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Memorialising the past, unveiling the present:
How can memorial museums help us reflect on 'contemporary forced removals' in South Africa?

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Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts by Research in Migration and Displacement at the University of the Witwatersrand

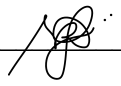
Supervised by Prof. Ingrid Palmary

July 2018

Declaration

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the purpose of memorialising South Africa's past when the spatial and socioeconomic dynamics of apartheid are still a reality for many South Africans. Specifically, it looks at how memorial museums produce knowledge about apartheid's forced removals while many South Africans continue to face the reality of forced removals through processes of eviction and urban segregation. Can memorial museums actually help us reflect on 'contemporary forced removals', or have they just become 'a house for dead people'? This question is explored through a case study of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre, a museum dedicated to memorialising the stories and experiences of those who were forcibly removed from the suburb of Sophiatown by the apartheid regime in the 1950s and 1960s. The exploration of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre revolves around three central questions: *what*, *how*, and *in whose interest* is knowledge produced and disseminated in the museum space? Turning first to the museum's permanent exhibition, I argue that while the purpose of memorialising the past plays a key role in the South African context – given the deliberate attempt of the apartheid regime to erase the histories of black communities in the country – it is important that memorialisation practices are not restricted to celebrating the struggle against apartheid and the nation's reconciliation, for this may hide from view the continuity of historical processes. Second, drawing on concepts associated with the philosophy of critical pedagogy and the educational methods adopted by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre, I discuss how memorial museums can encourage the public to 'read the world' in which they exist. Finally, I analyse the mission, audience, and operating environment of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre arguing that museums can provide significant spaces for bridging the past and the present and unveiling contemporary forced removals. My main contention is that in memorialising traumatic histories, museums should not foreclose debates about why these events happened and how they may still manifest in the present.

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1. Introduction

In October 2013, residents from New Brighton – a community located just outside Port Elizabeth, South Africa – forced the closure of the Red Location Museum amid protests over housing. The protesters accused the municipal authorities of spending millions of Rands memorialising the life stories of anti-apartheid activists while the community surrounding the museum still lived in shacks:

> Why build a house for dead people when us the living do not have a roof over our heads? We are living in shacks [that] get flooded each time it rains (...) and yet the municipality spends millions of rands building a museum. (AFP 2014)

As one of the reports on the protest concluded, 'like many of the poor around South Africa, the New Brighton residents feel they have not benefited enough from the end of apartheid' (AFP 2014).

Inspired by this story, this paper interrogates the purpose of memorialising South Africa's past when the spatial and socioeconomic dynamics of apartheid are still a reality for many South Africans. Specifically, it looks at how memorial museums produce knowledge about apartheid's forced removals while many South Africans continue to face the reality of forced removals through processes of eviction and urban segregation. Can memorial museums actually help us reflect on 'contemporary forced removals', or have they just become 'a house for dead people'?

This question is explored through a case study of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre, a museum located in western Johannesburg and dedicated to memorialising the stories and experiences of those who were forcibly removed from the suburb of Sophiatown by the apartheid regime between 1955 and 1963. The Sophiatown Heritage Centre was established in the late 2000s as the result of a partnership between the City of Johannesburg and the Trevor Huddleston Memorial Centre. Today, it offers both permanent and temporary exhibitions on the history of Sophiatown, as well as walking tours around the suburb and its iconic sites.[1]

My exploration of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre is divided into three chapters. In the first chapter, I conduct a thorough analysis of the museum's permanent exhibition taking into account some of the key elements involved in the 'knowledge-making capacity' of museums, such as location, layout, displays, and interpretive aids (Moser 2010). Rather than providing a mere description of all the objects and labels on display, my goal is to explore some of the narratives that emerge from the exhibition and understand how these narratives contextualise our understanding of Sophiatown and forced removals. In particular, I interrogate whether the knowledge produced by the exhibition is purely focused on the apartheid era, or invites museum visitors to think about the continuity of historical processes in South Africa.

The second chapter focuses on the three pedagogical methods currently employed by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre to complement its permanent exhibition – namely, walking tours around the suburb, interactive exhibitions, and once-off activities known as 'Time Travel' events. I expand upon each of these methods and analyse the

[1] The Sophiatown Heritage Centre is currently known as 'Sophiatown the Mix'.

extent to which they encourage the public to reflect on their current reality while learning about the past. This analysis relies on one of the key tenets put forward by the educational philosophy of critical pedagogy – that education should not only be about learning how read the *word* but also, and most importantly, should be about learning how to read the *world*, or becoming politically literate (Freire & Macedo 1987).

In the final chapter, I discuss the mission, audience, and operating environment of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre in the hope of understanding *in whose interest* and *for what purpose* the museum currently exists and operates and whether the 'unveiling of contemporary forced removals' can be enacted in the context of Sophiatown.

Before explaining the selection of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre as a case study and expanding upon my methodological approach, in what follows I unpack the term 'contemporary forced removals' and discuss the importance of questioning the social role of memorial museums in South Africa.

'Contemporary forced removals'

The use of the term 'forced removals' in South Africa is normally associated with the mass relocations of the black population that were carried out during the apartheid regime. From 1960 to 1983, it is estimated that the apartheid government uprooted and relocated 3.5 million people in an effort to establish a rigid system of racial segregation (Platzky & Walker 1985). These removals affected both urban and rural populations and resulted in the disruption of families, communities, lifestyles, and means of survival. They also set in motion a process of dispossession and marginalisation that continues to affect poor and working-class black communities around the country.

One of the central pieces of legislation that governed the forced removals of the apartheid era was the Group Areas Act of 1950. The Act made it compulsory for people of different racial groups to live and work in specific urban areas and forced hundreds of thousands of South Africans to relocate to segregated townships. As Platzky and Walker note, even though forced removals and racial segregation existed in South Africa long before the Group Areas Act came into force, this act turned what was a 'fairly limited and unsystematic form of segregation' into a 'rigid system' of social engineering that applied all over the country (Platzky & Walker 1985: 99). The suburbs of Sophiatown in Johannesburg, District Six in Cape Town, and Cato Manor in Durban, for instance, were all proclaimed 'White' under the Group Areas Act, forcing their residents to resettle in 'Native', 'Coloured', and 'Indian' townships on the urban periphery. These three suburbs continue to stand as famous examples of forced removals in South Africa.

Despite this apartheid-era connotation, many commenters suggest that spatial segregation and forced removals continue to be a part of life in South Africa. Even though the law no longer requires that different racial groups live in separate areas, racial residential segregation remains high in the country (Parry & van Eeden 2015). The national government itself has admitted that the goal of 'breaking down apartheid geography', which was set in 1994, is still far from being achieved (National Planning Commission 2012: 260). Gated communities, estates, and affluent suburbs continue to

be home to mostly white residents, while townships remain predominantly black (Parry & van Eeden 2015).

In addition, just like in the past, processes of eviction resulting from urban regeneration policies continue to 'push the poor black majority into zones of invisibility and inaudibility' (Selmeczi 2014: 230). As Huchzermeyer explains, the post-apartheid government's fixation with developing and regenerating the urban space and ridding cities of 'slums' has led to the 'gradual but steady' reintroduction of some of the repressive measures adopted during the apartheid era (Huchzermeyer 2011: 9). These measures have included the eradication of informal settlements, the raiding of derelict buildings that are deemed unlawfully occupied, and the resettlement of evictees to peripheral relocation camps.

The cities of Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban, in particular, have attracted in the past few years a great deal of attention from scholars and activists trying to expose the violent processes of eviction resulting from urban regeneration schemes (Chance 2015; Desai 2002; Pillay *et al*. 2017; Wilhelm-Solomon 2016). Local government structures (under different political parties) have been criticised for promoting policies that are fashioned according to the demands of the market while forcibly removing those whose presence is deemed undesirable in new, 'world-class' African cities. As Sihlongonyane points out in his discussion of the intersection between spatial planning and forced removals in South Africa:

> [J]ust as apartheid planning used political force to evict, demolish, remove and resettle people on behalf of white capital interests in the past, now people will experience eviction, forced removals and resettlements in post-apartheid planning due to market forces which favour white capital interests. (Sihlongonyane 2004: 26)

These forced removals have often been justified under the rhetoric of poverty eradication, public security, or the need to address the housing crisis in South Africa. Yet, they obscure a more sinister side of the story; that it is primarily low-income black communities that continue to be subject to processes of dispossession, exclusion, violence, and displacement from central urban areas (Wilhelm-Solomon 2017).

Urban regeneration programmes in South Africa have also been accompanied by the return of white middle-class residents and private developers to the inner city (Visser & Kotze 2008; Walsh 2013; Winkler 2009). This return, most forcefully seen in Cape Town and Johannesburg, has resulted in increasing rental costs and the eviction of those who can no longer afford to live in regenerated and gentrified 'wealthy controlled enclaves' (Walsh 2013: 9). Although the South African law gives important rights and protections to people facing eviction – including the responsibility of municipalities to provide temporary alternative accommodation to those who would otherwise be made homeless as a result of an eviction (SERI 2015) – a lack of transitional housing in central areas also means that evictees are often relocated to the urban periphery, where work opportunities, schools, transport, and health facilities are scarce (Pillay *et al*. 2017).

These processes share many similarities with the forced removals of the apartheid era, including the elements of dispossession, marginalisation, and oftentimes the use of

violence and intimidation against evictees (Pather 2017). Certainly, contemporary forced removals in South Africa cannot be equated to the policies and practices of systematic racial segregation under apartheid. Yet, it is possible to draw parallels between the past and the present.

Based on this understanding, I introduce this paper by arguing that it is important to question how memorial museums produce knowledge about forced removals in South Africa and whether this knowledge pushes the boundaries of conventional conceptions that are focused on the past. Museums are usually associated with prevailing views of what counts as 'truth', so it is essential to question what knowledge is being produced and disseminated in these spaces (Hooper-Greenhill 1999). The South African case is particularly interesting given the great number of efforts aimed at memorialising the country's history of political violence and the several institutions specifically dedicated to the history of forced removals, such as the Sophiatown Heritage Centre and the Fietas Museum in Johannesburg, the District Six Museum in Cape Town, and the new uMkhumbane Cultural and Heritage Museum in Cato Manor, Durban. The next section builds upon this argument and discusses how the role of memorial museums in South Africa has expanded and transformed in the past two decades.

Questioning the role of memorial museums in South Africa

There is a robust body of literature that focuses on the social purpose of museums as well as the role of memorialisation in uncovering and dealing with histories of political violence. South Africa has provided a rich terrain for exploring these topics over the past two decades in light of its history and growing cultural and heritage sector. Following apartheid's formal dismantling in the mid-1990s, a number of museums were created across the country in an attempt to memorialise apartheid's atrocities and reaffirm what Soudien refers to as the 'never again' attitude (Soudien 2008: 115). This scenario has attracted the attention of many scholars and practitioners interested in both exploring the South African arts, culture, and heritage sector and investigating how museums have become a source of memory, politics, and economic activity in the country.

Drawing on this body of research and the literature on museum studies more broadly, in this section I provide an overview of the emergence of memorial museums in South Africa and discuss the role that they played in the process of transition into democracy. This review will set the scene for an inquiry into the role of memorial museums in contemporary South Africa, which is the point of departure of my research.

Memorial museums and the nation-building project in post-apartheid South Africa

Over the last twenty years, memorial museums have played an important role in documenting South Africa's history and helping the country come to terms with its violent past. Following South Africa's first democratic elections in 1994, a number of museums were created across the country in an effort to memorialise the past and mark the beginning of a new era (Bremner 2007). The transition into democracy was also accompanied by the restructuring of old museums as part of a state-led initiative to transform and democratise the arts, culture, and heritage sector (Mpumlwana *et al*.

2002). But for several scholars, the memorial museums that emerged in post-apartheid South Africa were not merely created to commemorate historical events or narrate the end of apartheid. These sites actually became key instruments in two other projects – the 'nation building' project and the 'selling of South Africa to tourists and visitors' (Bremner 2007: 85-86).

Reflecting on the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, for example, Bremner (2007) argues that memorial museums were critical sites for the invention of South Africa's new political identity. Once statutory apartheid was officially over, South Africa was confronted with the challenge of weaving together diverse and sometimes competing identities and building a new, unified, 'post-apartheid nation'. The museum space was essential in this nation-building project, for it provided a platform for the construction of a common past and the reproduction of a coherent South African narrative – a narrative of resistance, reconciliation, and the demise of apartheid. At the same time, memorial museums played an important role in marketing this new South African identity to tourists and local visitors.[2] By subsuming multiple histories under a grand narrative of rupture and reconciliation, memorial museums made apartheid accessible, palatable, and consumable to those who had not experienced its atrocities.

Like Bremner (2007), Coombes (2003), Rassool (2000), and Baines (2007) also argue that memorial museums played an important role in the construction of the 'new' South Africa and the transition into democracy. Visual and material narratives created in South African museums throughout the 1990s not only reflected, but also reconfigured ideas of 'home', 'rainbow nation', 'great patriots', and the 'miracle' of the new South Africa, which were essential in the nation-building project. Focusing on the Robben Island Museum in Cape Town, for example, Coombes notes that multiple histories and private experiences were synthetised under a 'national' narrative of heroic resistance; "the 'new' South Africa arose phoenix-like from the ashes of apartheid" and was now ready to start a fresh chapter in its history (Coombes 2003: 95).

The memorial museums that emerged in the early years of democracy were also part of the national quest for truth, reconciliation, and therapy. Public discourses of trauma and recovery were reproduced and disseminated in memorial museums as a way of confronting the past and finding release from the painful memories of apartheid (Colvin 2003). This 'therapeutic' process – officially set in motion by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – was also closely related to the nation-building project; narrating traumatic experiences was conceived as a form of therapy for both the individual and the nation.

Certainly, the efforts to integrate multiple histories and memories into a singular public narrative of the 'new' South Africa did not come without tensions or contestations. The memorial museums that emerged in post-apartheid South Africa had to deal with different and often conflicting demands from various stakeholders, including private and public funders, the international community, and the highly differentiated national and local constituency (Coombes 2003). At the same time, the dominant discourse of 'resistance and reconciliation' was contested in significant

[2] Rassool (2007) notes that the cultural tourism that emerged in the 1990s was not only directed at international visitors, but also at South Africans (or the 'rainbow people') as a way of creating a sense of nationhood.

ways at the local level, particularly in community museums and local cultural initiatives (Mpumlwana *et al*. 2002; Rassool 2000).[3] But overall, much of the arts, culture, and heritage sector constituted in the early years of democracy seemed to follow the logics of transition, nation-building, and the marketing of this 'new' South Africa to tourists and visitors alike.

Memorial museums in contemporary South Africa: 'sites of conscience' and 'activists for change'[4]

More than twenty years after the first initiatives to memorialise apartheid's crimes were established, it seems appropriate to interrogate the purpose of memorial museums in contemporary South Africa, especially in view of the country's new political context and the re-emergence of debates over the shortcomings of the reconciliation process.[5]

Before I proceed with this exploration, however, it is important to mention that the current scholarship on museum studies broadly agrees that museums all over the world are undergoing a process of reinvention and self-scrutiny as the walls between society and these institutions start to crumble. Anderson, for example, argues that museums no longer symbolise an 'ivory tower of exclusivity', but are rather accountable to the public and have a social responsibility (Anderson 2004: 1). Similarly, Sandell and Nightingale identify the past few decades as a moment of transition, where issues of 'equality, diversity, social justice and human rights move from the margins of museum thinking and practice, to the core' (Sandell & Nightingale 2012: 1). In more practical terms, museums have also come to be understood as potential agents of social change in that they provide a moral framework through which contemporary issues can be conceptualised and ultimately addressed (Abram 2002; Bennett 2016; Ševčenko 2010). In particular, by narrating the past, museums have the power to foster dialogue on similarly-situated contemporary issues.

