



Maingard, J. (2017). Cinemagoing in District Six, Cape Town, 1920s to 1960s: History, politics, memory. *Memory Studies*, 10(1), 17-34.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698016670786>

Peer reviewed version

Link to published version (if available):

[10.1177/1750698016670786](https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698016670786)

[Link to publication record in Explore Bristol Research](#)

PDF-document

This is the author accepted manuscript (AAM). The final published version (version of record) is available online via Sage at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1750698016670786> . Please refer to any applicable terms of use of the publisher.

University of Bristol - Explore Bristol Research

General rights

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies. Please cite only the published version using the reference above. Full terms of use are available:
<http://www.bristol.ac.uk/pure/about/ebr-terms>

Cinema-going in District Six, Cape Town, 1920s to 1960s: history, politics, memory

This article discusses the cinema-going experiences of District Six residents in Cape Town in the 1920s to 1960s, before the apartheid government began systematically to demolish District Six from 1966, in terms of the notorious Group Areas Act of 1950. It draws on recorded and transcribed life history interviews of former residents produced in the 1980s and the 2000s, archived in Special Collections, University of Cape Town Libraries. My starting point is an article published by Bill Nasson in the 1980s, in which he argues that cinema-going was the chief leisure-time activity in District Six. Situating my research in histories of the cinema that emphasise the social and cultural experience of going to the cinema, I identify instances of the keyword 'bioscope', as the cinema was commonly termed, or the Afrikaans equivalent 'bioskoop', in order to locate cinema memories in the original transcripts of these interviews. The interviews are, I suggest, discourses of memory to be regarded as memory stories and texts that collectively signal a 'community of remembering', citing Kuhn (2002, 2010). I discuss three key thematic strands from the memories of cinema and cinema-going in District Six: cinema and place; cinema, culture and identity; and films, film shows, and stars, incorporating residents' experiences that reveal the peculiarities of cinema-going in this specific locale. I conclude that the cinema was so symbiotically intertwined with everyday life in District Six and the cinemas so geographically proximate that we might think of residents not so much as 'going' to the cinema but as being already there. Cinema-going residents of District Six were part of a global seam of cinema-goers, especially in the classical period of Hollywood cinema's distribution and exhibition from the 1920s to the 1960s, and were therefore 'cinema citizens', while being stripped of their citizenship rights in all other respects.

Keywords: apartheid, bioscope, cinema-going, cinema citizens, District Six, films, memories.

‘Memories never fade if you got a good memory, but dreams fade’¹

In 1984, researchers at the Cape Town History Project attached to the Department of History at the University of Cape Town, conducted a series of life history interviews with former residents of the area known as District Six, and ‘almost immediately generated path-breaking research on [its] social history’ (Bickford-Smith, 2001: 5).² The project was later renamed the Western Cape Oral History Project and later still, in 2001, the Centre for Popular Memory. It was one of a variety in South Africa at the time that drew on oral histories as a means of producing ‘history from below’.³ One of the researchers, Bill Nasson, subsequently chronicled his perceptions of working class leisure-time activities in District Six, describing how these were predominantly focused on cinema-going. As one respondent put it, ‘our way of life were based on bioscope’ (Cds.266-27).⁴ Nasson also argued that despite the regularity and social significance of cinema-going, District Six residents also asserted and experienced their own forms of culture and leisure. These were not prescribed so much by the forces of entertainment capital but were more roundly pre-determined by traditions and histories of local, popular entertainment, particularly in relation to music and to the annual street festival known as the ‘Coon Carnival’. Indeed, it is precisely this imbrication of the experience of cinema-going with local culture and street life that is repeated throughout the interviews: going to the ‘bioscope’ was a ‘firmly local’ activity (Nasson, 1990: 286). In this article, I return to these life history interviews of the 1980s, and include a smaller set produced in the 2000s, in order to trace the memories of cinema-going in District Six embedded within them, based on perceived recurrent themes related to the centrality of the experience of cinema-going.

My research in this field is part of a larger research project that is developing in two interrelated parts: the first addresses histories of Hollywood’s globalisation, by investigating the political economy of its distribution and exhibition in South Africa; the second is a case study of the social and cultural experience of going to the cinema in District Six in the 1920s to 1960s, from which the present article is derived.⁵ Robert Allen and Douglas Gomery’s

(1985) study of film history is a seminal starting point in identifying the significance of contexts beyond the centrality of the film as 'text' in cinema studies, which they categorise as technological, economic, social and aesthetic (Allen and Gomery, 1985: 20). Subsequently, in the 1990s and 2000s, Melvyn Stokes and Richard Maltby published a series of four scholarly volumes focusing on the reception of Hollywood film (Stokes and Maltby, 1991a, 1999b, 2001; Maltby and Stokes, 2007). They produced a further volume in 2007, with the addition of Allen, *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*, a title that firmly located its focus on the act of 'going' and its social dimensions. A few years later, Maltby, with Daniel Biltereyst and Philippe Meers (2011), 'launched' what they termed the 'new cinema history' with their volume *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*, which they defined as 'an emerging trend in research into cinema history [that] has shifted its focus away from the content of films to consider their circulation and consumption, and to examine the cinema as a site of social and cultural exchange' (2011: 3).⁶

This 'turn' to investigate the experiences of cinema audiences within wide historical contexts whilst simultaneously paying attention to localised peculiarities, provides a useful framework for my research into the macro history of (Hollywood) cinema's globalisation and its reach into Africa, and particularly South Africa. The micro investigation of the cinema-going experience in District Six, draws further inspiration from several earlier research projects in the UK, and to an extent in the USA, that have also relied upon memories of cinema-going. These are the research of Annette Kuhn (2002), represented in *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* as well as her related subsequent publications; Jackie Stacey's (1994) investigation into women's experiences of cinema-going in the 1950s, *Star-Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*; and Helen Taylor's (2014 [1989]) account of female fans of *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Scarlett's Women: 'Gone With the Wind' and its Female Fans*. I shall return to Kuhn's research below, but for the moment would note that the locus of my research differs from these earlier projects that were created specifically to produce memories of going to the cinema. Unlike them, I have mined already-recorded

life histories that focus on the everyday lives of former residents of District Six for memories that refer specifically to the social and cultural experience of going to the cinema embedded within them. Since the practice of going to the cinema was so thoroughly entangled with the everyday life of District Six and its inhabitants, memories of cinema-going are an inevitable feature of most of these life histories.

