

Social Archaeology and the Theatres of Memory

Hall, M. (2001). Social Archaeology and the theatres of memory. *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 1(1), 50–61.

Archaeology is a study of ways in which we express ourselves through the things that we make and use, collect, discard and take for granted; all archaeology is social archaeology. And, because the past is always part of the present, social archaeology is closely concerned with the construction of memory. This has been particularly true in representations of South Africa's past during a time of exceptional transformation. Within a short span of time, the celebration of an enduring white domination has been superseded by the recollection of a dismantled apartheid. Material culture – the tangible traces of memory – plays a central part in this theatre of memory.

Social archaeology and the theatres of memory

Martin Hall

Centre for African Studies, University of Cape Town

Journal of Social Archaeology 1(1), 2001, pp. 50–61

DOI 10.1177/146960530100100104

Abstract

Archaeology is a study of ways in which we express ourselves through the things that we make and use, collect, discard and take for granted; all archaeology is social archaeology. And, because the past is always part of the present, social archaeology is closely concerned with the construction of memory. This has been particularly true in representations of South Africa's past during a time of exceptional transformation. Within a short span of time, the celebration of an enduring white domination has been superseded by the recollection of a dismantled apartheid. Material culture — the tangible traces of memory — plays a central part in this theatre of memory.

Keywords apartheid • colonialism • material culture • memory • modernity • South Africa

Memory is historically conditioned, changing colour and shape according to the emergencies of the moment; that so far from being handed down in the timeless form of 'tradition' it is progressively altered from generation to generation. It bears the impress of experience, in a mediated way. It is stamped with the ruling passions of its time. Like history, memory is inherently revisionist and never more chameleon than when it appears to stay the same. (Samuel, 1994: 10)

1987 was the third centenary of the town of Paarl, heart of the winelands in the valleys below the Hottentots Holland Mountains and close to the southern tip of Africa. There were costumed historical plays and the burial of a time capsule filled with memorabilia that were intended for the white rulers of South Africa a century on. The following year was the 150th anniversary of the Great Trek — and the settlement of vast reaches of the southern African interior — and the defeat of the Zulu at Blood River. 1988 marked three centuries since Huguenot refugees had arrived at the Cape from France, and five centuries since Bartolomeu Dias had landed on his quest for a sea route to the Indies.

Unsurprisingly, these celebrations were overwhelmingly white affairs. But there was an undertow of unease, a consciousness of the constant, sullen presence of the underclass — the 'impress of experience' about which Raphael Samuel wrote in his magisterial *Theatres of Memory* (Samuel, 1994). This was evident in the squabbles that characterized the staging of these cultural events. The Voortrekker celebrations ended in a rival group of bearded enthusiasts setting off across the country in a motorized ox wagon, claiming a purer form of racial nationalism grounded in Dutch colonization. The centrepiece for the celebration of Portuguese colonialism was a replica of Dias's caravel (again, discreetly motorized), which was to sail from Lisbon to Mossel Bay on the Cape's South Coast, where a small landing party of Portuguese sailors had encountered a group of Khoikhoi herders, killing several of them when they declined to part with their cattle. But there was disagreement between the Mossel Bay festival committee, which wanted a 'non-political' costumed re-enactment, and the Cape Town municipality, which wished to use the quincentenary as an opportunity for a reconciliation to include the descendants of both colonizers

and colonized. The result was two commemorations, with the replica caravel first making landfall at Buffels Bay (near Cape Town), where Dias was commemorated in a period costume pageant and the erection of a replica Portuguese padrão, and then sailing on to Mossel Bay for the official, government-sanctioned ceremonies.