This paradigm shift towards an inclusive, socially responsive museum does not come without tensions or practical challenges. Many museums are primarily driven by the imperatives of the market and are more concerned with entertaining and increasing attendance figures and revenues than making a positive difference on the community (Janes & Conaty 2005). Moreover, many museum officials are still influenced by the colonial enterprise of collecting exotic objects and exhibiting them to the West (Diop 2014). There are also pragmatic barriers to public engagement posed by long-standing museological practices linked to the modernist regime of thought, which privileged collections over visitors (Papadimitriou *et al*. 2016).[6] However, the current literature on museum studies broadly suggests that the contemporary (or post-modern) museum

[3] For example, as a 'community-based independent museum', the District Six Museum in Cape Town did not have to conform to the emerging, centralised national heritage framework (Rassool 2007: 120).
[4] The use of the terms 'sites of conscience' and 'activists for change' is informed, respectively, by the works of Ševčenko (2010) and Bennett (2016).
[5] For a discussion about the 'unfinished business' of the South African reconciliation process, see, for example: Bray (2014); Tutu (2014).
[6] In contrast to the twenty-first century 'visitor-centred' museum, the modern museum is generally described as an elitist, collection-driven institution (Anderson 2004).

marks a departure from the monolithic, modern museum and is increasingly aware of its social role.

It is also important to highlight the fact that contemporary museums are broadly understood as sites of learning and knowledge production. Hooper-Greenhill, for instance, argues that museum exhibitions are not neutral, but are rather best understood as 'visual cultural narratives' that produce views of the past and the present (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 2). Different assemblages of objects can invoke different meanings and, in this sense, museums are active in shaping knowledge.

It is within this conceptual framework that I now begin to explore the social purpose of contemporary museums in South Africa, paying special attention to the ways in which they produce knowledge and whether they are aware of their actual or perceived social responsibility within the new South African context.

The recent literature on museums in South Africa suggests that memorial sites have a dual purpose in the current political and social context: they work as 'sites of conscience' as well as 'activists for change'. Murray and Witz (2013), for example, note that several sites that symbolise apartheid's violence are today being identified and reconfigured as 'sites of conscience'. Rather than promoting heroic accounts of great leaders or presenting a narrative of apartheid's demise, these seemingly anonymous sites serve as reminders of the everyday conditions of life in the past and, in this sense, represent 'places of remembrance' (Murray & Witz 2013: 51). But beyond representing the past, these sites also play a key role in actually transforming the present.

According to Ševčenko (2010), 'sites of conscience' have the power to foster dialogue on contemporary issues and, to some extent, also contribute to the resolution of conflicts. They do that by not only preserving the memory of the abuses of the past, but also by inviting a reflection on similarly-situated contemporary issues. For example, the Constitution Hill museum in Johannesburg has sought to create a space where visitors are encouraged to discuss the latest matters before the Constitutional Court and reflect on how justice should be defined in present-day South Africa (Ševčenko 2010, 2017). There is, then, a general understanding that memorial museums can actively connect the struggles of the past with today's movements for social justice.

In addition to serving as 'sites of conscience', some memorial museums in South Africa have also come to portray themselves as 'activists for change'. The District Six Museum is a typical example of such a role. As the museum's director Bonita Bennett explains, '[a] people-centred activism has always been a hallmark of the District Six Museum's methodological approach' (Bennett 2016: 6). In particular, Bennett notes that the museum not only works as 'the keeper of the destroyed community's memory', but also explores ways in which this memory can be mobilised to support the land claims of former residents of District Six. It is important to notice, though, that the museum-activism nexus has always been present in District Six. From its inception, the museum has proclaimed its commitment to 'land restitution and the reconstruction of [the District Six] community' (Rassool 2007: 120). Conversely, other memorial museums may not have such a clear vision in terms of legal rights and

reclamation. It then becomes essential to explore how these sites can still play a role in advocating for social change in the present.

In light of this evolution in the South African arts, culture, and heritage sector and the shift in museum thinking over the past few decades, it is important to explore how contemporary museums are producing and disseminating knowledge about the past and in whose interest these narratives are being created. In South Africa specifically, the danger of building a grand narrative of apartheid's demise is to suggest that apartheid is a closed chapter in the country's history, when in fact it is still a reality for many South Africans (Brenner 2007; Colvin 2003; Verbeeck 2007). This assertion is particularly relevant when we consider the case of forced removals, which continue to manifest themselves through processes of eviction and urban segregation, as discussed above.

This paper, therefore, seeks to frame the discussion about the role of memorial museums within the current political and socioeconomic context of South Africa. More specifically, I ask: what might be the purpose of memorialising South Africa's past when forced removals are still a reality for many South Africans? Even though the recent literature points to a shift in museum thinking and practice, little attention has been given to the paradox between representing the past while, in significant ways, still 'living in the past'. Furthermore, I hope to contribute to discussions around how memorial museums can both invite a critical reflection on contemporary issues and become 'sites of conscience' and 'activists for change'. Such an inquiry seems appropriate in light of the shortcomings of the democratic era in South Africa and the fact that a black majority remains excluded from access to basic rights, such as adequate housing.

Case Study: the Sophiatown Heritage Centre

The selection of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre as a case study is justified by both the importance and the uniqueness of the site. Alongside District Six in Cape Town and Cato Manor in Durban, Sophiatown is arguably the most famous case of forced removals in South Africa. It was also the first site of forced removals under the Group Areas Act of 1950 and, in this sense, represents the official launch of the apartheid government's spatial engineering programme. While racial segregation and forced removals existed in South Africa long before Sophiatown, the scale and systematic nature of the removals in the area were unprecedented. This may explain why Sophiatown continues to feature prominently in the South African imaginary as 'the symbolic icon of all forced removals' (Fink 2015: 13).

Sophiatown is also known for producing some of South Africa's most famous writers, musicians, and politicians and for contributing to the emergence of a black urban culture in the 1940s and 1950s. Extensive cultural production around the suburb – including novels, music, autobiographies, plays, films, and paintings – attests to the mythical status that the place holds in the South African consciousness (Erlank & Morgan 2015; Fink 2015; Knevel 2015). Sophiatown also boasts a considerable photographic archive that can be activated in the present as a source of remembrance and commemoration. As such, the township 'has the edge over other, less artistically pictured removals' (Fink 2015: 13).

Despite Sophiatown's iconic status and historical importance, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre is not as well known or academically researched as other memorial museums in South Africa. In fact, many people seem surprised to learn that there is a museum in Sophiatown, even though it has been in operation for a decade. The surprise might stem from the fact that present-day Sophiatown can hardly be compared to the 'hustle and bustle' of Cape Town's city centre, where the District Six Museum is located, or even Vilakazi Street, home to the Hector Peterson Memorial and the Mandela House Museum. Far from tourist routes and cultural attractions, Sophiatown resembles other residential areas in Johannesburg and is best described as a 'fairly typical neighbourhood' (Thelen & Morgan 2013: ix).

The Sophiatown Heritage Centre is also quite unique in that it 'tries to restore a world that has been lost' (Knevel 2015: 51). Sophiatown was completely destroyed by the apartheid regime and replaced by a new, white-only suburb named Triomf (or triumph in Afrikaans). It was only in 2006 that the area was renamed Sophiatown, but with a very different configuration. Land was never given back to former residents[7] and only a few buildings remain from the original community[8]. There is then a clear mismatch between the Sophiatown of the 'imagination' (or the one constructed through popular culture) and the 'real Sophiatown' that has formed since the desegregation of the 1990s (Knevel 2015: 53).

By contrast, other urban areas that were also subject to forced removals during apartheid remained largely undeveloped following the relocation of its residents. The suburb of District Six, for example, remained as 'a dark cloud on the city's conscience' for many years and is still a site of land reclamation (Naidoo 2015: 102). Similarly, the suburb of Fietas (or Pageview), an area in Johannesburg that was subject to forced removals in the mid-1970s, remains desolate. These landscapes not only provide a physical space where the memories of former residents can, somehow, continue to reverberate and materialise, but also present a concrete reality that needs to be confronted by the museums that operate in these areas. Indeed, both the District Six Museum and the Fietas Museum are very vocal about processes of land restitution. Conversely, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre can only grapple with a 'myth' or a place that is constructed in the memories of former residents.

Another interesting point is that while Sophiatown, at first sight, does not seem to have changed much since the desegregation of the 1990s, the suburbs of District Six, Fietas, and Cato Manor are often described as highly contested urban spaces in terms of contemporary forced removals. Inner-city Johannesburg for example, where the Fietas Museum is situated, has seen in recent years the emergence of new businesses and residential projects and the return of upper and middle class investors and dwellers (Walsh 2013). These changes, which are mostly driven by private capital and regeneration programmes sponsored by the City of Johannesburg, have led to an increase in rental prices and the displacement of many people who can no longer afford to live or trade in the central areas of Johannesburg. The same process has been observed in Cape Town's city centre, which has become a 'prime real-estate' area in an 'increasingly gentrified' city (District Six Museum 2018). Cato Manor, as well, is

[7] Most land claims in Sophiatown were settled through financial compensation (Beningfield 2006).
[8] Only four buildings survived the demolition of Sophiatown – namely, Dr Xuma's house (where the Sophiatown Heritage Centre is located), 33 Toby Street, St Joseph's Children Home, and the church of Christ the King.

often remembered for constant clashes over land occupation and shack evictions. On the other hand, Sophiatown does not seem to deal with contemporary forced removals on its doorsteps – or at least sufficient attention has not been given to this issue.

The Sophiatown Heritage Centre can thus provide an original case study for investigating how knowledge about forced removals is produced 'out of sight'. Does this 'isolation' contribute to the emergence of alternative narratives, or does it serve to reinforce and reproduce hegemonic representations of forced removals that are focused on the past? The museum's website suggests that they favour a bolder approach:

> Our arts, cultural and heritage programmes are designed for people to meet and connect in ways that might surprise them, and open doors for conversations with meaning. (Sophiatown the Mix 2018)

But how does this mission statement translate in everyday memorialisation practices? Are contemporary forced removals a part of the conversations held at the museum? This research can help illuminate some of these questions.

Methodology

In order to understand how the Sophiatown Heritage Centre produces knowledge about forced removals, I have adopted a qualitative, interdisciplinary methodological approach that draws on concepts associated with museum studies as well as the educational philosophy of critical pedagogy. This approach is based on the idea that understanding the museum requires not only moving beyond intra-disciplinary limitations, but also adopting techniques from different academic traditions (Macdonald 2006; Message & Witcomb 2015). It is also premised on the idea that museums can be regarded as essential pedagogical sites, in that they perform an educational role (Hooper-Greenhill 1999, 2007).

Data collection

Three methods of data collection were employed throughout the research process: textual analysis, participant observation, and key informant interviews.

1) Textual analysis

In the first part of the data collection process, I conducted a qualitative textual analysis of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's permanent exhibition, which involved analysing the objects and narrations on display. Other elements that can contribute to the process of meaning-making in museums, such as location, layout, and audio and visual media were also taken into consideration. This analysis was conducted over a period of three days in August 2017.

The analysis of the exhibition was coupled with a textual analysis of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's Visitor's Book. All entries (ranging from September 2015 to August 2017) were examined, and comments relating to my topic of study were fully transcribed. Where available, information on the nationality and place of residence of commenters was also recorded.

2) Participant observation

The second stage of the data collection process consisted on observing the walking tours offered by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre. The tours take approximately two hours and stop at some of the iconic sites of Sophiatown. They are hosted by three expert guides with deep knowledge on the history and life of the suburb – namely, Tshepo Letsoalo, Victor Mokhine, and Klaas Hobe.

With the exception of Klaas Hobe, whose interest in Sophiatown stems from his background in tourism studies and his enthusiasm for the history of forced removals, the other two guides have a personal tie with Sophiatown. Victor Mokhine (or Tata Mokhine, as he is commonly known) was born in the suburb and was forcibly removed to Meadowlands with his family at the age of 11. He has vivid memories of his childhood in Sophiatown, which are proudly shared with museum visitors and researchers alike. Tshepo Letsoalo's family was also forcibly removed from Sophiatown and he was born in Meadowlands. His family ties with the church of Christ the King in Sophiatown sparked in him a desire to get involved in the suburb's life and to start working for the Trevor Huddleston Memorial Centre. Tshepo led my first tour of Sophiatown in April 2017 and inspired me to pursue a research on the topic.

One of the advantages of employing this method of data collection was the possibility of experiencing the walking tour both as an *insider* – using my own experience as a research instrument – and as an *outsider* (Spradley 1980: 56-57). Although my initial plan was to observe as many tours as possible and interview different groups of museum visitors, I was only given the opportunity to join two tours during the process of data collection: the first was led by Klaas Hobe and I was the only participant; the second, organised by my research supervisor, was led by Victor Mokhine and allowed me to observe and interact with a group of visitors from South Africa that included four adults and three children. In August 2017, I also participated in a tour of the museum organised for a group of approximately 50 students from the University of the Witwatersrand. However, on this occasion, no data could be collected as the ethical clearance process for my research had not been completed. This limited interaction with museum visitors can be viewed as one of the limitations of this research. Future studies that adopt a visitor-centred approach could help amend this methodological shortcoming.

3) Key informant interviews

The data generated through the analysis of the exhibition and the participant observation of the tours was complemented by key informant interviews with staff members of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre. Key informants included:

Interviewee's name	**Position**
Tshepo Letsoalo	Heritage Team Leader and Tour Guide
Victor Mokhine	Research Consultant and Tour Guide
Klaas Hobe	Tour Guide
Tilly Kokwane	Heritage Assistant

Similarly to Tshepo Letsoalo and Victor Mokhine, Tilly Kokwane also has a personal tie with Sophiatown. She was born in the suburb and grew up participating in the events and workshops organised by the Trevor Huddleston Memorial Centre. She started working at the Sophiatown Heritage Centre in January 2017 and, at the time of data collection, was the newest member of the staff. These four participants are directly responsible for the day-to-day running of the museum, hence their selection as key informants.

All interviews were conducted face-to-face at the Sophiatown Heritage Centre and happened at a time and date convenient for research participants. They followed a semi-structured format and were adapted according to the expertise of each informant. General themes included: the professional background of participants, the nature and scope of their work, general purpose of the museum, the process that goes behind the curatorial decisions and pedagogical methods implemented by the museum, and personal views on the topic of forced removals in South Africa. All responses were audio-recorded and fully transcribed with due permission.

The interviews were preceded by an informal conversation with the management of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre in the presence of director Tricia Sibbons, HR manager Violet Mohotloane, and Tshepo Letsoalo. This conversation allowed me to familiarize myself with the workings of the museum and to identify potential key informants. It also provided me with a source of questions for the interviews and helped me build rapport with the museum staff. As suggested by the management of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre, I also paid a visit to the Fietas Museum in Johannesburg and interviewed its founder and curator Salma Patel. This visit was important to expand my knowledge of forced removals and to understand both the strengths and limitations of different museum approaches to the subject. A visit to the District Six Museum in Cape Town in April 2017 also helped me prepare for this project.