In the following section, I shall briefly describe the interviews and some of the demographics they reveal, as well as my methodological approach to identify references to cinema-going, before providing a short description of District Six itself and the work of the District Six Museum that was established in 1994, which leads into a short, and important, comment on memory 'texts', drawing on Kuhn's research. According to Sean Field (2008), who directed the Centre for Popular Memory up until its closure, 'ninety four interviews [were] conducted by Bill Nasson, Shamil Jeppie, and others between 1986 and 1989'.⁷ Much later, in the early 2000s, a research student, Thulani Nxumalo, conducted a further ten interviews so as to include African residents of District Six and to assert their equal importance in relation to those who were 'coloured'. In a working version of the catalogue,⁸ the total number of interviews (including Nxumalo's sub-set of ten) is identified as 121, but not all of these have been transcribed. The total number of transcriptions to which I have had access is 67.

The majority of the interviews are with 'coloured' residents who speak predominantly English or a form of localised Afrikaans, sometimes including phrases from the less dominant language, as is typical of popular, colloquial forms of speech. Those interviews undertaken in the 2000s are with Africans speaking in English with some insertions of isiXhosa. Language is an especially rich dimension of District Six's 'creolisation' and the *patois* of speech forms developed over its historical lifetime are in sharp relief when listening to, or reading, verbatim transcriptions of these interviews. When informants' religions are identified, they are either Christian ('Christe') or Muslim ('Slamse'). There would seem to be a wide age range, the oldest informant having been born in 1902 or 1903, while the youngest, those in

Nxumalo's sub-set of ten, were born in the 1940s.⁹ Dates of birth however are not consistently noted. The total number of interviews in the collection is almost equally divided across gender.¹⁰ As regards forms of work, some informants worked in District Six itself, in local enterprises, or, for example, running a stall in the fish market, or taking in washing and ironing for better off residents of the city, while others worked in neighbouring factories and industries or in city centre stores, or as domestic workers and nursemaids in other parts of the city. Two of the informants are particularly pertinent to the current enquiry: the daughter of local cinema owners, Mr and Mrs Bailey, who were Jewish and whose original surname was Bailim; and a resident who worked as a cashier at two of the local cinemas (and other cinemas elsewhere in Cape Town).¹¹

The interviews recorded in the 1980s that were transcribed at the time, were held in Manuscripts and Archives, at the University of Cape Town, when I first had access to them. They were not yet digitised and some, but not all, included an index of key themes on the front page. They did not always however record the correct page and sometimes references to the cinema in the transcript were not recorded in the index at all. Following the digitisation of the original transcripts undertaken by the Centre for Popular Memory before transferring the recordings to Special Collections at the University of Cape Town Libraries when the Centre closed, it became possible to accomplish digital 'searches' by keyword of each transcript. I opted for a systematic methodological approach, which was simply to 'search' each transcript on the basis of the keyword 'bioscope', which was the popular term for the cinema, or its Afrikaans equivalent 'bioskoop'. I also occasionally used other keywords such as 'film', 'cinema', or 'Star' – the most popular and central cinema in District Six – especially if an index included 'Star', or if 'bioscope' or 'bioskoop' did not appear at all, as a means of cross checking that I had not missed something by only using these keywords. Out of the 67 transcripts, 51 reference 'bioscope' or 'bioskoop', which is equal to 76 percent of these transcriptions. Taking the sub-set of Nxumalo's ten on its own, seven of the ten include the keyword 'bioscope', matching the significance of the recurrence of the word 'bioscope' in the full set of transcribed interviews to

which I have had access. These figures speak volumes for the extent to which residents experienced the cinema as one of the key threads of their lives. Indeed we might even think of it as 'structuring' their lives alongside their other everyday activities and commitments including raising their families and domestic chores, going to work or school, and engaging in various other forms of leisure and entertainment, as well as political activities.

In order to assist understandings of District Six's iconic status in South African history, and hence also to assess the exceptional value of the life history interviews I have accessed, a few descriptive comments about District Six are in order. It came into being following the official division of Cape Town into six districts under the Municipal Act of 1867 (Bickford-Smith, 1990: 36). Almost a century later, by the 1960s, its population had reached some 66,000 people.¹² As urban historian Vivian Bickford-Smith (1990) explains, it was part of the 'lower class residential belt' that stretched from the Castle, in the city centre, to Observatory, a suburb further away (1990: 37). In other words, it was directly adjacent to the city centre, Cape Town's Central Business District. It was a defined and definable neighbourhood, geographically speaking, as well as historically, socially, culturally, and in part, politically. While the population of District Six 'was drawn from all over the world' the largest 'component' was 'Coloured' (Bickford-Smith, 1990: 37).¹³ When the National Party came to power in the whites-only election of 1948, it very quickly enacted a slate of apartheid legislation that included the Group Areas Act of 1950, which formed one arm of the state's invidious ideology to keep population groups apart, based on racial classifications. All property development was frozen from the early 1960s (Omar, 1990: 191) and under the provisions of this Act, District Six was proclaimed a white 'group area' on 11 February 1966 and was systematically demolished; as Dullah Omar, a former resident who subsequently became Minister of Justice under Nelson Mandela's presidency, put it, District Six was 'murdered' (1990).¹⁴ The residents of District Six were moved to new or existing, racially-defined residential developments across the Cape Flats.¹⁵