What had caused such dissent in the arena of public culture? From 1985, South Africa had been ruled by means of a draconian State of Emergency that permitted detention without trial, interrogation without accountability, military control of residential areas and the banning of normal political activity. Indeed, the provisions of the Internal Security Act had to be eased to allow outside gatherings of latter-day trekkers and conquistadores. Consequently, small incidents could have considerable symbolic valency. The beach at Mossel Bay where Dias had landed was reserved for white bathers. Earlier in 1988, a 'coloured' Cape Town clergyman, the Reverend Pieter Klink, was told to leave when he took a swim with his children. In consequence, the principals of Mossel Bay's 12 'coloured' schools announced that they would boycott the celebrations, and Cape Town's municipality, anxious to maintain a facade of liberal toleration, hastily organized an alternative re-enactment that was presented as 'non-political'. The Mossel Bay celebration went ahead all the same, with the Khoikhoi on the beach played by enthusiasts with boot-polish blackened faces (Hall, 2000).

What can stories such as these say about social archaeology? My argument is this. The heart of archaeology as an intellectual practice is the search for the ways in which we express ourselves through the things that we make and use, collect and discard, value or take for granted, and seek to be remembered by. As such, all archaeology is social. These concerns with the past inexorably, and appropriately, link us with concerns for the present.

This link between past and present is nowhere more evident than in South Africa's historiographies. When legalized segregation is based on race and justified by claims on history, and when education, museums, universities and other sites of cultural production are used to define the daily practices of a segregated society; it follows that readings of the past cannot take place in a neutral intellectual place. And when the old order suddenly collapses, the locus of power shifts radically and a new nationalist discourse takes centre stage, it follows that 'the ruling passions of the time' will be different. These circumstances make a vibrant and immediate social archaeology that will meet Samuel's expectations for history-at-large. The changing theatre of memories in one small part of South Africa reveals something of the ways in which material culture works through time to map out claims for identity and power, showing in turn the sorts of multiple meanings, ambiguities and connections between past and present that give shape to the practice of social archaeology.

Time passes. The dream of another century of white rule — a possibility in 1987 and 1988 — proved to be a chimera. Memory, to adopt Samuel's phrase, changes its colour and shape. In 1990 Nelson Mandela walked free from Pollsmoor Prison and in 1994 the African National Congress inaugurated a new discourse of public culture.

One of the new government's first actions was to rename South Africa's plethora of public holidays. Out went such celebrations as the "Day of Covenant", which marked the solemn vow to mark the Voortrekkers' defeat of the Zulu armies at Blood River in 1838. In came 'Sharpeville Day' in March, the commemoration of the 1976 Soweto uprising in June, and 'Heritage Day' in September.

Heritage Day 1997. One of the most prominent scars on Cape Town's cultural landscape is District Six, an early nineteenth-century suburb close to the city centre that was declared a residential area for whites under apartheid laws in 1966 and, for the most part, bulldozed. 1997's Heritage Day was marked by a sculpture festival staged across the foundations that had been, 30 years earlier, home to more than 60,000 people, the artists' creations scattered through the rank grass and ageing field of debris (Soudien and Meyer, 1997).

Several thousand people come to listen to the bands, eat koeksusters (sweet pastries) and boerewors (beef sausages) and wander among the installations fashioned from broken glass, bricks, plastic and building rubble. Many had once lived there. Among them was Igshaan Jacobs, forcibly removed from Constitution Street, and an avid collector of ceramic sherds: 'this porcelain is how I relate to my history. If I could just piece together one small cup from all the pieces I've gathered I would have something to hold onto' (Sunday Times, Johannesburg, 28 September 1997).

Most of the artists contributing to the sculpture festival made use of the debris of destruction: plastic, ceramic sherds, broken glass, stone, and building foundations. Installations included a skeletal tree spray-painted luminous red and orange, with a small cairn of gold foil sand bags nearby — the treasure of memory — and branches touched by the sunset, or by blood. Next to this was a ship fashioned from paper and shredded plastic, with stick figure goblins swinging in its rigging; a parody of colonial history. A 'garden of remembrance' was fashioned from stones, broken glass, ceramic sherds and the other debris of daily life, dug out from just beneath the surface; ordinary artefacts rearranged as a shrine. In a sense, all these works were social archaeology, creating meaning from artefacts, using material things as a medium to comment on the past and the present.