Lens of analysis: Critical Pedagogy

The theoretical framework that informed the process of data analysis was critical pedagogy. Although commonly associated with the field of education, critical pedagogy has been applied in previous studies focusing on museums and can provide a useful lens for examining how these institutions perform an educational role (e.g. Hooper-Greenhill 1999; Lindauer 2007; Mayo 2013; Soudien 2008; Witcomb 2013).

The strength of critical pedagogy lies in both its ability to expose the relationship between power and education and its promise of achieving social transformation through critical thinking. It does so by asking three simple questions: *what*, *how*, and *in whose interest* is knowledge produced and disseminated (Lindauer 2007). These questions were also central to my research. In applying this framework, I then hoped to contribute to the understanding of museums as essential pedagogical spaces and interrogate their role in producing knowledge about forced removals in South Africa.

Defining critical pedagogy is not an easy task. Recent literature on the topic stresses that an attempt to describe the term could elicit 'various and probably irreconcilable answers' (Porfilio & Ford 2015: xv). Most scholars nonetheless agree that critical pedagogy can be broadly understood as an educational and political philosophy that

emerged in the last quarter of the twentieth century, mainly inspired by the work of Paulo Freire and his 1970 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Giroux 2012; Kincheloe 2012; Porfilio & Ford 2015). For the purpose of this research, I have concentrated on two tenets of critical pedagogy: first, the idea that 'education is inherently political' (Kincheloe 2008: 10); and second, the idea that education should invite a critical reflection on reality and thereby contribute to social change. While these ideas do not represent the entirety of the theory, they are key to understanding how power relations play out in educational processes and how knowledge production is a site of contestation and critical reflection.

Turning to the first point, critical pedagogy rejects the seeming neutrality of education (Freire 1996). Education, or knowledge production as a whole, is rather seen as an inherently political process. Here, the word 'political' does not simply refer to government or party politics, but rather conveys the idea that pedagogical approaches are intrinsically connected with and pervaded by power relations. As Macrine *et al*. note, 'pedagogy' is not just a classroom practice or an instructional method, but should rather be seen as a political commitment in that it proposes a 'theory of reality' or a theory of what counts as true (Macrine *et al*. 2010: 3). Far from the objective transfer of knowledge from teachers to students, education is thus seen as a reflection of the hegemonic discourses and power structures that operate in society.

Resting on this belief, one of critical pedagogy's main concerns is the way in which mainstream pedagogical approaches – while professing to be apolitical – 'sustain and reproduce systems and relations of oppression' (Porfilio & Ford 2015: xvi). Concealed by the veil of neutrality, these approaches naturalise the economic, political, and ideological social order and reproduce historical and structural inequalities (Macrine *et al*. 2010). Yet, precisely because education is political, it can also be a site of conflict and contestation, where alternative discourses and practices can emerge (Kincheloe 2008; Macrine *et al*. 2010; Porfilio & Ford 2015). As Freire explains, 'knowledge is not something that's made and finished'; it actually involves a constant 'action and reflection upon reality' (Freire 1985: 100). This understanding brings me to the second tenet of critical pedagogy – the belief that education should bring about critical reflection on reality and inspire emancipatory action.

Those who endorse critical pedagogy argue that there is an inextricable link between *what we learn* and *how we act* as individuals and social agents (Giroux in Tristán 2013). In other words, theory and practice, or reflection and action, cannot be regarded as two separate, anti-dialectical spheres. Resting on this assumption, critical pedagogy proposes an educational model that goes beyond simply cultivating the intellect and that includes the transformation of reality (Kincheloe 2008). Education, it is suggested, should not only be about learning how to read the *word* but also, and most importantly, should be about learning how to read the *world*, or becoming politically literate (Freire & Macedo 1987).

In practical terms, this means that critical educators do not treat students as mere 'containers' to be 'filled' with knowledge, but rather encourage them to think critically about their reality in order to change it (Freire 1996). Issues that are central to students' lives become the basis of the curriculum, replacing the foreign and standardised educational programmes employed by non-critical approaches (Kincheloe 2008: 10). At the same time, teachers 'relinquish their authority of truth

providers' and instead assume the position of problem-posers, encouraging students to constantly challenge the knowledge that is presented to them (Kincheloe *et al*. 2011: 165). Through this model, it is hoped, students can start to perceive themselves as historical subjects capable of transforming themselves and the world around them (Freire 1996). The purpose of a 'liberating education' is then to invite a critical reflection on reality and inspire students to act upon that reality in a positive way.

Applying this framework to the Sophiatown Heritage Centre

Building on these ideas, my research has sought to explore *how* and *in whose interest* the Sophiatown Heritage Centre conceptualises and produces knowledge about forced removals in South Africa. In particular, I have asked: does the knowledge produced by the museum work to reinforce an understanding that forced removals are 'a thing of the past', or does it rather invite the public to reflect upon the historical continuity of forced removals?

My approach draws on the work of Lindauer (2007), who has also situated her analysis of a museum exhibition within a critical pedagogy framework. Focusing on a 1997 exhibition at the Heard Museum in the United States, Lindauer set out to answer three questions: 'what, how, and in whose interest will knowledge be produced and disseminated?' She explains that:

> In response to the question of *what* knowledge will be disseminated, critical pedagogy prescribes 'critical content'. In response to questions of *how* knowledge will be produced, it endorses 'progressive pedagogical principles' and 'emancipatory authority' (…) When the three features are enacted simultaneously, critical pedagogy theoretically educates learners to actualise social justice, thereby addressing the question of whose interests will be served. (Lindauer 2007: 307-308)

'Critical content' broadly refers to modes of thought that present an alternative to hegemonic discourses. In the case of my research, this means identifying the main themes that emerge from the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's exhibition and asking whether they oppose, or confirm, the way we commonly perceive forced removals. 'Progressive pedagogical principles' refer to teaching techniques that promote dialogue and encourage a critical reflection on reality. This means asking whether the pedagogical methods adopted by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre (i.e. walking tours, interactive exhibitions, and Time Travel events) invite museum visitors to 'read the world' and reflect on contemporary issues. Finally, 'emancipatory authority' relates to the idea that educators (or museum professionals) can offer a language of hope and transformation, and ultimately instigate in their students a desire to change the world.

Importantly, by adopting this lens of analysis, I do not mean to suggest that the Sophiatown Heritage Centre (or the people who work there) can actively address or confront the current problem of forced removals in South Africa or that they even aspire to play such a role. However, inspired by the concepts of critical pedagogy, my methodological approach is based on the idea that memorial museums can, and often do, provide a space where critical consciousness can emerge.

2. A tour of the museum

With the goal of understanding *what* knowledge is produced at the Sophiatown Heritage Centre, and whether this knowledge invites museum visitors to think about the continuity of historical processes in South Africa, this chapter provides an analysis of the museum's permanent exhibition. Before delving into the analysis of the exhibition, however, I begin by reviewing the literature on memorialisation practices in Sophiatown and discussing the hegemonic representations that tend to dominate public imaginings of the suburb. While not meant to be comprehensive, this introduction can provide some insights into how Sophiatown has been commonly remembered and celebrated. As Lindauer (2007) notes, it is important to identify the myths that pervade the histories that we celebrate and the stories that we tell in order to understand how a 'critical content' can challenge these myths and present alternative discourses.

'What is happening in Sophiatown now?'

Sophiatown could be described, at first sight, as 'an unremarkable-looking suburb on the western edge of Johannesburg' (Erlank 2015: 26). Like many other working-class suburbs around the country, it has been described as a place where people go about their lives and face challenges like 'raising and educating children, earning a living, overcoming crime or finding ways to make a difference in shaping their community' (Thelen & Morgan 2013: ix). Take as an example the following extract where a current resident explains how she feels about living in Sophiatown:

> They ask me, 'What is happening in Sophiatown now?'
> And I reply, 'Actually nothing.' People just live there. Nothing is happening there. (Thelen & Morgan 2013: 138)

But this image may downplay the history and diversity of Sophiatown that make it a rather unusual place. 'Sophiatown' – understood here as an essentialised category – enjoys a near-mythical status in the minds of those who are familiar with its history and famous characters. The iconic suburb features prominently in the literature and in popular culture (Erlank & Morgan 2015; Knevel 2015) and instils curiosity and fascination in those who recall it as the 'cosmopolitan centre of intellectuals, radical politics, jazz, and gangsters' of the 1940s and 1950s (Magubane in Mattera 2009: xiii). From novels and play scripts to clothing labels and kitsch, Sophiatown is a source of inspiration and a powerful brand that reverberates across South Africa and beyond; more than anything, the suburb has become 'synecdoche' for forced removals and the township culture of the 20th century (Fink 2015).

Hegemonic representations of Sophiatown

Two representations tend to dominate public imaginings of this mythologised Sophiatown. The first paints the suburb as a 'multi-cultural' and 'vibrant black urbanity', almost like a rainbow nation of the past (Erlank 2015: 26-27). That is the Sophiatown of Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela, 'the little Chicago of Johannesburg', the land of the *tsotsi*, or simply 'Kofifi', as former residents used to call it (Mattera 2009: 50). The second representation highlights the forced removals of the 1950s and 1960s and the bulldozing of Sophiatown. Heavily armed police

officers, families being loaded onto trucks, demolition, and a defying graffiti boldly stating 'We won't move' are the main elements in this picture.

While the former representation is exalted by jazz lounges and fashion labels around the world – relying on what Fink (2015) calls the 'Sophiatown TM' – the latter is often remembered through memorialisation initiatives that commemorate the struggle against apartheid (Erlank 2015). No matter how simplistic, these representations serve a purpose and can, at the very least, honour the memories of former residents. They are also catered for a specific audience, which is more interested in the Sophiatown of the 'imagination' than that of here and now (Knevel 2015: 53).

The problem, however, as many authors have noted, is that these representations approach the history of Sophiatown with a totalising gaze, thereby obscuring or completely ignoring the everydayness and the complexity of the suburb (Erlank 2015; Erlank & Morgan 2015; Fink 2015). In this way, '[c]omplex layers of context and relationships' – the various Sophiatowns of the past and the present – are reduced to a metanarrative of the rise and fall of Sophiatown (Erlank & Morgan 2015: 3). It is as if the history of Sophiatown had abruptly ended with the forced removals of the 1950s, and everything that came after, or before the 1940s, did not matter; or as if Sophiatown existed in isolation, removed from its geographical and spatial surroundings.

These hegemonic representations have important implications for how we think about the continuity of historical processes. In particular, I suggest that they may play a role in how we understand and conceptualise forced removals in South Africa. It is thus essential to question what narratives are being produced and disseminated at the Sophiatown Heritage Centre, and whether these narratives confirm or challenge hegemonic representations of Sophiatown that are focused on the past. In the next section, I provide a tour of the museum paying attention to what is discussed and, by juxtaposition, what is hidden from view.

Analysis of the exhibition

The Sophiatown Heritage Centre operates in one of the few houses that survived the bulldozing of Sophiatown by the apartheid government. Situated on the corners of Toby Street and Edward Road, the house once belonged to Dr Alfred Bitini Xuma, a renowned South African physician and president of the ANC from 1940 to 1949. Dr Xuma commissioned and built the house in 1934, when Sophiatown was still a freehold area, and used it as his surgery and family home for over two decades. He lived there with his wife Madie Beatrice Hall Xuma, another important figure in the history of South Africa and the ANC. Despite the political and social status of the Xumas, the family was forced to sell their property and move out of Sophiatown in the late 1950s, when the area was declared 'white' under the Group Areas Act. Apart from their residence and another house in Toby Street, all residences in Sophiatown were completely demolished to give way to Triomf.

Perhaps for its political significance and aesthetic value, the Xumas' house has always been considered a landmark of Sophiatown. In the 1960s, *Drum* journalist Bloke Modisane remembered the house as the 'palatial home of Dr A.B. Xuma', contrasting it with the more mundane dwellings that made up the community (cited in Hannerz

2001: 163). Even today, although the house no longer contrasts with the other, equally spacious residences around the suburb, it still holds some symbolic value. In 1998, it was declared a national monument, and in 2007, was bought and restored by the City of Johannesburg to be converted into a museum. The 1,2 million rand purchase was part of an effort by the municipal government to revive Sophiatown and boost the tourist experience of Johannesburg (CoJ 2007).

For the past ten years, the house has functioned as a museum run by the Trevor Huddleston Memorial Centre. The original ceilings and the façade of the building were retained, allowing visitors to step back in time and have a feeling of what Dr Xuma's home looked like in the 1930s. Alongside unique architectural features, the space also offers permanent and changing exhibitions on the 'heritage and deep significance of past Sophiatown' relying on a mix of objects, narrations, media, and photos from the 1950s (Sophiatown the Mix 2018). The museum is currently split into seven sections, with each room focusing on a specific facet of Sophiatown. Between each room, spaces in the passages are also used to tell the history of the suburb, from its origins and famous characters to snippets of everyday life.

Idyllic garden: the origins of Sophiatown

The official tour of the museum begins in the garden of the house, where visitors are welcomed and introduced to the history of Sophiatown. Large and well-kept, the garden holds a special meaning to the Sophiatown Heritage Centre: it symbolises the encounter between 'the old' and 'the new' (or 'the mix' of Sophiatown). While the past is represented by Dr Xuma's original 1930 house, the present comes to life in the form of a modern building, recently designed to host the Trevor Huddleston Memorial Centre. Together, the two structures represent the new possibilities that the suburb holds, including a range of arts, cultural, heritage, and business-related activities.

It is within this 'idyllic garden', 'a place of storytelling and connection', that visitors are introduced to the history of Sophiatown (Sophiatown the Mix 2018). As the heritage team explains, Sophiatown was established towards the end of the nineteenth century by an Eastern European immigrant called Herman Tobiansky. In 1897, Tobiansky purchased a plot of land located about five miles west of Johannesburg's city centre and named it after his wife, Sophia. He planned to develop the plot into a 'desirable white suburb', but his plans fell apart when the Johannesburg city council decided to build a sewerage disposal next to the area (Narrations, August 2017). Failing to attract white buyers, 'resourceful Tobiansky' started to sell stands to non-whites families who dreamt of settling in this 'attractive suburb'. With the increasing demand for labour in Johannesburg and the restrictions placed on property rights elsewhere, Sophiatown started to grow; it was one of the only areas on the fringes of Johannesburg where non-whites were allowed to purchase land. By the middle of the twentieth century, the area had developed into a racially-mixed and overcrowded township, famous for its vibrant lifestyle and stereotyped characters.

This narration about the origins of Sophiatown sets the scene for the tour of the house. As visitors progress through the museum's interior, they start to get a sense of what Sophiatown was like in the 1940s and 1950s and how the suburb has transformed in the course of its history. At the end of the tour, the garden is revisited as a space of

reflection: what has changed in Sophiatown since it was first envisioned and created by Tobiansky over a century ago – and crucially, what has stayed the same?

Dr A.B. Xuma's room: a place of health, politics, and resistance

The first room of the museum is dedicated to Dr Xuma and is used to show what his surgery and private study looked like. The exhibit shows photos of Xuma and his family as well as narrations about his personal life and career, both as a medical doctor and as a politician. Three themes become apparent in this space: Dr Xuma's house was a place of health, politics, and resistance.

An examination bed displayed on the corner of the room reminds visitors that the house was not only used as a residence, but also as a medical space. Indeed, as visitors are informed, Dr Xuma named his property *Empilweni* – which roughly translates to 'health' or 'place of life' – and used the rooms at the back to see his patients. The written narrations prepared by the heritage team also stress the high qualifications of Dr Xuma, hinting at the 'black excellence' that prevailed in Sophiatown: Dr Xuma not only became 'the first Black South African to graduate with a PhD from the London School of [Hygiene and] Tropical Medicine' but was also 'the first and only western-trained medical doctor in Johannesburg'.

