history extracts in the exhibition. To a large extent, in any exhibition, the need for a coherent narrative that illustrates the visual content of an exhibition, and vice versa is a norm. In the case of *Digging Deeper*, with its emphasis on defining the exhibition (and the Museum space) as one driven by ex-resident interventions and voices – the complicity between visual and narrative interventions and the modification of ex-resident transcripts raises questions about the social history project in South Africa and the ways in which the voices of those marginalised in an oppressive society are *made to speak* and are represented in the public domain.

The phenomenon of how the marginalisation of these groups became entrenched by the methodologies of oral history practice is noted in a critique by Minkley and Rassool of oral history practice in the Western Cape which was produced in the early 1990s.<sup>62</sup> In this critique Minkley and Rassool identify the hegemonic role of oral history in the practices of social history and a people’s history, which resulted in a history from below which restricted those designated as ‘below’ from any agency in the way their narratives were used within the historical discipline

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62 G. Minkley and C. Rassool, ‘Oral history in South Africa: Some critical questions’, paper delivered at the Africa Seminar, Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town, 1995, 1-14.

and consequently within a broader public sphere. While Minkley and Rassool addressed how people were ‘made to speak’, another critique which is useful for looking at *Digging Deeper* is that presented by Minkley, Rassool and Witz, during the same period, and which speaks to how the category of *hidden voices* in itself was a construction. Through the process of identifying and naming categories as hidden and marginalised, Minkley *et al* argue that the ‘construction of subject positions as ready made unities’ within social and popular history became a key feature of its practice. The complicity of an oral history methodology in this construction lay in its perceived value in uncovering and restoring silent voices to history.<sup>63</sup>

Within *Digging Deeper* categories of marginalisation are present in the category of the ‘ex-resident’ itself. As the source of stories about District Six, and as the victim of the forced removal, the ex-resident is perceived as someone who has been denied the opportunity to voice his/her trauma and experiences of the removal. A key way in which this trauma – the loss of the self/identity- is mediated is through the floor map and the memory-cloth, as well as other opportunities for the ex-residents to inscribe their names.<sup>64</sup> Ex-residents are encouraged to relate stories as they inscribe themselves back into the District and back into history, but it is not the *act* of inscription which defines the ex-resident as the ‘hidden voice’ or the marginalised ‘other’. Rather, it is the Museum that mediates and facilitates the process of inscription (and the making of meaning), and which raises questions as to who may reveal their voice, who should be considered ‘marginalised’ and how this revelation may be ‘captured’ and mediated to a broader public. While perhaps not using the conventional tool of the academic article, the aesthetic framework of the Museum nevertheless provides a lens through which former residents of District Six are understood as part of the seamless category of the ‘ex-resident’. Notably, the seamlessness of this category is defined by the multiple voices *allowed* to come to the fore at different points of the exhibition. This multiplicity is evident in the different opinions expressed by ex-residents on their experience of District Six, but also in how extracts from individual interviewees are used to show the nuances of their narratives.

In the following extracts from an interview with Amina Gool, the nuances of her individual narrative can be seen on display on the Resistance and Demolition panel:

### **RESISTANCE PANEL**

So there on the picnic is Ray Alexander, Eli Weinberg,...Gomas, Leepile and another two or three people...Now they’re all discussing. Now what are they discussing? The Republic. Die meer is ek ‘n esel, die meer weet ek nie wat gaan aan nie. I mean, let’s now just face facts. Hulle se vir my ‘and comrade, what do you think.’ So comrade replies, ‘it’s so lovely to be out in the open air.’

Amina Gool, interview 1999

63 G. Minkley, C. Rassool and L. Witz, ‘Thresholds, gateways and spectacles: Journeying through South African hidden pasts and histories in the last decade of the twentieth century’, paper delivered at the ‘Future of the Past’ conference, University of the Western Cape, 1996, 3-4.