One work well expressed this multiple coding of material things. Roderick Sauls, himself a onetime resident and subsequently a student of archaeology, celebrated nostalgic recollection while turning it in on itself. Many remember District Six's carnival processions, the lengths of satin material hung from the top of electric poles on New Year's Eve: 'the shiny satin made our street look so pretty. Walking up Tyne Street from the Chapel Street end, looking straight ahead, you could see the different-coloured streamers stretching from one end of the street to the other... Now and then a gentle breeze would make the streamers flutter to remind people that it was New Year in District Six' (Fortune, 1996: 7). Sauls expressed these memories with strips of brightly coloured cloth hanging from a tunnel-like frame, and built over the remnant of Hanover Street, the site of annual parades 30 years before. The movement of the strips of cloth mimicked the sounds and movement of the street, now lost. But within the tunnel, faded sepias of painted faces and popular lyrics were framed by slave manacles. Sauls's work portrays the complex strands of material expression — the theatre of memory — with its varied roles and plots, ranging from political mobilization to commercialization, from nostalgia to anger at betrayal.

The apartheid government's decision to destroy District Six had been a focal point for political mobilization from its announcement in 1966, part of the growing international opposition to forced removals. The 1976 Soweto uprising raised the stakes in the gamble for white minority rule, and it was important for the government to be seen to continue with the project, despite a lack of viability that was already evident. When plans to house 15,000 whites in townhouses and high-rise flats failed because of negative publicity, the government turned to state-funded projects, planning housing for military and police employees and education facilities reserved for white students only (Hart, 1990; Soudien, 1990). By early 1984 almost all houses had been demolished, although mosques, churches and schools remained, as well as cobbled and paved streets, kerbstones and the traces of wall footings where the bulldozers had been less efficient. Seen from the Table Bay shoreline District Six was now a jagged scar, in the novelist Richard Rive's words, 'South Africa's Hiroshima' (Cape Times, 9 January 1986).

The completion of the District Six removal programme coincided with the growing popular uprising against the government, leading to the declaration of a State of Emergency in 1985. This umbrella of increasingly successful resistance affected local politics in many parts of the country. Civic organizations took up specific issues in District Six, such as opposition to the destruction of St Mark's Church, protests at the closure of the Silvertree Crèche and opposition to corporate business initiatives to redevelop the area within the provisions of the Group Areas Act (Soudien, 1990). In this transcript of public culture, District Six's footprint of house foundations, debris and isolated churches, mosques and schools was a mnemonic

that focused political attention at the grassroots level, allowing a popular resistance to draconian attempts at state control that wove between the repressive legislation and security apparatus.

This political transcript was intertwined with broader threads of memory, some of them consistent with the goals of grassroots political movements, others in a less comfortable, or inimical, relationship with the political theatre. District Six has long attracted various forms of nostalgia. Such yearnings for the return to the past are a matter of who is remembering what. White writing and art focusing on District Six has tended to celebrate either a rustic idyll, in which the native shunned the city, or the merry riot of carnival untouched by politics. In contrast, victims of such injustices as the forced removals of apartheid will remember their own histories, blunting the rough edges of daily life with a romantic patina — not surprisingly, representations of District Six's street and community life by those who once lived there are qualitatively different from outsiders staring 'from the safety of distance'. As Raphael Samuel has warned, it is misleading to become 'accustomed to thinking of commemoration as a cheat, something which ruling classes impose on the subaltern classes'. Rather, he suggests, 'heritage might be seen as a vehicle for the pursuit of the visionary, an idiom for the expression of otherwise forbidden, or forgotten, desire. It allows utopia to occupy the enchanted space which memory gives to childhood, promising a new age which will be simpler and purer than the present. It joins the practical and the visionary, the future and the past' (Samuel, 1994: 17, 294).

Nostalgia for District Six is grounded in the area's diversity. As Bill Nasson has written, 'a child growing up there might be a progeny of a West Indian seaman and a migrant Coloured woman from the rural southwestern Cape. Its parents might be a Coloured woman raised in Harfield Village, Claremont, and a paid-off Scots Fusilier who had settled in Cape Town after the South African War. It might be borne by a female migrant from St Helena married to a Lithuanian cabinet-maker. Or its father might be a Tamil Indian migrant from Natal, with a family history of indentured plantation labour, and its mother a Muslim woman from a Kalk Bay fishing family with an unmistakably Portuguese surname' (Nasson, 1990: 63–4).