The politically-motivated 'Hands Off District Six' campaign subsequently won some gains in preventing (white) development plans in District Six, including British Petroleum in the 1980s. Arising from this and other campaigns the District Six Museum Foundation was established in 1989, and in 1994 the District Six Museum was opened in the former Methodist Church building at 25a Buitenkant Street. It subsequently acquired a further building close by at number 15a on the same street, formerly Sachs Futeran Wholesalers, now the Museum's Homecoming Centre. It is pertinent to note that the Museum presents itself as 'work[ing] with the memories of the District Six experience and with that of forced removals more generally' (District Six Museum). In describing the memory work of District Six Museum, Crain Soudien discusses the significance of memories as 'sit[ting] behind and provid[ing] the mental schemas in terms of which people make sense of the world' (2008: 22), an apt description for the memories of District residents as represented in the life history interviews of the 1980s, where the 'schemas' of place – District Six itself – and the experiences of everyday life within it, including going to the cinema, are symbiotically intertwined. Ciraj Rassool identifies the Museum's 'memory work' as its 'core business' (2007: 124) and, he proclaims, it is in the 'memory work conducted in support of the struggle for restitution of land rights in District Six that the District Six Museum has committed itself to reconstituting and recalling community in District Six in the heart of Cape Town' (2007: 124). This, he suggests, marked a new phase for the Museum, shifting its focus to a new campaign, 'Hands On District Six'. After South Africa's first democratically elected government took office in 1994, it promulgated the Restitution of Land Rights Act in the same year, which made it possible for former residents to submit land claims. Since then, more than 2,500 ex-residents of District Six have lodged claims. With the first phase of the redevelopment plan completed, some claimants have been re-housed in District Six, with the promise, and expectation, that the remainder will follow as the plan is fulfilled.¹⁶

Recognising the politics of both District Six's demise and reconstruction is a crucial framework for the articulation of its local history. The memories of cinema-going and life more generally, with which I am working, were recalled

when District Six was an 'empty traumatic landscape', (Rassool, 2007: 125), and thus with a profound sense of deep personal and collective loss, that can be read from, and even felt, in some of these remembering. Karen Till offers the descriptor of 'wounded place' (2008; 99-113), a salient reminder of District Six as a site that embodies the pain of its demolition under apartheid, and the terrible consequences for its residents. In this context, Kuhn's identification of her 'informants' accounts' as memory 'discourse' (2002: 9), as well as memory 'stories' and 'texts' (2002: 11) is useful. 'The formal attributes of memory texts', she contends, 'often betray a collective imagination as well as embodying truths of a more personal salience' (2002: 11). This 'collective viewpoint' (Portelli, quoted in Kuhn, 2002: 11), and Kuhn's later elaboration of 'communities of remembering' (2010: 2, 10), are patently and richly articulated in these memories of former District Six residents. While the focus and scope of the present article precludes the kind of developed discourse analysis that Kuhn's research accomplishes, I have nevertheless adopted her deductive method in a small way, thus facilitating the identification of the core themes that structure the remainder of this article: cinema and place; cinema, culture, and identity; films, film shows, and stars. Before exploring these themes in more detail I shall briefly identify and describe the cinemas themselves, based on extant information, which is rather more patchy than fully-fledged.

As we have seen, before the brutal demolition of District Six under apartheid, cinema-going was the chief leisure-time activity of its residents (Nasson, 1989):¹⁷ A key reason for this is that there were several cinemas in District Six itself and others close by in Woodstock and other parts of central Cape Town that were also frequented by District Six residents. Those that are remembered most frequently are: the Avalon in Hanover Street built during WWII, the British in Caledon Street, the National in William Street built in 1905 as Theatre of Variety and Plays (Eckardt, 2005: 35), and the Star (formerly Metro) on Hanover Street. The City, adjacent to District Six, near the market on Sir Lowry Road (now the site of the Goodhope Centre), is also frequently remembered. Older informants remember cinemas popular before 1925, especially the Union (formerly the Unity), on the corner of Horstley and

Hanover Streets, and the Empire. The latter two were owned and run by a couple, Mr and Mrs Bailey, with Mr Bailey managing the Union and Mrs Bailey the Empire. The National and the Avalon were still standing in 1973. The British was demolished in the early 1970s (*The Argus*, 19 October 1973: 14).¹⁸

Cinema and place

The cinemas were part of the warp and weft of District Six's street life. They were used primarily for screening films, both through the week and on weekends, but the buildings themselves were also landmarks of place. They frequently serve as points of physical orientation in the memories of District Six residents. In recounting a story of a friend who was arrested by the police for not carrying his 'pass', an informant comments: 'They arrested him, then he said no, he's got his ID, his pass so they took [him] up to Searle Street. Searle Street was right up, you know, you pass Avalon Bioscope (Cds.191).¹⁹

In a different example, an informant explains where she lived in District Six by referring to the British cinema:

It was a room it was down stairs there were people who lived up stairs and around the corner was Caledon Street where the British Bioscope were and quite a number of shops and café[s] that belong to the Malay people it was a mix[ed] area you know (Cds.203).

This approach to identifying oneself and one's home is commonly represented in the interviews. The cinema cashier responds to a question about when she had 'tea time' by orientating herself from the position of the cinema itself: 'I was quite near the Avalon. I was in Aspeling Street. Then I would go home and then we would open up at half past one again' (Cds.171-173). In a further example, the informant first identifies the fact of the cinema's existence, then locates her own house and her future husband's house in relation to it: '...there was a bioscope in the street, the National bioscope, we lived near the bioscope...'. Later in the interview she comments further that:

When I met my husband then they also lived in William Street [...] I didn't know he lived in William Street [...] We lived near each other ... they lived closer opposite the bioscope, we lived a distance from the bioscope [my translation] (Cds.175-176).