64 See the ‘Curator’s note’, *A Guide to the District Six Museum and Digging Deeper Exhibition*.

## DEMOLITION PANEL

I was apolitical. I wasn't the political person. But one thing I know there was something wrong in District Six, the way we lived at home, the way people lived in District Six. There was poverty there. Children died like flies in summer and in winter it was bronchial pneumonia because we write out the death certificates... That's winter and in summer it's gastro enteritis ... But...on our death certificates my brother would say 'Marasmus' which is almost malnutrition...First it was gastro enteritis, then it was Marasmus. You know the combination of the two was a quick killer and there was none of this giving the children the drip, no Red Cross hospital at that time. And a child dying...It has been murdered by starvation.

Amina Gool, interviewed in 1999

In both extracts Amina Gool is *seen* to be fashioning an almost apolitical role for herself in resistance politics. Yet the placement of these extracts renders her meanings as politicised for two contexts. In a context not of her own making, the placement of the extract on the Resistance panel, illustrates the agency of the *Museum* in acknowledging that 'resistance' amongst District Sixers to apartheid was not a given, and in displaying that sentiment, makes a political statement about a District Six narrative that does not exclude this group. In the second extract, which was placed on the *Demolition* panel – the voice of Amina Gool that is seen *is* political, albeit around the underlying connection between the effects of racism and the prevalence of poverty in District Six. The presence of both extracts illustrate the Museum's 'apparent access to the consciousness of experience'<sup>65</sup> and the representation of this consciousness as history, no longer 'from below', but out in the open.

The features of a people's or popular history project in the Western Cape become a key point through which to interrogate the use of voices present in the Museum's displays. As noted by Minkley and Rassool, one of the features of popular history was the narrative link made between the object of 'the community' as metaphor for 'everyday experience'.<sup>66</sup> Themes around everyday, community life in District Six recur throughout the upper gallery of *Digging Deeper*, while broader historical narratives of the area are situated on the ground floor and are underpinned by a timeline that runs through the *Formation*, *Resistance* and *Restitution* panels.<sup>67</sup>

On the *Resistance* panel it is the biographical presence of four District Six residents, Lionel Davis, Amina Gool, Phyllis Fuku and Vincent Kolbe, which dominates the display. As noted in the exhibition guide, '[o]ral histories provide

65 Minkley *et al*, 'Thresholds and gateways', 4.

66 Minkley and Rassool, 'Oral history in South Africa', 3.

67 Significantly, as noted by Jos Thorne, one of the conceptual frameworks for the exhibition was 'life histories'. The *Formation*, *Resistance* and *Restitution* panels were divided along three bands: firstly, historical maps and aerial photographs were used as a backdrop; secondly, the timeline ran along the panels; and lastly, a middle band displayed photographs and texts relating to the timeline. See Thorne, 'The Choreography of Display', 96-7. This point is important when thinking through how oral history extracts do not act 'alone' in the exhibition space, but are anchored curatorially and aesthetically to visual and documentary forms in the exhibition space.

the basis of the memory work, exhibitions and research of the Museum' and the four life histories 'reflect a facet of this process'.<sup>68</sup> The four personal narratives are clustered on the *Resistance* panel as a metaphorical anchor<sup>69</sup> through which the broader 'political, historical and social developments relating to District Six' can be told.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the *form* the oral history extracts take - namely that of enlarged text printed onto perspex - ensures that the primacy of the oral history extract is asserted through its *visual* prominence in the display area.

The effect of placing extracts on perspex is twofold. As noted earlier, these extracts take on a life of their own, standing apart from the panels onto which they are mounted and enforcing their primacy in the exhibition. The function of an oral source in written form - in a particularly *transparent* form – reflects to a large degree the notion that the voices 'from below' are transparent, unambiguous and thus unquestioningly representative of suppressed histories.

However, as noted by Minkley and Rassool, this notion ignores the function of 'words, and their framing into oral historical narratives, and language and discourse [which] are not transparent'.<sup>71</sup> Thus the performative context in which memory is recalled and the subjective (and even collective) use of words to encode meaning may be elided by the desire to tell a 'history from below' and to represent the 'other'.