A second theme that emerges from this room is Xuma's political career, especially in his role as president-general of the ANC. He is remembered for revitalising the ANC and making the organisation more 'efficient and centralized', and for advancing the so-called 'Doctors Pact', an important step in the early struggle against racism (Narrations, August 2017). Despite these achievements, Xuma is also described as being 'moderate' and 'conservative', traits that eventually cost him his post as head of the ANC. In particular, the exhibit draws attention to the tensions that existed between him and the newly-formed ANC Youth League. For example, an anecdote extracted from Mandela's *Long Walk to Freedom* and reproduced in one of the display cases in the room reveals how Xuma expelled Sisulu, OR Tambo, and Mandela from his house one night following a disagreement over the future of the ANC. Xuma was adamantly opposed to the ANC Youth League's calls for mass actions and unceremoniously showed the trio out of his house at 11 p.m., closing the gate behind him.

This narration invites visitors to think of Xuma's house as an important place in the history of the country – a place that was witness to major political encounters. After all, "It was *here* that Dr Xuma invited the 'young lions' of the ANC" to discuss the future of the organisation and the country (Narrations, August 2017, emphasis added). Similarly, the house was also witness to Madie Hall Xuma's work as a women's rights activist. Visitors learn that the Young Women's Christian Association, an organisation that Madie Hall supported, met at the house over many years. The house is then described as 'a place of political meeting and activism for independence'.

A final theme that unfolds in the first room of the exhibition is that of resistance – resistance against demolition, oblivion, and even patriarchy, in the figure of Madie Hall Xuma. The house itself, standing alone in the face of demolition, can be considered a symbol of resistance against the apartheid government and their attempt to erase Sophiatown. The re-purposing and conversion of the house into an official heritage site also attests to its fight against time and oblivion. In the words of a visitor,

‘The museum is a testimony of perseverance and pride’ (Visitor’s Book, January 2017).

But more importantly, the exhibition highlights the resistance demonstrated by the residents of Sophiatown. Instead of being presented as passive victims of the forced removals, the Xumas, for example, are remembered as important agents in the history of the country. Dr Xuma is portrayed as an educated man, who managed to negotiate with the Native Resettlement Board the selling of his property – a negotiation that was unlikely in the South Africa of the 1950s. Likewise, Madie Hall is portrayed as a ‘highly educated’ social worker and politician, credited with reviving the ANC Women’s League, and a ‘leader among women’ (Narrations, August 2017). In this sense, and perhaps inadvertently, the exhibition introduces Sophiatown and its subjects by focusing on their strength, rather than their submission or destruction.

In its absent-presence – to borrow Sturken’s (2002) words[9] – the structures that did not survive the demolition of old Sophiatown also speak to the resilience of the township. Even though only a handful of buildings remain, Sophiatown continues to figure prominently in South Africa’s public imaginary. The walking tour of the suburb and the very existence of the museum confirm that there is always hope in the face of destruction – or confirm that something has remained despite the apartheid government’s attempt to erase Sophiatown and ‘triumph’ over its people.

A ‘vibrant, racially integrated community’

In the passage leaving Dr Xuma’s surgery, visitors are introduced to the so-called ‘spirit of Sophiatown’. Written narrations emphasise how Sophiatown was a ‘racially integrated’ and ‘supportive’ community – a place where people could live with ‘a measure of freedom not permitted anywhere else’ in the country. In particular, the exhibit focuses on the uniqueness of Sophiatown; the fact that every racial group was allowed to buy land and own properties in the area made Sophiatown particularly different from other communities across the country. According to the narrations that accompany the photos displayed in this section of the museum, Black, Coloured, Chinese and Indian families lived together in Sophiatown as a community and shared a space with ‘no fence’ or ‘superintendent’ (Narrations, August 2017).

This portrayal of Sophiatown as a ‘rainbow nation of the past’ – and the celebratory tones that undergird it – have been criticised for ignoring the complexities and everydayness of the suburb. It is true that Sophiatown was a racially mixed area, but also a challenging and dangerous place. As Mattera notes in his autobiography, the suburb was ‘a place where the poor were victims of subtle exploitation’ not only at the hands of whites, but also at those of Chinese, Indian, and in a few instances, African residents (Mattera 2009: 49). His testimony confirms that Sophiatown was not as harmonious and supportive as hegemonic representations of the township tend to suggest.

But according to former resident Victor Mokhine, who works as a tour guide and research consultant at the museum, it is important to emphasise the ‘living together’

[9] Sturken uses this expression in reference to the discussions that took place about how to memorialise the events of September 11 in New York City.

and ‘tolerance’ that prevailed in Sophiatown in the 1940s and 1950s. These notions help problematize and defy the common representation of townships (and black communities in general) as inherently violent spaces. He says:

> Like any other place, Sophiatown had different types of life; there was the violent side of it, and there was the pleasant type, but most of it was the pleasant type. (Personal communication, October 19, 2017)

Victor Mokhine also notes that this emphasis on notions of tolerance, understanding, and harmony allows visitors to understand that there is a possibility of realising the ‘rainbow nation’ they may envision. This rainbow nation, however paradoxical, was already a reality in Sophiatown according to him. Indeed, many visitors leave the museum feeling inspired and uplifted by the general sense of *Ubuntu* that seemed to exist in Sophiatown:

> The township that had a vibe and culture of proper ‘*Botho*’ – *Ubuntu*. Long live Kofifi. (Visitor’s Book, May 2016)

> I’m amazed at how the people here were all about unity, being yourself and most importantly expressing your true self. (Visitor’s Book, July 2016)

> ‘A jewel hidden away’. This place has so much to offer for nation building. (Visitor’s Book, March 2017)

Alongside references to racial integration and a sense of community, this part of the exhibition also focuses on the ‘vibrant’ lifestyle that distinguished Sophiatown and made it famous across the world. Visitors learn how the township produced some of South Africa’s most famous artists, writers, and politicians, and how it became known as the ‘Chicago of South Africa’. The narrations on the wall also highlight how this generation of stars produced by Sophiatown gave ‘pulse and style’ to the urban African culture that was emerging in the country.

This section of the exhibition thus serves as an introduction to the next three rooms of the museum, which explore the golden age of Sophiatown: in the first room, visitors hear about the great movie theatres, stars, and gangsters of old Sophiatown; in the second, they learn about *Drum* magazine and the famous journalists that used to work for the publication; and in the third, they listen to jazz records while looking at photos of world-class musicians produced by Sophiatown.

The Odin Cinema

At the height of its artistic production, Sophiatown had two cinemas – the classy and upmarket Odin, located on Good Street, and the less famous Balansky’s, on Main Road. With a seating capacity of over 1,100 spectators, the Odin was said to be the largest movie theatre on the African continent and became a landmark of Sophiatown (Mattera 2009). Not only did it screen famous American movies but also provided a venue for live stage performances and political meetings. Some of South Africans most famous musicians, including Hugh Masekela and Miriam Makeba, used to perform at the Odin. The cinema was also a source of inspiration for the *tsotsis* of Sophiatown, who derived their names and sense of style from American gang movies (Narrations, August 2017). A young boy at the time, Victor Mokhine remembers how

the Odin was always packed on Saturday nights; a mix of different people, from school teachers to real gangsters, would dress up to attend the midnight show and enjoy the music performances held at the venue (Personal communication, October 19, 2017).

Inspired by the artistic splendour that dominated Sophiatown in the 1940s and 1950s, one of the rooms of the museum is laid out as a movie theatre. Dimmed lights, padded seats, velvet curtains, and a long red carpet set up by the heritage team give visitors the impression that they are in a real movie theatre. A 20-minute documentary projected on the wall presents some of the iconic jazz stars produced by Sophiatown, such as Dolly Rathebe and Thandi Klaasen, and transports the audience to a different time and place. In the corner of the room, a stack of old film-rolls including titles such as *Double Indemnity*, *Angels with Dirty Faces*, *Cabin in the Sky*, and *The Street with No Name* add up to the atmosphere.

But once the light goes on, the gaze is inverted: the focus of the exhibit is no longer the stars of old Sophiatown but rather the everydayness of the township. The walls of the room are lined with photos of ordinary characters, such as 'Jane Dakile, a school teacher' or the Twalas, a 'well known and respected' family that was part of the community (Narrations, August 2017). Other photos include snippets of everyday life, from haircuts along the road to boxing gyms that were famous in the 1950s. These photos reveal how Sophiatown was, above all, an ordinary place.

As heritage team leader Tshepo Letsoalo explains, Sophiatown was 'a unique place, but it was an ordinary place at the same time'. According to him, the museum is cautious not to romanticise the past and forget about the ordinary characters that made up the community (Personal communication, October 17, 2017). During the walking tour of the suburb, visitors can also gain a sense of reality by visiting the Odin. The famous cinema that was once considered 'the pride of Sophiatown' no longer exists and is now replaced by an ordinary-looking residence (Narrations, August 2017). The only thing that remains is a peeling wall, which – as if haunted by the past – struggles to keep hold of its paint.

The hall of Drum

The passage leaving the movie theatre room is lined with iconic covers from *Drum* magazine as well as photos of famous journalists who used to work for the publication in the 1950s. Launched in 1951, *Drum* was a monthly magazine especially dedicated to urban black culture in South Africa. It relied on a mix of fiction, investigative reporting, political exposés, and short stories inspired by life in the township. With its innovative style and modern appeal, the magazine helped change the way black people were represented in the media and soon became one of the continent's leading publications (Hannerz 1994; Spector 2011).

Drum's all-star cast of journalists included names such as Henry Nxumalo, Nat Nakasa, Can Themba, Arthur Maimane, Casey Motsisi, Todd Matshikiza, Lewis Nkosi, Es'kia Mphahlele, and Bloke Modisane. Many of these writers went on to establish successful careers in the literary field and, today, continue to be celebrated in South Africa and abroad. The magazine also relied on an extraordinary team of photographers, including Jürgen Schadeberg, Bob Gosani, Peter Magubane, Ernest

Cole, and Alf Khumalo. Some of the photos that featured on the cover of the magazine – for example, the famous shot of Dolly Rathebe in a yellow two-piece bathing costume, or that of young Miriam Makeba performing in a recording studio in downtown Johannesburg (Spector 2011) – have become iconic in popular culture and are displayed today at the Sophiatown Heritage Centre.

Sophiatown and some of its characters provided a great source of inspiration for the journalists of *Drum*; gangsters, jazz stars, and shebeen queens featured prominently in the publication (Hannerz 1994). The slangy, gang-inspired *tsotsitaal* that was spoken in the streets of Sophiatown in the 1950s also gave rhythm to many stories published in the magazine. But *Drum* was more than a popular magazine that merely focused on entertainment and stereotyped township characters; it also produced some important political pieces, including a photo essay on the 1952 Defiance Campaign, a first-hand account of degrading conditions in the Johannesburg Central Prison, and an investigative report on the abuse of farm workers in Bethal (Spector 2011). The magazine also published a series of photos covering the forced removals and the demolition of Sophiatown. Jürgen Schadeberg and Bob Gosani's coverage of the forced removals are displayed at the Sophiatown Heritage Centre and form a central part of the museum's exhibition.

Tshepo Letsoalo notes that the *Drum* exhibit is one of the sections that people 'really marvel at' when they visit the museum (Personal communication, October 17, 2017). According to him, the '*Drum* boys' represented 'the best' in terms of the literature that South Africa had to offer in the 1950s. By displaying some of their work, the museum tries to honour the 'black excellence' that prevailed in *Drum*'s newsroom. At the same time, the journalists are presented in a light-hearted manner, reflecting the spirit that characterised the magazine's covers.

Jazz encounters

The third section of the exhibition representing the 'heyday' of Sophiatown is dedicated to music. The room is filled with a piano and an old microphone, and the walls are covered with photos of famous musicians who used to perform in Sophiatown in the 1950s. Among them, visitors can find saxophone 'genius' Kippie Moeketsi, trumpet legend Hugh Masekela, and 'blues queen' Dolly Rathebe (Narrations, August 2017). Masekela, in particular, is remembered with a sense of pride; tour guide Klaas Hobe recounts how the legendary musician received his first trumpet from Louis Armstrong, a gift organised by Father Trevor Huddleston.

The original cast of *King Kong*, a musical that premiered in South Africa in 1959 and achieved international fame, also receives special attention. A poster on the wall lists the names of all the actors and musicians that featured in the original production, including principals Miriam Makeba and Nathan Mdledle. Todd Matshikiza, the music composer of *King Kong*, is also honoured with a portrait.

Other highlights of the exhibit include an old music player and a selection of jazz records from the 1960s, including artists such as Duke Ellington, John Coltrane, Dave Brubeck, and The Dukes of Dixieland. While looking at the photos and objects on display, visitors can enjoy some jazz music playing in the background. The combination of audio and visual materials works to create a celebratory atmosphere

and gives a sense of reality to the exhibition. As one visitor has noticed: 'I love how real the place is, everything brings history back to life' (Visitor's Book, June 2016).

Beyond dancing halls and jazz performances, the exhibit also shows that music was present in the streets of Sophiatown. One of the photos displayed in the room portrays the traditional *Klopse* festival, a cultural festival celebrated on the 2nd of January by the so-called Cape Coloured community. The celebration involves a one-day street parade, commonly referred to as the *Tweede Nuwe Jaar* (or Second New Year), where minstrel troupes perform their typical *Ghoema* music style. Two barrel-shaped drums displayed on the corner of the room make reference to the music that marked the *Klopse* celebrations in old Sophiatown.

The main theme that emerges from this room of the exhibition is that music was more than a source of entertainment in old Sophiatown; it actually had the power to bring people together. As Victor Mokhine remembers, residents used to partake in different artistic events and celebrations, irrespective of their heritage or cultural background (Personal communication, October 19, 2017). Music then served as a bridge between the different communities of Sophiatown. Today, it continues to play the same role. The bi-monthly 'Jazz Encounters' organised at the Sophiatown Heritage Centre – which consist of live jazz performances by world-class musicians – are meant to attract a new crowd to the suburb and promote dialogue between past and present generations. Likewise, other artistic projects facilitated by the Centre, including book launches, plays, poetry, and music workshops, create a site of encounter for community members, former residents, and the general public.

Forced removals: legal apparatus, violence, destruction, relocation, and resistance

Quite different from the celebratory mood that prevails in the first section of the exhibition, the second part of the museum takes on a very serious tone and focuses on the forced removals and subsequent destruction of Sophiatown. To portray these events, the exhibition uses a mixture of photos, audio-clips, objects, as well as testimonials from former residents.

Five themes become apparent in this part of the exhibition. The first is the legal apparatus that enabled and structured the forced removals of 1955. The heritage team is very careful in placing Sophiatown within a wider political and historical context and in describing the body of laws that governed South Africa in the 1950s. As Tshepo Letsoalo explains, the forced removals of Sophiatown did not happen in a vacuum, but were rather the result of a series of laws and policies that were grounded on the idea of racial segregation and separate development (Personal communication, October 17, 2017). Especially important was the Natives Resettlement Act of 1954, which provided for the removal of 'Natives' from any areas within or next to Johannesburg. The Act also established the Natives Resettlement Board, which was entrusted with removing black residents from Sophiatown and resettling them in Soweto. In one of the photos displayed in the museum, visitors can see, for example, officials from the Natives Resettlement Board inspecting a backyard in Sophiatown right before residents started getting removed.