The proximity of the cinemas to people's homes made possible a form of leisure that was easily within the control of parents, who could allow their children to go to the cinema, while controlling who they went with and what time they returned home:

Well, when I go to the bioscope, look, as we are at the bioscope's door, when you come out of the bioscope...see the father just standing on the *stoep* [verandah] he can see you are coming out of the bioscope, you go home (this was spoken very rapidly, not very clear). So now you can't really go walking about [my translation] (Cds.134-137).

In another instance, the detail suggests that parents or guardians would find out what time the film was expected to end so they knew when to expect their child to return home, even for matinees:

Int: Did you have to be home by a certain time?

GJ: Yes, when the bioscope comes out and my Auntie always used to find out if it was that time. But we weren't allowed night shows, only matinees, and then we had to come straight home (Cds.88).

This is related in the context of the significance of the cinema as a place where teenage boys and girls could meet and court:

Int: Were there any special places where boys and girls could meet each other?

GJ: Only the bioscope, my dear. We weren't allowed dances. There was big dances, sometimes, but we wasn't allowed. We was too young to go places like that. They said when you 16 then you

too young. And I was young when I got married. I was only 17. In those days when you meet a boyfriend and your people see it's going too far they rather see you married than bring shame on them. We wasn't allowed to stay with a boy alone, or so. But in the bioscope it was a whole crowd. So the crowd would see you home safe and your boyfriend too they would see all the girls home then themselves (Cds.88).

This informant continues to explain how when she was older she 'didn't like the way I couldn't go out' and describes how she and her friend, Mabel, had 'planned it', to 'go at night to bioscope':

There was a Western, man, a marvelous Western by the Star bioscope. O, the people was pushing to get in and our 2 boys as well (laughing). Oo Jenna [a form of colloquial exclamation] we had a good time. But the next day my auntie she slapped me so hard, and (laughing) Mabel got it too, on the other side. She forbid me to go to bioscope again, until after a whole month. We had to tell the boys that we girls couldn't come out and they must leave us alone. If this one can't come out, man, there are others. It was a sad month for me and Mabel (Cds.88).

As it turned out, this informant met her future husband at the 'bioscope':

...at the matinee bioscope [...] We couldn't get tickets, and we 2 girls were standing there, me and Mabel, and he came to talk to us, this young ... chap. He said he had a friend who had spare tickets so that's how we met. So he went in with us and so we made friends. We introduce one another. And then every time he saw me he came to talk to me and I talked to him that way we get intimate with each other (Cds.91-92).

References to the cinema as place are not only incorporated into District Six residents' commentaries in relation to where they themselves lived, but also

as a place enmeshed in the broader street life and amenities of the whole locale. One regular instance is the identification of a cinema, then the street it was on, and descriptions of other shops or activities on the same street. Most commonly, this relates to the Star cinema on Hanover Street. This is no surprise, since it was the main thoroughfare through District Six and the fish market, another key landmark, was opposite. One resident identifies 'the three, four cinemas in our area' and discusses his experience of District Six's cinemas and shops in terms of 'choice' and 'convenience':

So you, you had a choice, you could go to bioscope every night and see a different film. And there was a lot of shops, there was competition. You could get things very cheap because of the amount of shops which was competing against the other and that type of thing. You had your shoemaker there, you had your tailor there, you had your barber there, you had your butcher, your fishery, even your restaurants. Every thing was there. (Another person speaks and reminds him of the vegetable market.) Oh well, well now, we had a very big market, we even had a very well known fish market which was opposite the Star bioscope (Cds.211a).

This resident concludes his interview with a wistful reference to the proximity of his own house to the National linked to his experience of 'convenience':

When I stand in my yard I could see, no I could hear, what was being said in the bioscope. You can imagine, and if I stand at my front gate I could see the entrance of the National bioscope. You see you had all those conveniences (Cds.211a).

This experience of 'convenience' is verified by other residents: 'District Six everything is near there. You can go out your front door and go to the shop. Here [where he lives at the time of the interview] you must take the bus to go to the shop' (Cds.32). This form of comparison between life in District Six and where the informant lives at the time of the interview is very common. There are regular references to the proximity of informants' homes to amenities of all

kinds, both in District Six itself, and the city centre. The proximity of the city centre, for window-shopping after work or on weekends, and the foreshore, for strolling and picnics, are also commonly and nostalgically recalled.

Cinema, culture, and identity

The cinema buildings were used for multiple events across a broad spectrum of leisure, culture and politics. As community or neighbourhood places they were central to the life of District Six residents, beyond their film screening function. The memories of the cinema owners' daughter are especially illuminating here: '...the bioscope was used during the weekends for meetings and for council meetings as well, and amongst the councillors was Dr Abdurahman and Isaac Persel', and, she continues, with characteristic detail, 'Dr Abdurahman always wore a black fez with a lassie [tassel] hanging down he was very smartly dressed. He always looked spic and span and immaculate' (Cds.165).²⁰

Residents were also audiences of variety and other shows that took place in the cinemas. The cinema owners' daughter explains that her father 'wanted to encourage people to come to the bioscope' (the Union), which was why he put on variety acts:

...he introduced all types of entertainment he had the dancers with very wide dresses and in the operating box he had a light going with all variegated colours and as this person would intertwine her very, very wide skirts, it was like a fairy, red, mauve, green, yellow, heliotrope and it would go on all these colours and the audience would go mad, they had a review of singing and dancing, and then he had the strong man picking up weights, different kinds of weights and dumbbells and so on, then he had a boxing match on stage, so they could watch the boxing, this would be a special special night, oh we had full houses when they had the boxing on...(Cds.165).