On another level, the focus on the four life histories highlights Minkley and Rassool's critique of oral histories as contextual devices for historical narratives. Through their prominence in the exhibition, a core cluster of names, in essence, became the 'voices' of the Museum and the representative faces of District Six, and did not provide a platform where a layer of voices could become representative of the broader community. 'History from below' was largely told through the personal narratives of a few. Minkley and Rasool's argument in respect to social history - that the voices of nationalist leaders tended to become representative of a broader political movement, is reflected in the prominence accorded to the stories of a few ex-residents as representative of a District Six history told by the Museum.

Another critique raised by Rassool and Minkley and the uses of oral history within social history relates to an assumption that relies on the notion that

the historical method of collecting individual life histories through oral histories [and] ... their assembled quantity, matching and sequencing as well as their individual 'representivity' will constitute and correlate collective memory.<sup>72</sup>

68 A Guide to the District Six Museum and the Digging Deeper exhibition.

69 This point came to light in a discussion with Tina Smith, one of the curators of *Digging Deeper*.

70 A Guide to the District Six Museum and the Digging Deeper Exhibition.

71 Minkley and Rassool, 'Oral history in South Africa', 8

72 Minkley and Rassool, 'Oral history in South Africa', 8.

The notion of representivity and collective memory as it relates to *Digging Deeper* and District Six history in general is significant for the discussion of how oral histories in their exhibitionary form embody a collective memory and a form of oral historical tradition.

Minkley and Rassool's argument relates to the insertion of oral histories into a historiography that sees it as 'supplementary evidence' - where the author of the modified oral history is not visible, but constructs a narrative and a chronology around a set of quantified oral history interviews, and who devises 'lifelike and detailed descriptions of "how it really was"'.<sup>73</sup> Consequently, however, oral interviews are framed as sources of primary evidence for the telling of a District Six history - validated by their acceptance by a viewing public located outside of the academy. Following these characteristics, *Digging Deeper*, particularly in how life histories are constructed around the different social spaces of District Six in the gallery space, begins to emulate Minkley and Rassool's critique. Thus, oral history extracts of working life in District Six found in the Places of Work alcove are detailed and lifelike, not only in terms of their content, but also in how the interviewee is referenced. In the Places of Work alcove the following extract is found:

I used to (clean) with my hand and a mop. I used to take a hard broom and then I put a cloth over (it) and I would rub and rub. And I had a beautiful shiny place.

Cornelia Moses (adapted from interview, 1999)

Cornelia Moses worked for the City Council as a toilet cleaner. She worked at the Farmer's Market toilets in Cape Town and Salt River as well as at the public toilets on the Parade and Kloofnek.

Another aspect of how oral history extracts are used in the exhibition is the non-*translation* of colloquial phrases that appear in the oral history interview. The majority of interviews conducted for the exhibition were conducted in English, and consequently, instances of translation (from isiXhosa to English or Afrikaans to English) are minimal. Furthermore both exhibition text and oral history extracts on display are in English. The function of colloquial, mostly Afrikaans, phrases that were allowed to remain in the oral history extract on display raises a number of questions. Do they remain as a means of illustrating a District Six dialect, or do they reinforce the presence of the 'everyday person' who lived in District Six? In many of the extracts, these phrases are idiomatic in nature e.g. with Amina Gool (interview 1999): '*Die meer is ek 'n esel...*' [The more I am a donkey/ass] or as found in an extract from an interview with Joe Schaffers (interview 1999): '*Die man van die Group was hier*' [The man from the Group (Areas) was here]. In the latter case, the experience of receiving a notice of removal is denoted through signification in the text, and becomes idiomatic for the experience of the

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<sup>73</sup> Minkley and Rassool, 'Oral history in South Africa', 8.

removals. Other instances of non-translation appear in the use of words such as *slootjie*, *kennetjie*, *drie blikkies*, *bok-bok* (the names of games played in District Six).<sup>74</sup>