Although the District varied from street to street, it was long overcrowded, with poor services and a mostly poor population. Residents were employed in clothing, leather working, tobacco, furniture and processed food production, and in a sizeable service sector within the suburb: retailing, shop workers, building and transport trades, self-employed tailors, carpenters, dressmakers, seamstresses, shoemakers and cabinet makers (Bickford-Smith, 1990, 1995; Nasson, 1990). District Six was marked by poverty. In the words of Richard Rive, who was born and brought up there, 'it was a ripe, raw and rotten slum: It was drab, dingy, squalid and overcrowded' (Rive, 1990: 111). Nevertheless, the area's cosmopolitanism led to a sense of distinction, defined by a rough, communal character. Although there were marked inequalities — landlords exploiting slum dwellers, pawnbrokers profiting from low incomes, skilled artisans holding 'themselves aloof from labourers — there was also 'an environment marked strongly by mutual needs and sharing between families and neighbours, whatever the divisions of income, occupation or religion' (Nasson, 1990: 64).

The ambiguities of nostalgia are well illustrated by District Six — the Musical, a stage show that opened in 1987, and played before audiences of more than 350,000 in Cape Town, Johannesburg and Port Elizabeth, as well as at the Edinburgh Festival in the UK. Its spirit is captured in the lyrics of one of its most popular songs, 'The Heart of District Six': 'From Hanover Street/ Comes a lovely sound/ Can you hear the music that I hear/ A rhythm and a beat/ Of the people all-around/ Melodies are ringing in my ears/ And it goes klop klop/ Beating out a rhythm/ Klop klop a rhythm that is living/ It's the heart that beats in District Six'. Writers David Kramer and Taliep Petersen aimed at social realism. Again, in the words of their lyrics, 'We want to tell a story tonight/ About a place called District Six/ Together we lived there/ Brown, black and white/ But the government changed that/ in sixty six/ All the so-called 'coloureds'/ Who had lost their rights/ Were forced to move because this area/ District Six/ Was reserved for whites'.

But nostalgia can go where its progenitors had not intended. In a celebratory review, the local press was quick to hope that District Six and the struggle of its people could now be consigned to history. It was 'inevitable', the reviewer supposed, that the musical 'must involve politics', but nevertheless the work was 'the definitive monument' to this now-destroyed part of Cape Town. This was because, despite the references to struggle and dispossession, the lyrics and music captured an eternal romance — they were 'ultimately about the people, their loves, their joie de vivre and their culture'. And, the reviewer lectured, the former residents of the District must realize that they were 'just as much to blame for the tragedy as those who callously ordered its demise' because 'people should question and not merely go along with plans, schemes and decisions made for them by the authorities' (Cape Times, Cape Town, 13 April 1987).

But while the white establishment's press looked for closure on history and its unsavoury memories, District Six — the Musical also helped keep alive the memories of one-time residents. Many went to the performances, particularly when it was restaged at the Joseph Stone Theatre in the Coloured Group Area of Athlone. As such, the show joined other 'otherwise forbidden expressions of desire' such as the memoirs of District Six's local diaspora. Here is former resident Linda Fortune's image of life in the District 40 and more years earlier: 'people who grew up and lived in District Six knew everyone who belonged in the area. So did the gangsters, who grew up there and lived there. They recognized strangers immediately, and some of them would linger about, waiting to rob an unsuspecting victim. They never bothered any of us living in District Six' (Fortune, 1996: 58). Kramer and Petersen captured this often-told image of the 'community gangster' in their *Sexy Boys*: 'We are the Sexy Boys/ En ons is unemployed/ Die mense we annoy/ We are the Sexy Boys'.