Apart from the legal aspect, the exhibit also highlights the rationale behind the removals: 'Sophiatown and all it represented was a direct challenge to apartheid

ideology' and in this sense had to be destroyed (Narrations, August 2017). This idea links the first part of the exhibition, which highlights the vibrancy and mixed character of Sophiatown, with the forced removals carried out by the Natives Resettlement Board from 1955 onwards. The tour of the room also introduces a new facet of Sophiatown, which focuses on the poverty and slum conditions that prevailed in the township. Different from the 'mansion' of Dr Xuma, photos show that many residents of Sophiatown lived in shacks or rented rooms in overcrowded yards. Such conditions were exploited by the apartheid government to justify the forced removals.

The second theme that emerges from the exhibition is the violent nature of the forced removals of Sophiatown. Violence did not only manifest itself in apartheid's laws and institutions but was also present at the implementation level, especially in the form of police brutality. Photos that form part of the exhibit show how 2.000 police officers entered Sophiatown in the early hours of February 9th 1955 (the first day of the removals) and started to evict people from their homes, throwing them out with all their belongings (Narrations, August 2017). Even though the removals were scheduled to start three days later, officials arrived ahead of time, suppressing any kind of resistance. Besides the element of surprise, police also relied on the element of fear; as the photos show, officials were heavily armed with Sten guns, rifles, and knobkerries, as though expecting some kind of confrontation. Screams playing in the background of the room add on to the atmosphere of violence.

The violent nature of the removals is also presented in a metaphorical way. One of the photo labels in the room highlights how 'people were thrown out *in the cold weather*' while police officers wore warm jackets (emphasis added). Here, even the weather acts as an aggravating factor in the suffering of those who were being removed from Sophiatown. Interestingly, this theme is also explored in the memories of Don Mattera, who describes how the '[r]ain, slow and deliberate, pattered down on the town' on the first day of the removals, while the sun, 'too moved' and 'perhaps too cowardly', 'hid its face behind grey clouds' (Mattera 2009: 142). The 'murder of Sophiatown' is another metaphor used to convey the idea of violence. An extract from Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me on History* reproduced on one of the walls of the exhibit describes how Sophiatown looked like one of its many victims after it was bulldozed: 'lying in the open gutters, a raisin in the smelling drains, dying of multiple stab wounds, gaping wells gushing forth blood' (Narrations, August 2017).

Connected to violence is the idea of destruction, which is presented in a quite literal manner. Tilly Kokwane, who works as a heritage assistant at the museum, notes that 'just going inside the room without narration speaks volumes' (Personal communication, October 19, 2017). Pieces of broken furniture are littered around the room, showing the complete disregard that officials had for the residents of Sophiatown and their belongings. Photos on the wall also make reference to the idea of destruction; they show scenes of deserted roads and families sitting in front of gutted houses, as if part of a post-apocalyptic world. By juxtaposition, a reference to Christ the King Church also reminds visitors of what was lost; the church is 'one of only four structures which survived the destruction of Sophiatown's buildings' (Narrations, August 2017).

The sudden change of mood in the exhibition also brings into context the disruption caused by the removals. The bulldozing of Sophiatown not only destroyed buildings

and personal possessions, but also disrupted lives, community relations, and livelihoods. This feeling is epitomised by a street sign that reads 'Triomf', which reminds visitors that the forced removals of Sophiatown were, more than anything, about destroying the human spirit. Indeed, in the words of Bloke Modisane, a long time resident of Sophiatown, '[s]omething in me died, a piece of me died, with the dying of Sophiatown' (Narrations, August 2017).

The fourth theme that unfolds from the exhibit is the forceful relocation of the residents of Sophiatown to different racially-designated areas. In one of the photos displayed in the room, it is possible to see 'some of the houses being built [in Meadowlands] for the 75.000 people to be evicted from Johannesburg's Western Areas' (Narrations, August 2017). The box-like houses portrayed in the photos stand in sharp contrast with the ideas of diversity and vibrancy that are highlighted in the other sections of the museum.

Victor Mokhine, only 11 years old at the time of the removals, was among those residents relocated to Meadowlands, about 10 kilometres southwest of Sophiatown. He recounts how the move caused 'a lot of suffering' for some people, especially in the first few years (Personal communication, October 19, 2017). According to him, most people could not afford to pay rent for their new houses, and some got evicted and sent to rural areas. Another problem was that the pass laws that governed South Africa at the time were harshly implemented in Meadowlands, causing a sense of insecurity in those who were accustomed to the relative freedom and racial integration of Sophiatown. The distance to Johannesburg's city centre and the lack of infrastructure in the relocation areas also placed a burden on those who were resettled in places like Meadowlands, Diepkloof, Eldorado Park, and Lenasia.

But relocation was not a burden for everyone. As the tour guides point out, some families did not oppose the removals because the move represented a chance of getting a new house. Again, this idea is also explored in the broader literature on Sophiatown. Mattera for instance, mentions how 'the promise of four-roomed houses doused the spirit of revolution' in many residents who lived in 'horrible conditions' in Sophiatown (Mattera 2009: 140). Similarly, Bob Gosani describes the 'mixed feelings' demonstrated by the residents of Sophiatown when the removals started in February 1955 (cited in Mutloatse & Masiza 2005: 30). Above all, there seemed to be a feeling of uncertainty about the relocations: 'What Will Happen in the Western Areas?', Gosani asks.

The final theme that becomes apparent in the exhibit is the resistance against the forced removals of Sophiatown and the apartheid regime. The theme is first explored through the history of Regina Brooks, a white woman who fought in the South African courts in the late 1950s to be reclassified as 'Coloured' and live among non-white people. Brooks is presented as a strong woman who stood up against the law and the social norms on interracial relationships. The idea of resistance is further explored with references to prominent political figures, such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Oliver Tambo, Steve Biko, and Chris Hani. Special attention is devoted to Father Trevor Huddleston, who is described as 'a major voice in opposition to apartheid and in standing up for the rights of the community' of Sophiatown (Narrations, August 2017).

Besides references to important political figures, the theme of resistance is also explored in relation to famous places in Sophiatown that symbolise the struggle against apartheid. The Freedom Square of Sophiatown, for example, which used to be located on the corner of Victoria Road and Morris Street, is described as a famous place of political meetings in the 1950s. Similarly, the Oak Tree in Bertha Street, which no longer exists, is presented, among other things, as a place of meeting for religious leaders and activists. The Odin cinema as well is recalled as a 'venue for mass political meetings by organizations like the African National Congress' (Narrations, August 2017). All these landmarks (or what remains of them) are included in the walking tour of the area. But the most famous symbol of defiance against the forced removals of Sophiatown is presented through a photo taken by Jürgen Schadeberg in 1955. The photo, which is reproduced in near-life size in the foyer of the museum, shows a graffiti reading 'We Won't Move'. It is with this slogan that the tour of the museum comes to an end.

Discussion

An analysis of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's exhibition in this chapter has revealed that the museum dedicates most of its resources towards reconstructing the Sophiatown of the 1940s and 1950s and celebrating its spirit.

Creating a presence in the face of absence

This focus on the past can perhaps be explained by the challenge of creating a presence in the face of absence (Sturken 2002). Unlike other sites across South Africa that remained largely undeveloped following the forced removals of its residents, Sophiatown was flattened to the ground and completely replaced by a new white suburb. Only a handful of buildings survived the demolition and there was a deliberate attempt on the part of the apartheid regime to erase all physical traces of old Sophiatown. This means that the preservation of historical or partially-destroyed buildings as a form of memorialisation was not an option in Sophiatown.

The preservation of 'emptiness' as a reminder of *what once was* and a symbol of *what might be* was not an option either. In contrast to the suburbs of District Six and Fietas, Sophiatown was redeveloped following its destruction, and a new community, with a history of its own, was formed. Former residents of Sophiatown were also never given the opportunity to return, which means that their presence in the area can only be realised, today, through their memories. By reconstructing a world that is no longer – and thereby producing a kind of presence – the Sophiatown Heritage Centre is successful in preserving the memories of former residents and ensuring that the crimes perpetrated by the apartheid regime are not forgotten.

Presenting alternative narratives

In its reconstruction of the past, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre has also taken important steps in pushing beyond some of the discourses that tend to dominate public representations of Sophiatown. The museum is specially concerned about not romanticising the history of the suburb, and exposing some of its complexities and everydayness. This concern is exemplified in the portrayal of former residents as a diverse group, rather than a mass of victims with no agency, as well as in the

presentation of Sophiatown through the eyes of 'ordinary' residents, such as Victor Mokhine, Tshepo Letsoalo, and Tilly Kokwane.

The heritage team is also careful not to paint Sophiatown as a utopian community. Even though most parts of the exhibition are dedicated to celebrating the 'vibrant' and 'mixed' character of old Sophiatown, tour guides do not gloss over the fact that poverty, violence, and gangsterism prevailed in the suburb. This indicates that they are aware of the critiques raised in the literature and are willing to embrace some of these critiques to present alternative narratives.

A missing chapter: the historical continuity of forced removals in South Africa

There is, however, a gap that could be further explored by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre in terms of presenting a critical content. The permanent exhibition is still very much focused on the past and does not look beyond the geographic space of old Sophiatown. In this sense, it 'hides from view' the broader history of forced removals in Johannesburg and South Africa.

One way of countering this shortfall would be to draw on the historical literature available on Sophiatown and show that the suburb was, from its inception, intertwined with the politics of forced removals in other areas of Johannesburg. An example that could be used is the fact that as early as 1907, white residents of Sophiatown were already petitioning for the forced removal of 'Natives' from the suburb and asking for their relocation to a specific 'Kaffir Location'. Their call was inspired by the forced removals of black residents happening in other areas of Johannesburg (Knevel 2015: 55). Similarly, in the 1930s, the Johannesburg City Council proclaimed the city as 'white', allowing municipalities to expropriate what was classified as 'slum land' and to clear mixed-raced townships (Knevel 2015: 63). Sophiatown became an important refuge for those being evicted, but not for long. By exploring these facts, the museum could expose the 'normalcy' of forced removals throughout the history of Johannesburg and show that urban engineering policies based on racial segregation were already a reality in the country years before the National Party came into power.

Likewise, the museum could expand its geographical scope and draw important parallels between the history of Sophiatown and that of other sites of forced removals in South Africa. The cases of District Six, Fietas, and Cato Manor – to name just the most famous ones – could be used to show that Sophiatown was embedded within broader policies of urban planning and displacement during apartheid.

Another area that could be further explored by the museum is the connection between apartheid's forced removals and current cases of displacement in South Africa. Themes that emerge in the museum's exhibition and that are often recurrent in stories about removals – such as the legality behind evictions, the use of violence by law enforcement officials, and the resistance displayed by those who are being evicted – could provide a bridge to discuss similarly-situated contemporary issues. By establishing clear links between the content of the museum and the present reality of viewers, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre has the potential to encourage visitors to reflect on the continuity of forced removals across different times and places.

The next chapter turns to some of the strategies already in place in Sophiatown to encourage museum visitors to make connections between the past and the present. I argue that by inviting the public to 'read the world' and question their current reality, these strategies can invert the 'backward gaze' privileged by the museum's permanent exhibition.

3. Critical education in Sophiatown

The principle that guides the arts, culture, and heritage programmes of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre is '*Ek Sê!*'. The expression originates from Afrikaans and can roughly be translated to 'I say'. Those who are not familiar with the goals of the museum may wonder why they would adopt such a curious expression to define their activities. But the answer becomes clear once the walking tour of Dr Xuma's house starts: the idea is that visitors are not just spectators in the museum space, but are rather encouraged to share their stories, engage with the local scene, and 'have a say'. As director Tricia Sibbons has emphasised, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre is more than a museum in the traditional sense; it is actually a *place of encounter*, where people can interact with one other and possibly discover themselves in a new light (Sibbons in Douglas 2015).

Pedagogical methods employed by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre

In order to create a place of encounter and encourage visitors to play an active role in the life of the museum, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre has adopted three pedagogical methods: walking tours, interactive exhibitions, and once-off activities known as 'Time Travel' events.

In this chapter, each of these methods will be expanded upon and analysed in terms of their potential to enact a critical pedagogy and encourage museum visitors to question the social world in which they exist. The following questions will guide this exploration: To what extent do the pedagogical methods employed by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre create a dialogic environment and cast museum visitors as active participants in their learning experience? Are these methods structured around posing questions and encouraging visitors to look beyond the walls of the museum? Do they inspire visitors to both 'read the word' and 'read the world' – that is, to learn about the past of South Africa while also reflecting on its current reality?

By exploring these questions, I ultimately intend to interrogate the extent to which the Sophiatown Heritage Centre allows visitors to perceive and critically reflect on the historical continuity and contemporary prevalence of forced removals in South Africa.

Walking tours

The walking tour offered by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre serves three main purposes. First, it allows visitors to interact with members of the heritage team and to interrogate the knowledge being imparted by them. As tour guide Klaas Hobe puts it, 'the importance of having a guide is that at least you can ask questions' (Personal communication, November 2nd, 2017). Indeed, the importance of interaction between guide and visitor was made clear to me on my first visit to the Sophiatown Heritage Centre. Tour guide Tshepo Letsoalo stated that our walking tour was not supposed to feel like a lecture, but rather as a dialogue. I was encouraged to challenge him, ask questions, and contribute as much as possible with my own reflections and previous knowledge.

This mode of interaction was observed in all the tours that I joined throughout the research process. While each of the three guides who work at the museum maintains

their own style, all of them seem to be aware of the importance of interacting with visitors and motivating them to question the content of the tour. As Klaas Hobe admits, they do not have the answer to all the questions that may arise during the tour, hence the importance of receiving feedback and encouraging the public to challenge the stories being told by the 'experts' (Personal communication, November 2nd, 2017).

This approach indicates that the tour guides who work at the Sophiatown Heritage Centre put great emphasis on creating an inquiry-driven and dialogic environment and encouraging visitors to be actively invested in their learning experience. It further suggests that they strive to break with the 'vertical patterns' of traditional education (Freire 1996: 61) by offsetting some of the inherent power imbalances that exist between 'teachers' and 'students', or guides and visitors (Breunig 2005: 115). They do so by relinquishing their authority as truth providers and by renouncing their position as the sole producers of knowledge in the museum space (Kincheloe *et al*. 2011).

Second, by offering walking tours, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre is able to enact what Witcomb describes as 'pedagogy of feeling' (cited in Message & Witcomb 2015). Instead of relying solely on discursive modes of interaction – such as text, interpretive aids, or narrations – the museum encourages visitors to experience Sophiatown through their *bodies* and *emotions*. This is achieved by the process of physically walking through the suburb, observing and becoming a part of the local scene, as well as engaging with members of the community. For example, at various points during the tour, guides will ask participants to observe the current landscape of Sophiatown and contrast it with the Sophiatown that is shown in the pictures and stories at the museum. This 'embodied' experience – which literally transcends the space of the exhibition – allows visitors to gain different perspectives and immerse themselves in the history and life of the suburb.

In addition, the walking tour gives visitors a chance to interact with the local community and have a personal encounter with residents of Sophiatown. Most of the members of the heritage team either live or have lived in Sophiatown and can provide first-hand accounts of life in the area. Victor Mokhine, for example, is a former resident who was forcibly removed to Meadowlands when he was 11 years old. He treats visitors to detailed, and often emotional, accounts of life in the suburb, including stories about the Odin cinema, his old house in Good Street, as well as recollections of the first day of the removals, when mounted police officers entered Sophiatown and began loading people's belongings onto trucks.