In historiography, the dominance of the English language in the translation of oral texts raises questions around how historians write history in monolingual ways.<sup>75</sup> As noted by Marijke du Toit, one of the dangers of the translation process lies in how the subjects of interviews are translated into a discourse which is English-centred and which therefore elides the role of other languages in the making of meaning.<sup>76</sup> As she notes, the danger of not problematising how oral texts are translated into English includes, amongst others, the silencing of the agency of the translator who ‘speaks’ the interviewees ‘into English’, the concealment of the power relations between the researcher and the translator in relation to how meaning is both produced and disseminated, as well disregard for the agency of the interviewee as framed in the language he or she speaks.<sup>77</sup> While these dangers govern the translation of oral texts *into* English, the danger of including phrases in the language of the interviewee in a historical analysis lies in how it enacts a ‘process of authentication performed by shards of indigenous language’.<sup>78</sup>

While the scattered prevalence of colloquial phrases throughout *Digging Deeper* may not warrant a deeper analysis of the role of translation in the exhibition, their presence raises tentative questions around the site of (non) translation as a site of power relations between the interviewee and the interviewer, and how the interviewee is presented to an audience. The site/act of non-translation in the Museum highlights two aspects of how oral histories are used in its space. Firstly, it balances the Museum’s identification with an audience of District Six ex-residents - who are seen to understand the colloquialisms found in the exhibition, and who have been participants in its making. Secondly, the colloquial phrases authenticate the voices that are being read in the display. They create a sense that the interviewee is a ‘real’ person, someone the visitor can identify with.

As noted by Thorne, one of the curatorial intentions for *Digging Deeper* was that the aesthetic framework of the Museum should be ‘rooted in oral testimony and expression’.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, the routes one could follow as a visitor, were not fixed, but encouraged ‘multiple readings’ which could enable the viewer to be ‘guided by their own interests’.<sup>80</sup> The notion of multiple readings is important for a discussion of the way orality is sourced into the Museum and its exhibition space. As Hofmeyr reveals about the oral historical narratives around the siege of Makapansgat, oral sources around the siege are not wholly oral. They are often the results of interactions with literate worlds and literate accounts of the event i.e. written accounts by newspapers, travelers and popular historians.<sup>81</sup> Along similar lines,

74 Joe Schaffers, Bloemhof Reunion, interview 2000, Bloemhof Flats alcove.

75 M. du Toit, ‘Telling tales: The politics of language in oral historiography’, *South African Historical Journal*, 42, May 2000, 98.

76 du Toit, ‘Telling tales’, 93.

77 du Toit, ‘Telling tales’, 93, 95, 96.

78 du Toit, ‘Telling tales’, 96.

79 Thorne, ‘The Choreography of Display’, 74.

80 Thorne, ‘The Choreography of Display’, 81.

81 Hofmeyr, ‘We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told’, 143-144, 150. The popular historian in this case was Gustav Preller who also gathered life histories and oral testimonies around the siege.

within the exhibition space itself, a reading of oral sources around District Six is tempered by the layering of a number of exhibition elements. In addition to being subject to processes of being transformed into written texts, oral sources are subject to a *reading* that relies on their spatial arrangement in relation to photographs and objects, as well as other texts. With the Bloemhof Flats alcove, oral history extracts are read in relation to a historian's account of housing in the District Six.<sup>82</sup> With the Public Washhouse display, archival records documenting how washer-women interacted with the City Council form part of the aesthetic framework of the display, and is to be read in relation to the extracts found on the washhouse as well as exhibition text. In the Hanover Street alcove, it is a written account by Vincent Kolbe from a Museum newsletter which can be read in relation to oral history extracts from interviews conducted with him.