Nostalgia plays out at the margins of commercialization. Musicals are written to make money and the tourist industry has long promoted chocolate box images of Cape Town's charming and mischievous Coloured reprobates, 'characters with an insatiable appetite for conviviality and an insatiable thirst for alcohol... cackling flower sellers... cuddly youth from the Globe Gang' (Nasson, 1990: 48). Such commercialization serves as a further theme in this theatre of memory, and raises issues of who owns the past and who can speak for its descendants — questions that are, of course, part of the more general discourse about the past.

Such controversy has centred on the work of local artist Sue Williamson.

Williamson's early work on District Six was shown in 1981, and titled *The Last Supper*. An assembly of bricks, torn linoleum, a discarded kettle, a child's shoe and shrouded chairs was accompanied by a recording of the recollections of former residents, the muezzin and the battering noise of the bulldozers. This was protest art in the face of apartheid's repression, and proceeds from the installation contributed to a fund for the creation of a museum to the community and its destruction (Argus, Cape Town, 18 September 1981). Twelve years later Williamson returned to this theme with *Last Supper Revisited*. Now, the fragments from District Six's destruction had been encased in resin and placed to cast pools of light on a white shrouded table. 1980s agitprop had become 1990s high art; artefact-icons were sold in individual perspex cases as a numbered edition, and the installation moved from Cape Town to the Venice Biennale. For one reviewer, this was no more than 'a large dressing table upon which is arranged the findings of our very own conscience-crazed bag lady': 'Apartheid is often seen as convenient subject matter for a quick creative buck, and a hallowed space at a dinner party or faculty shindig. Anti-apartheid sentiment has become a sure-fire blue chip in the stock exchange of contemporary social concerns. The pain of repression and dispossession belongs firstly and only to those at the receiving end — it is their subject matter, their story' (Argus, Cape Town, 26 May 1993).

The memorabilia and memories of the past, whether Igshaan Jacobs' teacup or Linda Fortune's memories, Sue Williamson's contested artworks or the Heritage Day sculpture festival, lead towards the museum as a principal stage in the theatre of memory. The District Six Museum opened in 1994 — the year of South Africa's first democratic elections — with roots in the civic movements of the 1980s and strong ties with

former residents of the area, now scattered through many of Cape Town's suburbs. The District Six Museum was an instant success. Visitors are confronted with a large map of the District spread across the floor, and are encouraged to mark the places where they lived. Bolts of calico are draped over chairs, and former residents are asked to sign their names and recall their memories.

In turn, these acts of marking encourage people to talk about their lives. The museum's staff feels that the past means much more to people when they can handle objects such as spoons and nails, collected from the area. There is an extensive photographic display. Noor Ebrahim, who took hundreds of photographs of the District from 1968 until he was evicted from his Caledon Street home, has found that photographs stimulate recollections of people, places and events, starting conversations that bring the community back to life (Noor Ebrahim, pers. comm., October 1997). Particularly popular was — and is — the museum's display of street signs. Suspended as long banners from the high ceiling of the one-time church, these evoke rich memories of the District's complex physical and social geography.

And this completes the circle, returning to the sculpture festival that the District Six Museum organized in 1997. In making meanings from the debris left from apartheid's forced removals 30 years earlier, the festival brought together the complex, intertwined discourse that is social archaeology.

These stories from the Cape of Storms are fragments of a far more extensive discourse that stretches back to colonial settlement in the seventeenth century, and outwards to the world systems of the Dutch East India Company, the British Empire and the networks of development, underdevelopment and dependency that have framed the contemporary world order. They show some of the ways in which the palimpsests that are the material world are constructed and continually reinterpreted.

The social archaeology of one small part of District Six can stand as a summary of this complex form of discourse. At first the territory of the Khoikhoi, who moved their cattle around these northern slopes of Devil's Peak with the changing seasons, the land was taken by the Dutch and fell within cannon range of the Castle on Table Bay. Next, the area was surveyed and allocated under title to a free farmer, forming part of the heritage that was claimed, in an atmosphere of desperation, in the public ceremonies of 1987 and 1988. In the late nineteenth century, the land was surveyed again and subdivided into small lots for working-class housing. Now known as Horsley Street, it was marked by a steep cobbled street with a row of single-storey tenements on either side, rented out to Muslim families who shopped at the Jewish-owned corner store, worshipped in the local mosque and worked in the town below, perhaps in the growing garment industry or the docks. This was the District Six celebrated in local legend and, later, the inspiration for District Six — the Musical.