The personal encounter with a former resident tends to leave a strong impression on those who visit the museum. Several visitors comment on how they enjoy looking at Sophiatown through the eyes of an insider and the way in which national history merges with personal history. For example, one visitor has noticed: 'yesterday we visited the Apartheid Museum, but it is so interesting to visit the real place and have all the comments and stories from an insider (Visitor's Book, April 2017).

These observations indicate that those who work at the Sophiatown Heritage Centre are aware of the importance of adopting a holistic approach to education and exploring modes of learning that are not restricted to the cognitive or the ideational.

Physical and emotional dimensions are seen as integral parts of the learning experience. Emotions, in particular, play a key role in the way in which the museum produces knowledge. As Tshepo Letsoalo explains, a visit to Sophiatown can invoke in people many different feelings, such as guilt or pride; what is important, however, and what the museum tries to achieve, is to inspire visitors to reflect on those feelings once they go back home. In a nutshell, he concludes, 'what we want is for people to be *conscious of self* once they are here' and to learn from this affective and embodied experience (Personal communication, October 17, 2017).

Finally, the walking tour offered by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre gives visitors a chance to get actively involved in the creation of the goals and expectations of their learning experience. Each tour is unique, and the guides place great emphasis on customising the content and style of the tour according to the specific interests and aspirations of participants. Klaas Hobe notes, for example, that they always have to 'go the extra mile' and be prepared to identify themes that relate to the visitors' universe. After all, he says, 'you are not going to tell the same old stories each and every time' (Personal communication, November 2nd, 2017).

Tshepo Letsoalo also notes that because Sophiatown has so many layers and possibilities, it is important to create a tailored experience and place the interests of the visitors at the centre of their learning experience:

> Sophiatown has so much to offer to people. For instance, a person would come and say, 'I want to come and do a tour or a research tour about the music in Sophiatown, or the lifestyle of Sophiatown, or the gangsters here in Sophiatown'. We try to see how we can manipulate whatever that we do to suit the potential people that will be coming on site. (Personal communication, October 17, 2017)

This approach broadly challenges the idea that education, or knowledge production, can pre-exist the encounter between 'teachers', 'students', and the reality in which they are inserted. It is precisely in this encounter and in this exchange that knowledge and new forms of knowing are rooted and actualised in the Sophiatown Heritage Centre. At the same time, the tour guides who work at the museum seem to endorse, perhaps unconsciously, one of the basic principles of critical pedagogy: that the content and format of education is not bound, ready-made or externally-imposed; it is rather found in the reality, experiences, and particularities of the students (hooks 1994; Kincheloe 2008).

Looking beyond

These findings suggest that the walking tour offered by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre puts into practice some of the key principles espoused by critical pedagogy. Not only does it allow the public to play an active role in their learning experience, but it also creates an inquiry-driven and dialogic environment. More importantly though, the process of walking through the suburb and engaging with the local scene allows visitors to *look beyond the walls of the museum* and to observe – through their minds, bodies, and emotions – the reality that surrounds it.

This 'looking beyond' could be further explored by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre – and other museums that commit themselves to the purpose of 'unveiling the present' –

to encourage the public to read into the urban landscape and, hopefully, gain new perspectives on spatial segregation in contemporary South Africa. In particular, tour guides could use some of the features of the local scene to raise questions about how the urban space is defined and occupied, and how these processes may define who belongs (or does not belong) in the suburb or in the city.

For example, in the context of Sophiatown, the fenced-in properties, security features, and snarling dogs that prevail in the suburb's landscape could serve as starting points for conversations about spatial segregation and who is included (or excluded) from new wealth and security enclaves in Johannesburg (Thelen & Morgan 2013). Similarly, the graffitied walls that stand just a few metres from the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's entrance could provide an interesting prompt for conversations about the use of art as a form of urban resistance and reclamation (Walsh 2013).[10] Even the bicycle lanes that now form part of the landscape of Sophiatown could be used as a platform for exploring questions of urban development and access to the city.

Interestingly, these urban features tend to naturally catch the attention of those who take part in the walking tour around Sophiatown and, oftentimes, spark more interest in the public than the tales of the old days. It is not uncommon, for example, to observe some of the participants of the tour marvelling at the pieces of graffiti in Toby Street or getting distracted by the sound of construction work or snarling dogs along the way. By not exploring this initial interest and privileging a gaze that focuses on the past, museum professionals can miss an opportunity to establish important connections between the past and the reality of viewers.

Interactive exhibitions

In addition to walking tours, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre organises a range of interactive exhibitions that are designed to invite the visitors to 'have a say' in the life and content of the museum and to engage with one another. These exhibitions are displayed in the foyer of the museum and usually change according to the events on the South African calendar.

In September 2017, for example, as part of the celebrations of South Africa's Heritage Month, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre reserved a space where visitors could share their views on the history and heritage of the country. One specific exhibit invited visitors to answer the following open-ended questions: 'what events or people would you include in a people's history of Sophiatown' and 'what is South Africa's heritage'? The answers were written on post-it notes, which were pinned to a space above the exhibit thus becoming a part of it. Another exhibit gave visitors the choice

[10] Walsh (2013) draws an interesting parallel between graffiti and urban displacement. She introduces her paper by calling attention to a piece of graffiti that sits on the rooftop of a fancy new building in Johannesburg's Maboneng Precinct. The graffiti – which reads 'We won't move' – makes a direct reference to the slogan adopted during the forced removals of Sophiatown in the 1950s. She suggests that the painting asks for at least two readings: it might have been painted by those who were being displaced by the new developments in Maboneng; or most likely, it was painted by the developers and new occupiers of the precinct, as a form of reclaiming their presence in Johannesburg's inner-city. This provides a case in point for how graffiti can open up conversations about spatial segregation and forced removals in contemporary South Africa.

of ‘Yes’, ‘No’, or ‘Maybe’ when reacting to the following statement: ‘I feel like my experience as a South African is represented in modern South African heritage’.

By creating a platform for the exchange of ideas and emotions, these exhibits not only allow visitors to actively engage with the subject matter of the exhibition, but also encourage them to interact *with one another*. Through this interaction, visitors can get exposed to different views and possibly renew their reflections in the reflections of others. It is interesting to notice, for example, how some visitors may define South Africa’s heritage as ‘the celebration of different cultures, through dance, food and clothes’, while others may think that the answer is ‘not clear so far’ or that ‘South Africa’s true heritage has not been discovered yet’ (Analysis of the exhibition, October 2017). By comparing and contrasting their own answers with that of other participants, visitors can challenge their views and thereby construct new interpretations.

It is also interesting to notice how this type of exhibit allows participants to engage with people of different backgrounds in a way that walking tours usually do not. During walking tours, visitors can only get exposed to the views of the guide or the views of those who form part of the visiting group. By contrast, interactive exhibitions span across different visits and, in this sense, allow participants to interact with past and present reflections, as well as the reflections of diverse groups. My personal experience can help illustrate this point. While observing the above-mentioned interactive comment panel on the history and heritage of South Africa, one comment in particular caught my attention. It stated the following: the person who should be included in a people’s history of Sophiatown is ‘my grandmother, who lived in Triomf then and in Sophiatown now’. This comment – which was written, I suppose, by someone whose family relocated to Triomf during the apartheid era – allowed me to engage with a view that I might not have encountered by simply interacting with other foreign tourists, like myself, during a walking tour. The comment also inspired me to think about the importance of including the current residents of Sophiatown as well as their descendants in the museum space – a view that I had only encountered in the literature. Thus, by creating an open-ended platform of engagement, interactive exhibitions can connect a broader range of participants and take the learning experience at the museum to different, and oftentimes unexpected, directions.

In a similar way, interactive exhibits can also set off a ‘chain reaction’ and encourage visitors to engage in new and alternative conversations that fall beyond the scope of mainstream exhibitions. Each visitor’s contribution feeds into the next and opens possibilities for debates that might not even have been envisioned by the museum staff themselves. For example, while observing a similar, open-ended comment panel at the District Six Museum, I was surprised to see the number of comments that complemented each other and related to one particular topic: the forced removals in Palestine. Although the museum’s permanent exhibition did not make any direct references to cases of displacement outside of South Africa, many visitors seemed to draw a connection between the forced removals of District Six and the current situation in Palestine, perhaps inspired by one initial comment relating to the topic. This comes to show how interactive displays can serve as a catalyst for dialogue and bring to the forefront topics that would normally fall outside the scope of more permanent and all-embracing exhibitions.

Creating new zones of interaction

These observations become important when we think about the role of museums in stimulating critical reflection and creating diverse zones of interaction. As Hooper-Greenhill notes, from a critical pedagogy perspective, museums are not to be understood as 'monolithic and unchanging' institutions (Hooper-Greenhill 1999: 22). Instead, they should be seen as 'sites of multiple and heterogeneous contact zones', where different voices, histories, and experiences intersect and intermingle.

Drawing on this idea, I argue that interactive exhibitions can provide one way of establishing 'contact zones' and allowing museum visitors to engage with different views of the world. They can also allow visitors to read into each other's realities and thereby challenge their own reality. A comment board about contemporary forced removals in Palestine, for example, can encourage readers to think about where else in the world forced removals are happening or where else *in their reality* forced removals are happening. Similarly, a comment panel about forced removals in South Africa may inspire readers to reflect on new forms of forced removals, and how they differ or coincide with what happened during apartheid. Even the following comment, which remains 'hidden' in the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's Visitor's Book, could inspire other visitors to establish links between old Sophiatown and other cases of displacement around the world: 'Sophiatown in the USA was every city where black Americans lived – it was called urban renewal – we called it black removal' (Visitor's Book June 2017).

Time Travel events

The final method employed by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre is the so-called 'Time Travel event'. This method was officially adopted by the museum in 2017, but will only start being implemented in 2018. The analysis that follows is thus based on the current literature available on the topic, as well as on examples from different contexts where the method has been implemented. This analysis will then be complemented by the discussions that I have had with staff members of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre, and their aspirations and expectations around the method's implementation.

Overview and implementation in a different context

A Time Travel event is a pedagogical activity that entails the role-playing (or the dramatization) of a historical event at the site where it happened. It is usually carried out by a group of students or members of a community, under the supervision of school teachers or museum practitioners. As the name suggests, the method requires participants to use their creativity to *travel back in time* in order to gain a better understanding of history and learn from this embodied experience.

The Time Travel methodology was developed in 1986 by the Kalmar County Museum, in Sweden, and started as a way of incorporating the study of local history into the school curriculum (Hunner & Westergren 2011; Sole 2011). After a period of experimentation, the methodology was adopted by different educational institutions across Sweden and later expanded to several countries throughout the world. In South Africa, the methodology was introduced in 2006 by Bridging Ages, an international

organisation that promotes the use of local heritage and history as a platform for learning. Today, different institutions around South Africa – including museums, heritage centres, and schools – continue to adopt the Time Travel methodology as a tool for education and community-building (Bridging Ages 2018).

The main purpose of Time Travel is to allow participants to 'experience' the past while debating and reflecting on themes that are relevant to their present reality. The activity usually involves seven basic steps (Hunner & Westergren 2011; Sole 2011):

1. Participants select a historical event (or a 'scenario') that can be re-enacted through a role-playing exercise. Any historical event – such as a strike, a public meeting, or a trial – can be the focus of the activity, 'as long as it has a story to tell' (Sole 2011: 31).
2. Students research the scenario that was selected and prepare a series of questions that connect the historical event with contemporary issues.
3. Students 'read the landscape' or the historical site where the event happened. This can be done, for example, by trying to imagine what the site was like in the past or by engaging with members of the community that participated in the historical event;
4. School teachers or museum practitioners involved in the project take part in training sessions to prepare for the role-playing exercise;
5. In the context of schools, the historical event (or the time period under study) is integrated into the school curriculum;
6. Role-playing exercise: participants normally dress up in costumes and engage in role-playing activities relating to the historical event. They perform these activities while discussing key questions that connect the past with the present.
7. The final step is commonly referred to as the 'reflective dialogue', whereby students and educators reflect on the activity and discuss ways of applying some of the lessons in their reality.

In a Time Travel event conducted by local schools in Potchefstroom in 2008, for example, the chosen historical scenario was a public meeting that took place in the township of Ikageng in 1986. The public meeting was organised by members of the community and revolved around their frustrations with the apartheid system and the state of emergency that prevailed in South Africa in the mid-1980s. To recreate this scenario, participants in the Time Travel event engaged in a series of role-playing activities, such as preparing speeches, making placards, singing freedom songs, and shouting slogans of the time. Some of the key questions that guided the exercise were: 'What are our grievances', 'Can this township be developed in spite of all the problems with electricity, running water, infrastructure, violence and unemployment', and 'Where do we go from here' (Hunner & Westergren 2011: 127)? The aim of the pedagogical activity was not only to allow the students to learn about Ikageng's past struggles – and thus place themselves in the shoes of those who participated in the historical event – but also to make them think about some of the problems that persist in the community today. In this sense, the questions that guided the activity related both to the past and the present of Ikageng.

As this example illustrates, the Time Travel methodology is premised on the idea that history is not only found in textbooks or in the classroom space. Rather, it is found in 'someone or some place or event' that we know (Hunner & Westergren 2011: 128).

For instance, instead of reading *about* the struggles of Ikageng in a history book, the students who participated in the Time Travel event described above were encouraged to read *into* the reality that surrounds them.

Drawing on this understanding, I argue that Time Travel events can be a way of enacting a critical pedagogy. In particular, the method encourages participants to unveil the reality in which they are inserted – or in Freire's words, to 'read the world' *with which* and *in which* they find themselves (Freire 1996: 64). Significantly, those who endorse Time Travel note that one of the basic steps involved in the preparation for the exercise is to 'read the landscape' in which the activity will be carried out (Hunner & Westergren 2011; Sole 2011). This means using the landscape as a 'source of information about the past', much like a history book (Sole 2011: 33).

Moreover, both Time Travel and critical pedagogy understand education as a process that involves *action* and *reflection*. One of Time Travel's key principles is that the act of time travelling cannot be complete without a 'reflective dialogue' whereby participants evaluate their experience. As Hunner and Westergren note, 'learning [in Time Travel] happens both by *doing* and *reflection*' (Hunner & Westergren 2011: 125, emphasis added). This understanding is very similar to the notion of 'praxis' put forward by Freire and further developed by other proponents of critical pedagogy. Praxis, as Freire suggests, is 'reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it' (Freire 1996: 33). In other words, the unveiling and transformation of the world cannot happen through an intellectual effort alone nor be reduced to the level of action. It is brought about by the 'authentic union of practice and theory', or action and reflection (Freire 1985: 87).[11] Importantly, the elements of action and reflection exist simultaneously, in an ever-evolving relationship. In the case of Time Travel, in particular, participants start with an abstract idea (or theory) around a historical event, translate this theory into purposeful action through the role-playing exercise, reflect on their experience, and incorporate this reflection into practice by discussing ways of changing their present reality.[12]

Time travelling in Sophiatown

After laying the theoretical basis of the Time Travel methodology, discussing how it is been actualised in the context of Ikageng, and drawing some parallels between the methodology and critical pedagogy, I now turn to its implementation in the specific context of Sophiatown.

The Sophiatown Heritage Centre is still in the planning phase of the Time Travel methodology, but those who work at the museum already have some ideas for future events. According to Tshepo Letsoalo, one of the ideas is to partner with local schools and develop role-playing exercises that recreate the Sophiatown of the 1950s. As he proposes, school learners from the area could perhaps engage in dancing or cooking

[11] As Freire notes, '[c]ut off from practice, theory becomes a simple verbalism. Separated from theory, practice is nothing but blind activism' (Freire 1985: 156).