Her mother on the other hand, who did not have variety acts (in the Empire), 'wasn't going to be outdone' and would 'put on serials, and during that week

[the same week as her husband's variety show] so that she could get the public' (Cds.165). Several informants remember the weekly serials and the drive not to miss an episode:

I just used to work [...] till 1 o'clock, then, sometimes I would go from there to matinee bioscope. She [her employer] couldn't keep me 1 minute if there was a matinee, because it wasn't far from her house (laughing). I will even go without my food because I want to be at matinee bioscope so bad, I follow the serial and I must see it (Cds.90).

The cinemas and cinema-going were closely interrelated with local cultural activities, particularly the annual 'Coon Carnival', as well as with wider expressions of identity. The Carnival is an annual event that takes place on the 2nd January, the 'tweede Nuwe Jaar' ('second New Year') in which minstrel troupes parade through the city centre. Before its demolition, the Carnival parade would begin in District Six. The Malay choirs are the first to celebrate the New Year and are known as *nagtroepe* (literally 'night troupes'). They are associated with the Carnival not only in relation to New Year celebrations but also because the membership of choirs and Carnival troupes sometimes overlap. The cinema cashier describes her experience of waiting for the *nagtroepe* on New Year's Eve when they would put out benches in front of the Star cinema and 'sit and watch for the night teams to come'. They would 'dance, ghoema in Cross Street. The band was all round and we used to dance in the middle, ghoema, ghoema'.²¹ Her own experience of the cinema and the Carnival was interwoven in that she worked as cashier at the cinema and she and her husband also 'sewed for the coons'. On New Year's Day, she recalls, after having been up all night with the *nagtroepe*, she would often be called to fix the costumes and had to 'go with my machine to the klops kamer [literally 'troupe room']' (Cds.171-173).

The Carnival has its roots in the combination of nineteenth century minstrelsy and street performances of freed slaves in Cape Town and has run continuously to the present day. It is already well documented that Carnival troupes evidence a strong emulation of American icons including those drawn

from the cinema (Maingard, 2003, 2007; Martin, 1999; Nasson, 1989). This takes various forms including the names of troupes that are modelled on American and African-American names; American insignia such as stars and stripes in the design of uniforms, in banners, and in face paint. Apart from the influence of Westerns in the names of troupes, the most repeated icon is that of the black-face minstrel, popularised by Al Jolson first in *The Jazz Singer* (1927), playing Jackie Rabinowitz, alias Jack Robin, and in subsequent films and performances. Although the assimilation of the minstrel figure into the Carnival had its antecedents in the American minstrel troupes that had visited South Africa in the 1800s, the 'Al Jolson look, white around the eyes and white around the mouth and the rest of it black' (quoted in Martin, 1999: 139) became a major feature of the Carnival troupes' painted faces after *The Jazz Singer's* screening in District Six in 1929. Both the film as a whole, and the key moment when Al Jolson 'blacks up' with burnt cork in the dressing room mirror, draws on his tight cap and looks up at Mary (May McAvoy) in a medium close-up, have great potential for investigating how 'coloured' audiences identified with, and appropriated, Jolson's 'look'.²² The extent of his iconic status is also evident in the appropriation of his songs:

The night Al died ... there was hardly a street in District Six in which his favourite songs were not sung as a tribute to the creator of the Coon favourites "Sonny Boy" and "California Here I Come" (quoted in Martin, 1999: 144).

Another significant area of cultural identity relates to gangs and gangsters, a major part of the life of District Six, and mentioned in many of the life history transcripts both generally and in relation specifically to the cinema, particularly from the 1940s. The Star was frequented by the Globe as well as other gangs and the Globe gang features most often in the memories of District Six residents. It developed from the sons of shopkeepers on Hanover Street, whose 'security was being threatened' by gangs formed earlier (Pinnock, 1984: 25). These young men would meet under a streetlight at the Globe Furnishing Company, which was opposite the Star cinema. Their 'first action' is reported as breaking up a group of 'toughs' and their 'informal tax-racket',

where they would extract a penny from each cinema patron entering the cinema (Pinnock, 1984: 25-6).

Perspectives on gangs vary, in that some remember them as only fighting other gangs, rather than threatening local residents, or even helping the local community, for example by escorting young women safely home from the cinema. They are also remembered as sometimes sitting on the streets and singing into the night. Other residents remember them as being more threatening. Some of their more threatening behaviours are linked to the cinema, and particularly to the Star cinema. They would, for example, sometimes use strong-arm tactics to force cinema staff to reserve their seats, even if the screening had begun and they did not use them, as the Star cashier recalls:

...these Globes they were so determined, they demand, you must keep their seats, irrespective if it's time for the bioscope to be out, you must still hold onto their seats (Cds.171-173).

On one occasion the head of the Globe gang had harassed her by pushing the door open, intent on robbing her. She had pressed a buzzer in place 'if anything goes wrong [...] And in no time there was four from downstairs, the mobs, the doorman, the ushers and all that with sticks in their hands' (Cds.171-173). The fact that there was such a device suggests they had reason for it, despite the contradictory comment from this informant that the gangs 'would fight in the bioscope, but they never interfered with us the cashiers'. The head of the Globe gang, she says, '...was always beaten up. And he was always bleeding. And he was always stabbed'. She adopts an especially colloquial Afrikaans to express the approach of the gangster pleading for her help, to which the translation into English does not do justice, but clearly affirms the fact that he does not want to be caught up in any officialdom: 'Come and help me I don't want to go to hospital [my translation]'. Her office, she says 'believe you me [...] was a chamber of horrors' (Cds.171-173).

This cinema cashier also recounts how, to prevent gangs fighting in the cinema, the doorman would take away 'batons, with the sticks and whatever it was [...] before they go in'. She is at pains to reiterate that it was not audiences in general that caused trouble but rather gangs: '[T]hese hoodlums, these two gangs [The Globes and The Killers] they caused the trouble, not the people amongst themselves. We could sit in peace at night in front, the manager and I and all of a sudden we would hear fights' (Cds.171-173). Others have similar memories of fighting that occurred in the cinema itself: '...And then there was the Star bioscope. I mean that was one of our popular bioscopes. But sometimes when a drunkard comes in - you watch the film then they start fighting. The film is on the screen' (Cds.96-98).