In 1966, Horsley Street was declared white and its residents were served notice that they would be moved to the new coloured townships out of sight on the Cape Flats. The bulldozers came and soon one house remained, captured in protest in a documentary film, part of a growing protest against the brutalities of apartheid. Over the following years, Horsley Street's skeleton — the cobbled street and house foundations covered by grass and low scrub — kept memories alive for former residents, a social archaeology that was to be recalled in the District Six Museum and the 1997 sculpture festival. One house was excavated, archaeological techniques revealing the details of wall footings, doorways and additions, and the meagre assemblage of broken crockery, coins, nails and bric-a-brac that had slipped down between the floorboards. Excavation of what had been the kitchen revealed multiple layers of linoleum, bought from the corner store each year at Eid, and installed in celebration of the new year. As the archaeologists worked, former residents stopped by and pointed out details of the emerging structure, exchanging anecdotes about life in the area. The future remains uncertain. Perhaps this part of Horsley Street will become an open-air museum, a monument to parts of this history. Perhaps the imprint will finally disappear beneath a new layer of history.

District Six, then, has persisted as much more than a set of memories or the sparse documents of colonial administrators and apartheid functionaries. Words, music and images are rooted in the scar across the land — a mnemonic system that makes history tangible. Such non-verbal signs are not merely reducible to words — they have additional qualities, and, in particular, an ambiguity. This is evident in the way in which responses to everyday objects, observed or retrieved, have shifted between nostalgia and anger. Testimony is often framed around the importance of household possessions: proudly kept interiors contrasting with dilapidated house exteriors, poorly maintained by landlords; washstands, fireplaces, ornamental clocks, carpets, lace, brass candlesticks, cutlery (Nasson, 1990).

Linda Fortune, recalling her childhood in District Six, remembers that ‘pieces of wood from a tomato box that the bigger boys had brought home from the market in Sir Lowry Road were piled up outside on the pavement under the sash window with the wooden shutters. An empty jam tin was put on top and wilted pieces of cabbage, carrot leaves and potato peels — fetched from the kitchen where Mom was busy cleaning the vegetables — were put inside. The jam tin was then filled with water from another tin which served as a jug. In a few short minutes the food, cooked over a fire that was never lit, would be dished up with a piece of plank and “spooned” onto toy plastic plates. Each little girl would pretend to eat and enjoy her helping of food’ (Fortune, 1996: 21). In a different context, the celebrations of Dias’s landfall at the Cape and the competing claims for the heart of Afrikaanderdom were given valency by costumed re-enactments of the raising of the Portuguese *padrão* or the symbolism of the ox wagon, escorted into Pretoria by bearded horsemen dressed in the rough clothes of the frontier.

In Raphael Samuel’s words, ‘“heritage” is a nomadic term, which travels easily.. a term capricious enough to accommodate widely discrepant meanings’ (Samuel, 1994: 205). Areas such as District Six are encrusted with a variety of meanings that are the substance of social archaeology. For its former residents, it was marked ground, the geography of dispossession and dispersal. For the apartheid government, it stood for white entitlement and the principle of separate development. For reformist business and municipal interests, the land was an opportunity for investment and economic development.