[12] Note that this scheme, which is inspired by the work of Breunig (2005) on the implementation of critical pedagogy in the classroom space, is used by way of illustration. As Freire points out, his defence of praxis 'implies no dichotomy by which this praxis could be divided into a prior stage of reflection and a subsequent stage of action. Action and reflection occur simultaneously' (Freire 1996: 109).

activities, or impersonate different characters of old Sophiatown. The use of props, such as a costume, a song, or a time-specific type of food, would facilitate the exercise and help participants feel like they travelled back to the Kofifi of the 1950s. Another idea is to invite school learners or current residents of Sophiatown to recreate, through dramatization, the days leading up to the forced removals of 1955. In this scenario, participants could re-enact some of the events that occurred before the removals, such as community meetings or resistance campaigns (Personal communication, October 17, 2017).

No matter the historical scenario though, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's team emphasise the importance of remaining faithful to some of the basic principles of Time Travel. First, it is important that the role-playing exercise adopts a multifaceted and bottom-up approach. As Tshepo Letsoalo notes:

> Most of the time, people will hear a one-sided narration of a story. In Time Travel, what [we] do is to show [different sides of the same story]. For instance, [in the case of forced removals], we will show the people that were *for* the removals, the people that were *against* the removals, the politicians, the people within the community, and other things that were happening around, so that there is a coming together of forces talking about it. (Personal communication, October 2017)

This view reinforces one of the key principles of the Time Travel methodology: that education should not simply reinforce hegemonic narratives or focus on famous historical figures. Rather, it should also include 'ordinary' people (Sole 2011: 32) as well as the stories that are often 'hidden' or 'forgotten' in the public discourse (Hunner & Westergren 2011: 125).

Those who work at the Sophiatown Heritage Centre also note that the role playing exercise should revolve around meaningful conversations that relate the past to the present. As Tshepo Letsoalo puts it, the main goal of Time Travel is to inspire participants to ask themselves: 'how can we make heritage applicable to everyday life' and how can we 'move forward' based on the lessons of the past (Personal communication, October 17, 2017)? In this sense, it is essential that all the activities relating to time travelling be coupled with a reflective session, where learners and educators can think about how they can apply what they have learnt in their current reality.

The potential of Time Travel in unveiling contemporary forced removals

Precisely because Time Travel can help learners reflect on their current reality, the methodology can serve as a platform for exposing and exploring cotemporary forced removals in South Africa. An event conducted in 2017 in Krugersdorp, for example, illustrates how this goal has already been achieved. Participants (which included students from a local school as well as staff members from the Krugersdorp Museum and the Sophiatown Heritage Centre) were asked to dramatize a court case relating to the eviction of the Dadoo family from their business premises in 1919.

The Dadoos went to court almost 100 years ago to challenge their eviction and to confront some of the laws and regulations that prevented the Indian community living in South Africa from owing businesses in Krugersdorp at the time. The key questions

that guided the role-playing exercise were: 'Do we accept people from other countries in our town and also as businessmen' and 'How to integrate people of different ethnic groups and migrant labours in the town' (Bridging Ages 2018)?

Through exploring these questions, the participants were given a chance to reflect on questions of racial segregation, forced removals, and xenophobia in the past. But more importantly, they discussed how these issues might persist in contemporary South Africa. According to Sophiatown's heritage assistant Tilly Kokwane, who participated in this Time Travel event, participants were able to make connections between the past and the present:

> After the role-playing exercise, the students were asked what they had learnt. They said that there is no difference [between what happened in Krugersdorp in the past] and what is happening in South Africa today. They managed to draw a lot of connections between the past and the present. They also noted that it was easier to [re-enact the historical event] because it is [still] happening. (Personal communication, October 19, 2017)

A similar approach could be used by different memorial museums in South Africa to inspire local students to think about how the forced removals of the past may relate to new forms of removals happening today in the country.

Conclusion

The three pedagogical methods employed by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre illustrate how memorial museums can enact a critical education and invite the public to 'read the word' around them. Specifically, these methods can create new zones of interaction, encourage visitors to look beyond the walls of the museum, and allow learners to see themselves as historical subjects capable of challenging their views and the reality in which they exist. I have argued that in doing so, these methods have the potential to start conversations about contemporary forced removals in South Africa.

The realisation of this potential is not automatic though. In the case of Sophiatown specifically, no clear connections were observed between the set of pedagogical tools currently implemented by the museum and the topic of contemporary forced removals. Observations in different contexts, however, indicate that it is possible to establish such links; in this sense, they provide important lessons for future projects to be adopted by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre.

Realising the potential of bringing about engagement with the topic of contemporary forced removals also depends, in great part, on who is included in the audience of the museum, whether the museum defines the 'unveiling of the present' as one of its purposes, and the environment in which it operates. In the next chapter, I turn to these questions in the hope of understanding *in whose interest* and *for what purpose* the Sophiatown Heritage Centre exists, operates, and produces knowledge about apartheid's forced removals.

4. Mission, audience, and operating environment

After expanding upon the content and the pedagogical methods employed by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre, in this final chapter I turn to the museum's mission, audience, and operation environment. My goal here is to explore *why* and *for whom* the Sophiatown Heritage Centre currently exists and operates, and whether the 'unveiling of contemporary forced removals' can be enacted in the context of Sophiatown. I start this exploration by looking into each of the purposes of the museum and discussing how its scope has expanded and transformed throughout the years.

Following this initial analysis, in the second part of this chapter I shift the focus away from what the Sophiatown Heritage Centre *aims* to achieve – and thus away from questions of what is ideal or desirable – and place it on what the museum *can* actually achieve given its resources and operating environment. In particular, I interrogate how the museum navigates the tensions between managing an official heritage site, securing funds, attracting a local audience, and presenting narratives that may at times challenge the official narrative favoured by public donors, especially in terms of openly discussing contemporary forced removals in South Africa. Some of these challenges are not unique to the Sophiatown Heritage Centre and can help illuminate the discussion about the knowledge-making capacity of museums in different contexts.

The Sophiatown Heritage Centre's mission

The Sophiatown Heritage Centre's mission revolves around three main objectives: to collect and preserve the memories of those who were forcibly removed form the suburb in the 1950s and 1960s; to present this material in a way that resonates with and engages contemporary audiences; and to serve as a community centre for the current residents of Sophiatown and its surrounding areas.

Memorialising the past

The collection and preservation of the memories and experiences of former residents has always been at the core of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's mission. In fact, this objective is so important to the museum that it could be considered its *raison d'être*. When the museum was established in 2008 – as the result of a partnership between the City of Johannesburg and the Trevor Huddleston Memorial Centre (THMC) – it materialised the THMC's 'heritage vision' for the suburb: that is, reviving the spirit of old Sophiatown (Erlank 2015: 35). Staff members of the THMC had been active in Sophiatown since the early 2000s promoting historical tours of the suburb and facilitating a series of projects aimed at collecting and preserving the memories of former residents. The creation of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre gave life to this vision and helped solidify some of the memorialisation practices already in place in the suburb.

This work of memorialisation continues to date and transpires in both the exhibition and the activities organised by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre. In particular, the museum puts great emphasis on facilitating oral history projects and promoting regular encounters among former residents and their descendants. These encounters

not only enable the source-community of the museum to remain duly represented and actively engaged in the workings of the institution, but also allow former residents to recreate, through their memories, the Sophiatown of the 1940s and 1950s.

In 2015, for example, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre commissioned a 'remembrance screen' for the displaced residents of Sophiatown in order to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the forced removals (Chapman in Design Indaba: 2016). The metal screen, which sits on the façade of the Trevor Huddleston Memorial building, supports a map of old Sophiatown where former residents can locate their old homes by hanging up a plaque with their names. The project resulted from a large consultation process among the source-community of the museum and can now be appreciated by those who visit the site.

Tellingly, on the day of the unveiling of the map, former residents were reminded that the memorialisation of their stories and experiences lies at the foundation of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre:

> Former residents who have generously given time to help us preserve and share the legacy of Sophiatown, without you, none of this would have been possible. Please consider this your second home. You and your families are always welcome. You were present when we dug the foundations of this building, and now we celebrate with you as we look forward. (Design Indaba 2016)

Among these former residents who have generously contributed to the establishment of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre is Victor Mokhine. His figure epitomises the idea that memorialising the past is among the primary purposes of the museum. Tata Mokhine joined the Trevor Huddleston Memorial team in 2006, and has since been actively engaged in contacting former residents, sharing his own memories during walking tours of the suburb, and helping bring to life the spirit of old Sophiatown. He remembers that when he joined the institution over a decade ago, one of his first tasks was to help identify some of the places and stories of the 1940s and 1950s:

> The THMC was in the process of engaging a few youths to start doing tours around Sophiatown. Apparently, none of these youths had grown up in Sophiatown, so it was worthwhile getting somebody of my calibre to come help them, to make sure that they gave people the correct information regarding the history [of the suburb]. (Personal communication, October 19, 2017)

Besides preserving the history of old Sophiatown, Victor Mokhine explains that engaging former residents in the life of the museum is important because it enables those who were forcibly removed from the suburb to meet and reconnect. After the forced removals, residents of Sophiatown were relocated to different areas around Johannesburg and had to restart their lives there. Some never went back to Sophiatown and completely lost touch with former members of the community. Victor Mokhine himself only knows of two or three families of former residents who still visit the suburb on a regular basis. He further mentions that the general change of atmosphere in Sophiatown – which no longer boasts the same vibrant and cosmopolitan environment – contributes to former residents losing touch with the area, hence the importance of inviting them to take part in the life of the suburb and re-establish old community ties.

By inviting former residents back to their old community, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre also tries to ensure that those who were displaced during apartheid can leave their mark in the suburb. Sophiatown was completely redeveloped following the forced removals, so former residents could never reclaim their lands. It is thus important that they are given a chance to return to their old homes, even in a metaphorical sense. As tour guide Klaas Hobe explains:

> Some of [those who were forcibly removed from Sophiatown] still want to be where they were before, because in our culture, [when] you are born, your umbilical cord is buried somewhere in the hut, and wherever you go, that is where your life is. (Personal communication, November 2nd, 2017)

Naturally, 60 years after the removals, those who were displaced by the apartheid regime are passing on. This does not mean, however, that their memories should be forgotten or that their 'umbilical cord' to Sophiatown should be cut, as the apartheid regime tried to do.

This work of memorialisation confirms the idea that one of the main purposes of the heritage industry in post-apartheid South Africa is to re-enact and foreground some of the histories that the apartheid regime tried to erase. By creating a form of presence, memorial museums serve as testimonies to a 'time before', when South Africans could not have imagined what was yet to come (Sturken 2002: 378). They also honour the memories of those who were affected by the crimes perpetrated during apartheid. However, as Sturken (2002) cautions, it is important that in mourning and paying tribute to the dead, memorialisation practices do not preclude debates over why their lives were lost. Adding to Sturken's proposition, I argue that memorialisation practices should also invite a reflection on how the past may still manifest itself in the present. As the next section explains, one of the methods that the Sophiatown Heritage Centre has adopted to respond to the challenges of the present and allow historical debates to continue is to provide a space where the local community can meet and share their stories.

Promoting a sense of community

In recent years, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre has launched a number of initiatives specifically aimed at attracting the local community and creating a space where the current residents of Sophiatown can interact and socialise. These initiatives have become so relevant to the life of the museum that, today, those who visit the site for the first time would probably describe it as a community centre or as a cultural hub.

The design of the new Trevor Huddleston Memorial building, for example, stems from an intensive community participation process and is based on the idea of promoting interactivity. The building reflects three 'common urban typologies' of old Sophiatown: the *stoep*, the yard, and the corner shop. These typologies are deemed to facilitate social interaction and break down some of the physical and metaphorical fences that prevent neighbours from being part of each other's lives (Chapman in Design Indaba 2016).

The Sophiatown Heritage Centre has also dedicated an exclusive area for temporary exhibitions, which allow the current residents of Sophiatown (or any passer-by) to get

a taste of what it has to offer. These exhibitions are often free of charge and designed in a way that can be quickly viewed and easily understood. On special occasions, the museum also grants Sophiatown residents who present a proof of residence a free tour of Dr Xuma's house. According to heritage team leader Tshepo Letsoalo, this strategy was adopted, for example, during Heritage Month 2017 (Personal communication, October 17, 2017).

This broadening of focus to include the local community in the space of the museum has not been accidental. As Victor Mokhine notes, before the Sophiatown Heritage Centre was created, there seemed to be a lack of venues in the community where residents could come together and mingle. This, according to him, contrasted with old Sophiatown, which was famous for hosting shebeens, cinemas, concert halls, and other venues where residents could interact. Houses in general were also less fenced-in and built closer together in old Sophiatown, making it easier for neighbours to be part of each other's lives. The Sophiatown Heritage Centre tries to fill this void and offer a space where locals can meet up and socialise (Personal communication, October 19, 2017).

At the same time, by providing a place of encounter for the current residents of Sophiatown, the museum attempts to respond to one of the main critiques raised in the literature. As several authors have noted, it is important that memorialisation practices in the suburb are not restricted to the Sophiatown of the 1940s and 1950s, but also include the other 60 years of its existence (Erlank 2015; Erlank & Morgan 2015; Fink 2015; Naidoo 2015). The Sophiatown Heritage Centre is aware of these critiques and has been placing great emphasis on including the local community in the space of the museum. As Tshepo Letsoalo concludes: 'We try to make sure that especially the people that are surrounding this museum are the ones that have the opportunity to come' (Personal communication, October 17, 2017).

Bridging the past, the present, and the future

In addition to remaining faithful to its source-community and responding to the needs of its immediate surroundings, a third focus of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre has been to produce content that dialogues with contemporary audiences and that inspires them to think about the present and the future of South Africa. According to Tshepo Letsoalo, the aim of the museum is, above all, to offer a space where visitors can reflect on contemporary issues, using the past as a starting point:

> Even though the pictures on the walls and most of the stories that we tell are about the past, we strive to make this a reflective environment for 'the now' and for tomorrow. We try to draw from the [visitors] to make sure that their reflection is about what is happening currently. (Personal communication, October 17, 2017)

The recent adoption of the Time Travel framework in Sophiatown illustrates this approach. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre will soon start to implement 'Time Travel events' in the suburb with the goal of promoting reflection and dialogue on contemporary issues. This project is the result of a partnership between the museum and Bridging Ages, an international organisation that promotes the use of local heritage as a platform for learning, social cohesion, and community building.

Informal conversations with staff members of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre also reveal that the goal of 'bridging the past and the present' is not a new one. For the past few years, the museum has been experimenting with different educational frameworks and developing programmes aimed at encouraging the public to engage in conversations about contemporary political and social issues in South Africa. For example, the museum has joined the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, which focuses on using the lessons of the past to promote democratic dialogue and civic engagement around contemporary human rights issues.[13]

These observations indicate that the Sophiatown Heritage Centre is not only aware of its social role in framing debates that connect the history of South Africa with its present reality, but is also taking active steps to realise this goal. This willingness to discuss 'what is happening currently' could be further explored by the museum to facilitate conversations about contemporary forced removals.