Another informant, to his own amusement, provides more expressive detail of what happened when gangs fought in the cinema, the chaos that ensued, and how it was talked about the following day:

You know sometimes the people sits in the bioscope there [...] And then there is a nice picture. Suddenly gang comes rushing in the bioscope, and everybody then, the whole crowd, that sit in that bioscope rush out of the bioscope, ha ha ha ha. [...] Now they come in...like they come with a big blade 'mes' [knife]...screaming and shouting you know. Now they got knives and so on and the people did know that there was a (unclear) and then everybody runs out and one gang is hunting for the other. Now they hear that those men were in the bioscope. Then they come rushing, and now it is all in the darkness, hey. And all of a sudden the lights goes off, and you just see people running, ha ha ha and in one minute the whole place is empty, and then there is nobody inside [...] the nicest part of it was that everybody moves in again, and they come and sit, and the show goes on again. Ha ha ha ha. [...] And it happens mostly on a Saturday night. Now the Sunday is quite a bit of history like you know. They asked like...erh did you hear what has happened at the bioscope again, you know. Ha ha ha ha. [...] It was the talked of the town (Cds.168-169).

Sometimes the behaviour of gangs in District Six reminded people of gangster films:

Quite often there was a gang fight in the streets [...] quite exciting to see this gang fighting. These gangsters right across the street coming down from the hill and that. It was like a real movie to see them coming down in a row (Cds.211).

The fact that the fish market was opposite the Star features in many of the residents' memories. It was common practice to buy fish and bread or chips to take into the cinema. The proximity of the fish market also had its down side for cinema-goers, as a former stallholder comments: '[a]s you sit in the Star bioscope all the flies from the fish market goes in there. But that was a hell of a bioscope...' (Cds.32). Other informants also comment on getting pocket money to cover not only the cinema ticket but 'monkey nuts' and sweets. One informant, for example, remembers getting 6d on a Saturday that covered the cost of the cinema ticket at 2d, plus a further 2d for nuts and 2d for sweets.

Patrons would also sometimes smoke *dagga* (the South African term for marijuana) in the Star cinema, but this did not distract the serious cinema-goer from watching the film:

Int: How was it in the Star bioscope?

CA: Very nice. [Afrikaans] You see people smoking dagga and they go crazy there at the back but they don't harm any others.

Allright the man who goes in at the bench [...] knows there are lots of things that shouldn't go on. He looks at his picture and then he leaves. That's how it was [my translation] (Cds.03).

Smoking *dagga* in the cinema was part and parcel of the cinema experience from the earliest days of the cinema in District Six. In the Union cinema, which ran until about 1925, the owner,

walk[ed] along the aisle to see if everything was in order, and as she passed she would smell the dagga and she would say in Afrikaans "wie

rook daar? [who's smoking there?]" and would go on and call this manager of hers and she walked along with a stick [...] they were dead scared of her (Cds.165).²³

The cinemas themselves are remembered as being frequented by different audiences based on a rough measure of class and wealth, as well as different forms of social behaviour. The Avalon and the National are remembered as 'posh' as against the Star being for 'poor people', even though it had an internal hierarchy with the poorer patrons downstairs on long, hard benches in the front, and those who were 'posh' or 'respectable' upstairs in the circle on 'plush but faded seats' (Nasson, 1989: 292). This division of status is well reflected in the cashier's memories:

Int: What can you remember specifically of your days at the Avalon. What was it like, what people used to come there?

FW: Well, socialites – used to come there. That was the first posh bioscope that opened. Very nice people used to come there. They would ask me to hold their tickets and I always used to get chocolates, because most of them were from the Parade [in the city centre] you know. If they were not in time to pick up their tickets then I would hold their tickets back for them

(Cds.171-173).

One informant proclaims that going to the cinema is her 'favourite' memory and moreover she 'favoured Avalon' even though the Star was closer 'because it was more decent than Star bioscope'. In her case, the cinema is a place to 'pass time', after 'hardworking' (Cds.190). Other cinemas are also remembered across class lines. An informant describes the National thus: '...we liked to go to the National bioscope. That was a society bioscope...' (Cds.96-98). Compared with the Star however, there is far less remembered about the other cinemas in and around District Six, which is no doubt partly attributable to the Star's central location in Hanover Street. It also may reflect the selection of working-class informants for the original project.

Films, film shows, and stars:

Cinema's attraction was fuelled by the publicity focused on films, film shows, and stars. The Bailey family, who owned the Union cinema (pre-1925), acquired a Shetland pony – 'a star turn in the district' – and would write up the name of the film on a board at the back of the trap. Jack, the Baileys' son, would drive the trap and pony through the streets of District Six 'right up to Buckingham House, Buckingham Palace, right down Zonnebloem, down Hanover Street, up Canon Street, down William Street where ... there was another bioscope now and down the side street back into Hanover Street' (Cds.165).

For Alexander Korda's *The Drum* (1938), the doorman at the Star cinema wore a pith helmet, the manager erected a fort at the entrance flying the Union Jack, and paid children 2d each to 'wear hats like you see on the proper Indians you get in India...turbans is what they were called, I think...they were made up from nice pink crinkle paper'. The children had to walk 'up and down in Hanover Street, to give out bioscope advertisements to the people walking there' (quoted in Nasson, 1989: 287). For the *Mark of Zorro* (1940) ushers wore black eyemasks and fake silver spurs and the cinema management had placed a large cut-out of a horse on the wall of a neighbouring shop (Nasson, 1989: 287).