But such use of common images leads to ambivalence: rooted in the use of the same signs and symbols as the purveyors of repressive histories. This was evident in the September 1997 Heritage Day holiday. While the Alabama Malay Choir led the procession and the crowd was entertained by ‘sons of the District’ such as the Boogie Men (a slick foursome of middle-aged men in cream linen suits, black shirts and gold chains), clusters of ‘homeless people watched silently — a new community in District Six, living in low shacks in the clumps of bushes and destined to be removed in their turn as the District is redeveloped. A coach which had brought people from Hanover Park, Athlone, and the other apartheid townships to which District Six’s residents were shipped, sported an airbrushed panorama of Table Mountain, a romantic dream in which no trace of conflict could be discerned. In a discordant juxtaposition, a wiry, brown-skinned man with hollow cheeks wore a cardboard placard with the address of the house from which he was evicted, haranguing anyone who would listen with his contempt for those who destroyed his community. His vision of retribution was thoroughly modern: ‘the devil has microwaves for the people who did this’. Out in the townships, the leader of the Sexy Boys gang — successor to the Musical’s lovable star — was shot in the head as his luxury car pulled up at an intersection, assassinated as part of a dispute between the Cape’s powerful drug cartels (Cape Times, Cape Town, 13 April 1997, 1 November 1997).

Alex La Guma, writing before the declaration of District Six as a white area, showed the violent consequences of South Africa’s racism through an unrelenting, street-wise fiction that used close description to build up the mosaic of daily life. There is no romance in La Guma’s writing — no yearning for a golden past or another world. The only relief lies outside life, in the ‘chill, comforting water’ of the sea — ‘the dark, undulating fronds of seaweed, writhing and swaying in the shallows, like beckoning hands’ — or in the future, the unborn child, the ‘knot of life’ in the womb (La Guma, 1962: 96). The poverty and degradation of life in the ghetto is thrust into the face of the reader as a fist of defiance. Here is Raphael

Samuel's 'impress of experience' mapped out in the details of everyday experience of the material world, a fictional social archaeology that well illustrates the authority of small things in the construction of meaning:

On the floors of the tenements the grime collected quickly. A muddied sole of a shoe scuffed across the worn, splintery boards and left tiny embankments of dirt along the sides of the minute raised ridges of wood; or water was spilled or somebody urinated and left wet patches onto which the dust from the ceilings or the seams of clothes drifted and collected to leave dark patches as the moisture dried. A crumb fell or a drop of fat, and was ground underfoot, spread out to become a trap for the drifting dust that floated in invisible particles; the curve of a warped plank or the projections of a badly-made joint; the rosettes and bas-reliefs of Victorian plaster-work; the mortar that became damp and spongy when the rains came and then contracting and cracking with heat; all formed little traps for the dust. And in the dampness deadly life formed in decay and bacteria and mould, and in the heat and airlessness the rot appeared, too, so that things which once were whole or new withered or putrefied and the smells of their decay and putrefaction pervaded the tenements of the poor. (La Guma, 1962: 34)

References

- Bickford-Smith, V. (1990) 'The Origins and Early History of District Six to 1910', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds) *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, pp. 35–43. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Bickford-Smith, V. (1995) *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fortune, L. (1996) *The House in Tyne Street: Childhood Memories of District Six*. Cape Town: Kwela.
- Hall, M. (2000) *An Archaeology of the Modern World*. London: Routledge.
- Hart, D. (1990) 'Political Manipulation of Urban Space: The Razing of District Six, Cape Town', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds) *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, pp. 117–42. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- La Guma, A. (1962) *A Walk in the Night*. Ibadan: Mbari Publications.
- Nasson, B. (1990) 'Oral History and the Reconstruction of District Six', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds) *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, pp. 44–66. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Rive, R. (1990) 'District Six: Fact and Fiction', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds) *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, pp. 110–16. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Samuel, R. (1994) *Theatres of Memory*. London: Verso.
- Soudien, C. (1990) 'District Six: From Protest to Protest', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds) *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, pp. 143–83. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Soudien, C. and R. Meyer (1997) *The District Six Public Sculpture Project*. Cape Town: District Six Museum Foundation.

Author note

MARTIN HALL is Professor of Historical Archaeology in the Centre for African Studies, and Dean of Higher Education Development at the University of Cape Town. His research has focused on early farming communities in southern Africa, the historical archaeology of colonial settlement and, more recently, on the cultural dimensions of heritage and identity in an age of globalization. His most recent book, *An Archaeology of the Modern World*, has recently been published by Routledge.