The role of photographs in the Museum in the making of orality also cannot be discounted. In talking about the value of photographs in another exhibitions context Lidchi identifies the function of photographs as firstly, enhancing the presentation of the exhibition; secondly, acting as a substitute for the physical presence of objects; and thirdly, facilitating the work of representation by providing a 'real' context for what is being represented.<sup>83</sup> Oral history extracts in *Digging Deeper*, in the primacy they assume in the exhibition space reflect to a large degree the function of photographs in exhibitions. Thus they enhance the presentation of the exhibition in the form of their display as enlarged extracts transferred onto perspex. On a broader scale, their presence (whether in textual or audio form) also substitutes for the actual site and spaces of District Six through evocations stimulated by the extracts and the acts of inscription encouraged by the Museum. Lastly, through their use in clearly defined /themed display areas such as the upper floor alcoves, they facilitate a reading of the display that relates to its content but which also draws attention to the details of the display e.g. with the Barbershop/Hairdresser alcove, the visitor's eyes are drawn around the shape of the hairdresser's mirror by the placement of extracts along the outline of the mirror.

An important cue to take from Hofmeyr's work around oral historical narratives is whether the combined reading of the exhibitionary elements of *Digging Deeper* (oral history extracts, photographs, and other visual displays) can be understood as an oral historical tradition in itself. The creation and transmission of oral historical narratives, as shown by Hofmeyr, is dependent on a number of factors. Amongst these is the identification of core-cliché's, around which the telling of the oral narrative turns.<sup>84</sup> In exploring how oral historical traditions were affected by interactions brought about by encroaching settlement by Voortrekkers and later, the impingements of Group Areas and the homeland system, Hofmeyr notes how storytellers were able to bring together a number of techniques, ideas, themes and resources to ensure the transmission of the tradition, albeit in an altered

<sup>82</sup> The exhibition text for the Bloemhof Flats alcove is an adaptation from an article by Shamiel Jeppie on housing in District Six in the 1940s. See S. Jeppie, 'Modern housing for the District: the Canterbury and Bloemhof Flats' in Rassool and Prosalendis, eds., *Recalling Community*, 113-130.

<sup>83</sup> H. Lidchi, 'The poetics and politics', 177.

<sup>84</sup> Hofmeyr, 'We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told', 163.

form.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the ‘context of transmission’ was central to the telling of the oral tradition, and changes in these contexts often brought about the telling of a fragmented narrative.<sup>86</sup> An understanding of the District Six narrative as an oral historical tradition requires a deeper exploration of how and when ex-residents tell their stories, and how the themes, identified by the Museum and supported through the fragments extracted from oral history interviews - as well as the context it provides as a receptive space for these stories - echoes a practice of oral historical tradition in which the Museum is the narrator. One of the ways in which to deepen this understanding is identifying the ‘mnemonic outline’ that the Museum has (and continues) to develop for the District Six story.<sup>87</sup> As noted in Hofmeyr, within oral historical narrative the occurrence of a crisis often provides the core image around which a narrative dwells.<sup>88</sup> Notably, one of these outlines for the Museum is the crisis precipitated by the Group Areas declaration of 1966, which is the key ‘event’ towards which the exhibition narrative and oral history extracts progress.

This study has attempted to unpack the various ways in which oral histories have been used in the *Digging Deeper* exhibition. While not a detailed account that tracks the evolution of one oral history interview and its deployment in the exhibition space, it has provided a broad and varied look at the way oral histories are changed once transcribed into textual form, and has attempted to understand the implications of these changes for the oral source. This it has done very much within the bounds of thinking through how *history* is produced and transmitted. In particular, the critique of how social historians utilise the oral source, posed by scholars in the 1990s, has been key to the peeling away of how meaning is constructed through the oral source in the exhibition and, furthermore, highlights the need for a deeper analysis of how oral historical narratives are produced in contemporary settings.

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85 Hofmeyr, ‘We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told’, 167, 171-172.

86 Hofmeyr, ‘We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told’, 165-167.

87 Hofmeyr, ‘We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told’, 149.

88 Hofmeyr, ‘We Spend Our Years as a Tale That is Told’, 164.