More impressive, judging from the memories recorded, were the visits of film stars. British actress, Gracie Fields, visited South Africa in 1935 and appeared at the Star cinema:

CB: Many actors came from America to Cape Town. There was a ... Gracie Fields and there was a coloured boy Al Johnson. Then she sings on the stage. Then he was singing too. And she hears what a voice this boy got. She picks him up on the stage. He got a dirty, filthy keppie [cap] on – she took it off and put it on her head. And she was singing that song, "Wish me luck as you wave me goodbye". And he was singing with her. And later she keeps quiet and then he sings.

Int: Was that the Star bioscope.
CB: The Star Bioscope yes. Every...in that bioscope. For the
beauties and the uglies...
(Cds.32).

George Formby was another star visitor, on which occasion 'they had to drive a police van right against the door' to allow the actor to jump out into it (Cds.171-173).²⁴ Stars remembered also include 'tough guys on the screen' Humphrey Bogart and Edward G. Robinson (Cds.168-169).

Different cinemas were contracted to exhibit the films of specific studios. The Star screened Warner Brothers' films, and the Avalon those of Twentieth Century Fox (Nasson, 1989: 288), which was clearly significant for the choices residents made as to which cinema to frequent. This would certainly have affected the profiles of audiences at each cinema in relation to race, class, gender and age. While residents' memories are redolent with experiences of *going* to the cinema, memories of the films themselves feature less prominently, as Kuhn's (2002) research also shows. Broad categories of films are remembered more frequently than actual films, including weekly serials, newsreels and cartoons. In relation to genres it is clear that slapstick comedies (Laurel and Hardy, and Charlie Chaplin), gangsters, westerns and noir films were popular. Where specific titles are remembered these include *Sign of the Cross* (1914, 1932), *When London Sleeps* (1914, 1932), *The Jazz Singer* (1927), *The Singing Fool* (1928), *Gone with the Wind* (1939), *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *The Drum* (1938), and *The Mark of Zorro* (1940).

In view of the broad spectrum of time that these transcribed interviews cover, several informants remember silent films:

JA: I can still remember when there was silent pictures too.
Int: Silent pictures.
JA: Ja.
Int: Can you explain that.

JA: It was a silent picture; you just see the mouth going and the actions but no words. But it was good

(Cds.96-98).

The music that was played to accompany silent films and the inter/sub-titles are also remembered:

it was silent movies...the silent films. Show the films and the person played the piano. Now this person watched one afternoon and they know what kind or type of music. If it is sad music then you got a sad movies on [...] you just sit still and you must just see all the movements on the film until they change over music [...] And then they say what they wanted to say...and then like here on television (cough) (cough) then you suddenly make a speech in English...and they put it at the bottom, now the screen was the same. And now of course the music, now if there is a funeral gonna come on, then she play sad music (Cds.179-181).

One informant recalls the name of Johnny Thomas, who accompanied screenings:

Int: Was it silent movies?

MA: Ja.

Int: Did they play the piano?

MA: Ja [...] I don't know whether you heard from Johnny Thomas. That very dark fellow, he use to play the piano. A professional player, ja. And the bioscope was mostly in the afternoon. Because you could think it was mostly for children you know. Not in the night. I don't think those days will come again

(Cds.06).

The cinema owners' daughter remembers this pianist as Tommy:

he was my father's pianist, he played for my father's bioscope. Now was he white or coloured no he was coloured and he played all by ear, didn't have any music, and he saw the film, it was a classic or sad, or something stupid with Laurel and Hardy, he had to play sort of ragtime music [...] No Thomas was his surname but they called him Tommy, I think his name was Tommy Thomas (Cds.165).

She and her sister were pianists themselves whom her father often called upon to accompany a screening, sometimes at a moment's notice, through an ingenious telephonic device connected to their house from the cinema:

it was a long telephone with two bells in the centre of it, indicated in the centre which was marked "house" and you returned this indicator towards "house" and you rang it by hand and this connected to the house [...] we knew it was Dad and he would say "what are you doing, we need a pianist up at Union bioscope, will you and V. come along?" (Cds.165).

She also remembers the details of the methods she and her sister used to accompany different sorts of films and moments within them:

oh I can't remember the tunes, when soldiers came along you played a march, quick turn to the march, then my sister would turn it to a march, then we came to a cowboy film, turn to a cowboy film, we had it all marked so that you just had to turn the pages of this book and get it where you wanted it, it's amazing that we put that music together [...] I really do think it was marvellous, because we were only about eleven and twelve, maybe I was going on for thirteen at that time (Cds.165).

The period of silent pictures is remembered not only for the films themselves and their accompanying music, whether listening to it or playing it, but for a time when life in District Six was 'mixed', less policed, and not violent. Silent films represent a nostalgia for that remembered past, but also for an irreplaceable past that apartheid brutalised:

- A: It was silent pictures. It was very nice. There was no violence.
- Int: [Interview continues in Afrikaans] What kind of people always went to the bioscope?
- A: Everyone the Muslims, Christians and Muslims and whites was mixed.
- Int: And then how was it with the whites together.
- A: [In English] Very nice. It was very nice. [In Afrikaans] That time they played cricket here with the whites, the Muslims and the whites played cricket here. Then we would watch the cricket. [Afrikaans] Nice, [English] it was nice. There won't come a place – the government [Afrikaans] will never again build a place in its life like District Six. [English] District Six was a wonderful place. It was really wonderful... [my translations] (Cds.03).

This encapsulates how in these memories of cinema, and the process of their recall, a wider set of historical themes based on race and identity that ran through peoples' everyday lives, is embedded. Films, film shows and their stars, were the attractions that drew residents into the cinemas but their experience of being in the cinema itself, who they were with and alongside, and how this represented their wider social and political selves, individually and collectively, remains etched in the forefront of their memories.