Interestingly, those who work at the museum – and especially the younger generation of staff members – agree that forced removals are still a reality in South Africa. As Tshepo Letsoalo notes:

> In certain ways, South Africa has changed for the better (…) People are allowed to live anywhere they would like to live, provided that they have the money to stay there (…) [But] forced removals are still happening all around South Africa, especially in urban areas. People tend to come to places like Johannesburg or Cape Town looking for jobs, and they will [end up living in] what is known in South Africa as 'informal settlements' (or 'shacks' or 'shanty towns'), and the government will go and remove them. Even though there is a law [that states that] if people have been [residing in a place for a certain amount of time] the government must give them alternative accommodation once they remove them, it is not always the case. Most people live in tents for years because of the way they are removed from where they squatted. The plight of the people that do not have means to have their own houses is quite severe. It is constant and it is happening. So the story of the removal of the people of Sophiatown is still as relevant as it was even then, because it is still happening today. So in many respects, things have not changed. (Personal communication, October 17, 2017)

Heritage assistant Tilly Kokwane holds a similar view:

> One of the things that I have noticed about the South African history of forced removals is that it is an ongoing thing. The only difference is that it changes with generations. Today, you get places where people are squatting, and they are being forcefully removed, [even though] that is the only home they know. So it is an ongoing thing. For me it has not changed. The only difference is that [in the past] it was the apartheid era, and now we are free. But still we are being removed from certain places, being removed from places that we call home (…) The only difference is that it is not racial (…) It is not whites doing this, or Indians doing this. It has become a norm. (Personal communication, October 19, 2017)

[13] For further information on Sites of Conscience, see: Brett *et al*. (2007); Ševčenko (2010, 2017); The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (2018). Although the Sophiatown Heritage Centre has officially joined the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and is still listed on the Coalition's website as one of the South African museums that have pledged to the movement, the framework has not been fully implemented by the museum.

By offering a platform where these views can be openly discussed and confronted, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre has the potential to encourage the public to critically reflect on the continuity of forced removals throughout the history of South Africa. This potential, however, cannot be fully understood by looking at the purpose of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre alone or the personal views held by members of the staff. It is also necessary to look at the political, cultural, and social environment in which the museum operates and interrogate how this environment may impinge on the museum's ability to create a space of critical reflection around contemporary events. The next section turns to some of these challenges.

Challenges to 'unveiling contemporary forced removals'

The politics of heritage in Sophiatown

One of the challenges in discussing contemporary events in a heritage centre relates to how 'doing heritage' has been commonly understood and realised in post-apartheid South Africa.

Many authors note that, in the past two decades, the South African heritage industry has centred around two poles: on the one hand, it has sought to re-enact and celebrate indigenous cultures; on the other, it has sought to promote a metanarrative which focuses on the struggle against apartheid and the nation's reconciliation (Erlank 2015: 41). Both these approaches have been aligned with the democratic government's goals of stimulating the country's tourism industry and selling the image of the 'new South Africa' to the rest of the world (Bremner 2007).

Against this backdrop, over the last twenty years, many sites associated with the abuses of apartheid have been declared official heritage sites and converted into tourist attractions. A case in point is Dr Xuma's house in Sophiatown, which was declared a heritage site by the City of Johannesburg in the late 1990s and converted into a museum a decade later. Although these initiatives may have been well-intended – especially in terms of reversing the damages caused by apartheid's exclusionary cultural policies – they have often advanced a very specific rendering of South Africa's history; a rendering that focuses on the demise of apartheid and the nation's reconciliation (Erlank 2015; Peterson 2015).

In Sophiatown specifically, traces of this struggle-centred and celebratory approach to heritage still persist. As Erlank (2015) has noted, it appears that local government structures are only willing to support heritage projects in Sophiatown that focus on the struggle against apartheid and that promote a sense of triumphalism.[14] This ingrained approach may conflict with heritage initiatives that are focused on promoting critical reflection on contemporary events and that expose the shortfalls of the 'new South Africa'.

Tshepo Letsoalo acknowledges that even though the museum staff feels free to showcase and discuss the history of Sophiatown in the way they feel most appropriate, they still have to be 'cognisant' of the politics of heritage in South

[14] For example, at one point, the City of Johannesburg 'pushed strongly' the idea of turning Dr Xuma's house into a museum dedicated to his political work as the president-general of the ANC (Erlank 2015: 41).

Africa: 'It is a balancing act. It is the same as facilitating a tour. You must make sure that you balance [all] the issues [and expectations at hand]' (Personal communication, October 17, 2017). These issues and expectations are not restricted to the source-community of the museum or the needs of the public and the local community. They also include the interests of partners, donors, and government structures that exercise power over what resources are allocated to heritage projects in Sophiatown.

Thus, while it is important to recognise the agency of those who work at the Sophiatown Heritage Centre in determining institutional and curatorial paths, it is also necessary to keep in mind that, like any other museum professionals, they operate within a larger cultural structure that plays a role in framing decisions about what should be exhibited and what should be left out of official heritage spaces in South Africa.

Securing funds

The challenge of securing funds also needs to be taken into account when discussing the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's ability to promote critical reflection on contemporary political and social issues in South Africa. A major portion of the museum's funding currently comes from the City of Johannesburg and the Department of Arts and Culture (Personal communication with management, October 2017). This naturally raises a concern as to whether those who work at the museum can freely criticise the role of national and local authorities (or the role of specific political parties) in the current politics of forced removals in the country. As one of the members of the museum staff candidly admits:

> There are always strings attached to the funding that you get, and that will maybe go to the issue of focusing, for instance, on political parties. You do not want to contradict or to show your potential funder, or your funder, in a bad way (…) For instance, if we were to have an event, we would be very conscious of the little things, like the colours of the chairs [that will be used during the event]. (Personal communication, 2017)[15]

This does not mean that the need to secure funds controls the way in which the Sophiatown Heritage Centre operates. In fact, interviews with various members of the staff reveal that they enjoy complete freedom in determining what should be exhibited. Still, it is important to recognise that those who work at the museum have to take into account the financial and political environment in which they are inserted when deciding how to approach topics that may be deemed controversial.

This predicament is not exclusive to the Sophiatown Heritage Centre. Many authors who defend the idea that museums can be significant sites for the discussion of contemporary issues also recognise that such institutions do not operate in a vacuum. Janes and Conaty (2005), for example, note that many museums throughout the world have been struggling with the challenge of striking a balance between securing funds – and thus maintaining financial stability – and remaining faithful to its purposes and the needs of the community. Similarly, Macdonald (2006) and Message and Witcomb (2015) highlight the importance of understanding museological practices as not confined to the museum, but rather embedded within larger financial, political, and

[15] The source remains anonymous due to the sensitivity of the topic.

historical contexts. Anderson (2004), as well, suggests that instead of following a formulaic or one-size-fits-all model, museums should rather ask themselves how far they are able to go in fulfilling their social responsibilities, given their resources, capabilities, and operating environment. This does not necessarily mean conforming to the regulating structures in which a museum is inserted, but rather identifying operational challenges and findings realistic ways of circumnavigating them.

For example, the adoption of the Time Travel framework is one of the ways the Sophiatown Heritage Centre has found to deal with the challenge of securing funds while maintaining its goal of promoting debates around contemporary issues. According to Tshepo Letsoalo, the implementation of the framework does not require additional funds and have the potential to achieve the purpose of encouraging the public to build connections between the past and the present of South Africa:

> Initially, I thought [this project] would need money and require us to use the minimal resources that we have. [But] for instance, maybe wearing a prop [such as a costume, a cap, or a stick] is [enough] to make [participants] think they are no longer here and that they are part of some other event or time. So it does not particularly need funding. (Personal communication, October 17, 2017)

This example illustrates how museums can find creative ways of realising the goal of bridging the past and the present, even when they operate with limited financial resources.

Attracting a local audience

A final question that deserves attention is how the Sophiatown Heritage Centre deals with the challenge of attracting a local audience in order to promote ongoing conversations about issues that affect South Africa. Despite its focus on creating a place of encounter and interaction, the museum has struggled to maintain a constant stream of visitors. Perhaps, as Victor Mokhine suggests, the fact that the museum is located in a residential suburb, away from main transportation routes or major commuter hubs, poses an accessibility challenge for those who are interested in visiting the site (Personal communication, October 19, 2017).[16] Indeed, as I remarked during the course of my fieldwork, most visitors to the Sophiatown Heritage Centre seem to be international tourists who have pre-planned their visit to the site, rather than merely stumbling upon it.

The community of Sophiatown has also not been as much a part of the museum's life as the heritage team would have wanted. Victor Mokhine estimates that no more than 50 local residents have visited the museum since it opened almost ten years ago. He says that in the past the challenge of attracting locals was so great that during a community-based event staged by the museum only one person attended:

> I remember at one stage, we arranged a meeting at one of the churches in the evening for the community. I went there with the director. [When we arrived] there were only the people who were presenting [the event]. The community was

[16] In contrast to the District Six Museum, Constitution Hill, and the Apartheid Museum, for example, the Sophiatown Heritage Centre does not feature along prominent tourist routes, such as the Cape Town and Johannesburg City Sightseeing bus tours.

> just one man and his dog. I will never forget that one. (Personal communication, October 19, 2017)

Members of the heritage team also note that some local residents, even those living in close proximity to the museum, are not aware of its existence. This observation is confirmed by some of the comments that I came across while doing my research. For example, during a public consultation session held by the City of Johannesburg in April 2017, one resident complained that Sophiatown is not given due recognition by the government and deserves a heritage site. The resident did not seem to be aware of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's existence or the fact that the museum is housed in a heritage site:

> Sophiatown has a rich political and social history. Yet that is not evident. Go to Sophiatown today, nothing shows that it was once a home of some, if not most, of our leaders today. There's not even a single heritage site there. (CoJ 2017)

Similarly, some commenters on the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's Visitor's Book seem surprised about having a museum in their suburb:

> Having grown up and lived in Westbury for more than 20 years I had no idea of the real significance of Sophiatown. I also lived in Toby Street for 3 years and was still not really aware of the rich history. This was a real eye opener to the wealth of history at our doorstep. (Visitor's Book, March 2017)

This struggle to attract a local audience naturally poses a challenge for a museum that aims to offer a reflective environment for issues that affect the community and the country as a whole. However, those who work at the Sophiatown Heritage Centre acknowledge this challenge and are using different strategies to counter the situation. For example, they have distributed pamphlets into post-boxes around the suburb and are now trying to make the outside of the building more noticeable and visually appealing to passers-by (Personal communication with Tshepo Letsoalo and Victor Mokhine, October 17 and 19, 2017). They have also started to use the events hosted by the Trevor Huddleston Memorial Centre, such as music performances and business-related activities, as a platform for advertisement. Partnerships with other South African museums, such as Constitution Hill, as well as local schools are also on the plans of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre as a way of increasing its footprint and attendance (Personal communication with management, October 2017).

These strategies are starting to pay off as the museum has noticed an increase in attendance during the most recent events. As Victor Mokhine concludes: 'I am very positive. Especially now, with the [new] events, we see the mix of the different people. There is an influx of different people (…) unlike in the old days' (Personal communication, October 19, 2017).

Thus, even though the challenges of attracting a local audience, securing funds, and managing an official heritage site may still impinge on the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's ability to promote open conversations about contemporary events, the museum has already shown that it is looking into ways of balancing and working around these issues and remaining faithful to its purpose of bridging the past, the present, and the future.

These insights can provide an interesting basis for discussing the work of other memorial museums in South Africa. As Lindauer notes, while museums cannot single-handedly address social inequalities – or in the context of this research, address the problem of contemporary forced removals in South Africa – a number of institutions and museum practitioners 'remain committed to doing what they can, thereby tacitly endorsing the overarching objective of critical pedagogy' – which is to educate to liberate (Lindauer 2007: 306).

5. Conclusion

This paper began by stating the importance of questioning the social role of memorial museums in South Africa given the re-emergence of debates about the shortfalls of the democratic era and the suggestion that forced removals are still a reality in the country. Using the Sophiatown Heritage Centre as a case study and exploring *what*, *how*, and *in whose interest* knowledge is produced and disseminated in the museum space, I have asked whether memorial museums can help us reflect on contemporary forced removals or are, instead, just to be seen as 'a house for dead people'.

Turning first to an analysis of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre's permanent exhibition, I have argued that the purpose of memorialising the past plays a key role in the context of Sophiatown (and South Africa more generally), given the apartheid government's deliberate attempt to 'triumph' over of the black population and erase their histories. Despite recognising this need to preserve the memories of those affected by apartheid's atrocities, I have also argued that it is imperative that memorialisation practices in South Africa are not restricted to re-enacting and celebrating the past, for this backward-gaze can hide from view the continuity of historical processes.

Second, drawing on concepts associated with the philosophy of critical pedagogy and the pedagogical methods adopted by the Sophiatown Heritage Centre, I have discussed how memorial museums can encourage visitors to 'read the world' in which they exist and establish important connections between the past and the present. This discussion has indicated that by inviting the public to look beyond the walls of the museum and to see themselves as historical subjects, memorial museums can enact a critical education. Using examples from different contexts, I have also proposed practical ways through which the Sophiatown Heritage Centre can adapt their pedagogical methods in order to bring about engagement with the topic of contemporary forced removals specifically.

Finally, I have expanded upon the mission, audience, and operating environment of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre arguing that even though museums have to work within political and financial constraints, they can still provide significant spaces for bridging the past and the present and unveiling contemporary forced removals.

Importantly, by arguing that memorial museums in South Africa have the potential to 'unveil the present', I do not mean to suggest that the purpose of collecting and preserving the memories of those who were affected by the apartheid regime is not important or should be recast as secondary. In fact, memorialisation practices have played an important role in reversing the exclusionary practices of apartheid and in helping the nation come to terms with its violent history. However, drawing on the recent scholarship and practice in the museological field, I posit that memorialisation practices around traumatic histories should not foreclose debates about why these events happened in the first place and how they may still be happening today.

I also do not mean to suggest that by simply endorsing the purpose of 'unveiling the present', museum professionals can automatically encourage the public to reflect on the reality that surrounds them and instil in them a desire to change this reality. This view would not only deny the agency of the public in creating their own meanings,

but would also ignore the historical and power structures in which museum professionals operate. The case of the Sophiatown Heritage Centre, however, comes to show that it is possible to challenge traditional heritage practices and invite the public to take part in conversations about contemporary events. Even though the museum operates within a heritage industry that is still, in important senses, caught up with the idea of re-enacting and celebrating the past, it places great emphasis on responding to its surroundings and creating a reflective environment for the present and for the future. This willingness to include the present in the space of the museum does not necessarily make the Sophiatown Heritage Centre a better museum. It simply indicates that they are aware of both the context in which they are inserted and the need to reaffirm their relevance and evolving nature in the face of what may be deemed as 'more pressing issues'.

Looking forward, the insights resulting from this research could provide a practical framework through which the work and the knowledge-making capacity of museums can be analysed and discussed. This is particularly relevant in the current South African context, where the national policy for the arts, culture, and heritage sector is being revised, and the movement for the decolonisation of educational and cultural institutions is gaining momentum. Even the South African Department of Arts and Culture recognises that a fundamental policy revision of the heritage sector is now required in order to 'to accelerate, expand and deepen the gains made over the last two decades and to address the new challenges thrown up by an ever-changing world and society' (DAC 2017: 3). Thus, rather than 'a house for dead people', memorial museums in South Africa have the potential to be 'living' institutions that are attuned to the communities that surround them as well as the challenges that face these communities.

6. References

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List of interviewees

Klaas Hobe, Personal Interview, 02 November 2017.
Salma Patel, Personal Interview, 09 November 2017.

Tilly Kokwane, Personal Interview, 19 October 2017.
Tshepo Letsoalo, Personal Interview, 17 October 2017.
Victor Mokhine, Personal Interview, 19 October 2017.