Conclusion

In this article I have investigated the memories of cinema-going of former District Six residents, drawn from life history interviews, which Nasson and other researchers conducted in the 1980s, and a further smaller set produced in the 2000s. I identify instances of memories of cinema-going through 'searching' the digitised transcripts based on the keywords 'bioscope'/'bioskoop'. I deduce key themes from the recorded memories: cinema and place; cinema, culture and identity; and films, film shows and stars.

While the relatively small size of my investigation delimits any claims to triangulated or multi-modal methods as adopted in several other research projects of historical cinema audiences, it is worth noting that the memory work of the District Six Museum, the various memory records produced by former residents, and other forms of documentation, provide multiple sources for deepening understandings of cinema-going for District Six residents.²⁵ There are several published autobiographical works, all of which include a section on going to the cinema.²⁶ There are also photographs of the cinemas that provide architectural detail, as well as their locations in the context of the streets and street life.²⁷ Short stories and novels based on living in District Six also elaborate experiences of cinema-going.²⁸ A particularly rich resource is a publication of paintings and accompanying memories of the artist Sandra McGregor (Fleischer, 2010), who painted the British and National cinemas, including the interior of the National. These include named characters, who posed outside or inside the cinemas while she drew and painted, and whose stories she recalls. In short, the prevalence of the cinemas in all of these wide-ranging additional sources, not only re-confirms the centrality of the cinema in the life of District Six, but also exposes further valuable detail for this case study.

When Nasson and his co-researchers undertook the life history interviews, from which he derived his reflection on cinema-going published in 1989, their interests were rooted in recording the memories of everyday life in a neighbourhood brutally decimated under apartheid in the 1960s, a 'history from below'. The symbiosis between practices of everyday life and going to the cinema is evident in the multiple references to cinema-going that appear in these memories. Nasson's primary focus at the time was the nature and formation of working class leisure activity in District Six, in which cinema-going was primary. District Six nevertheless, he tells us, 'had an identity and an imagery rooted in a sense of separateness and social and cultural localism' (1989: 286). It was, as Bonita Bennett and Chrischené Julius, assert, a 'bounded space' (Bennett and Julius, 2008: 52).²⁹ I would contend that it is this very characteristic that facilitated the enmeshing of the cinema and cinema-going into the fabric of the life of District Six residents. Entertainment

capital, following Nasson's phraseology, 'leisure as capitalist enterprise' (1989: 286), penetrated the boundaries of District Six, locating itself in several sites. Residents were thus not necessarily 'going' to the cinema, in that they were arguably already there. For many residents, geographically speaking, it was simply a case of crossing the road or walking around a corner to visit one or other cinema. The different cinemas also provided a sense of choice through the diverse programming they offered, including not only Hollywood and British films, but also Indian films. The cinemas and the films they saw, structured and shaped peoples' lives and their identities, and, as we have seen, recalling their memories of the past involves recall of cinema-going, for the majority of residents. To these ends, residents of District Six were 'cinema citizens', members of a global seam of cinema entertainment and its imaginative opportunities, while stripped of all other citizenship rights both under apartheid, as well as before apartheid officially came into being in 1948.

I am nevertheless mindful of the fragmented nature of memory *per se*, and the act of prising mere glimpses of the cinema experience from wider histories. This record of cinema-going might therefore be seen as an archival 'sliver' (Harris, 2002), something like a shard that is taken from a wider body of knowledge, but that for the cinema historian nevertheless represents a unique opportunity to reconstruct the experiences of cinema-going for a neighbourhood traumatically demolished under apartheid and that no longer actually exists. Not only do these memories make possible some degree of reconstruction of the life and times of the cinema, but also of District Six itself, from the residents' points of view, and thus crucially represent subjective accounts. In the quest for finding peoples' memories of cinema-going within the contexts of their broader lives, drawing on already developed oral history accounts proves, as it does in the case of District Six, to be an as yet under-developed method in creating new knowledge of historical cinema audiences.

Dedicated to the District Six residents who contributed their memories to the life history interviews I have drawn upon.

Acknowledgements

Carolyn Hamilton, Research Chair, APC, UCT; Renate Meyer, Debra Pryor, Sean Field, and Niklaas Zimmer, Centre for Popular Memory, UCT; Bonita Bennett, District Six Museum; Joanne Bloch, Jo-Anne Duggan, Darren Newbury, Freddy and Sue Ogterop, Sandra Proselandis, Melvyn Stokes, Kylie Thomas, and John Wright; the Memory Studies reviewers and the Special Issue editors for their helpful comments. Special thanks to Emma Sandon.

References

- Adams, H. and Suttner, H. (1988) *William Street: District Six*. Diep River, Western Cape: Chameleon Press.
- African Studies*, Special Issue: 'Life After Thirty' - A Critical Celebration', 69(1), April 2010: 1-139.
- Allen, R. and Gomery, D. (1985) *Film History: Theory and Practice*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Argus, The*, 19 October 1973.
- Bennett, B. and Julius, C. (2008) 'Where is District Six? Between landscape, site and museum', in B. Bennett, C. Julius, C. Soudien (eds) *City.Site.Museum: Reviewing memory practice at the District Six Museum*, pp.52-67. Cape Town: District Six Museum.
- Beyers, C. (2007) 'Mobilizing "community" for justice in District Six: Stakeholder politics early in the land restitution process', *South African Historical Journal*, 58: 253-276.
- Bickford-Smith, V. (1990) 'The Origins and Early History of District Six to 1910', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds.) *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, pp. 35-43. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Bickford-Smith, V., et al., (2001) 'The Western Cape oral history project: the 1990s', *African Studies*, 60(1): 5-24.
- Biltreyst, D., Lotze, K., and Meers, P. (2012) 'Triangulation in historical audience research: Reflections and experiences from a multi-methodological research project on cinema audiences in Flanders', *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 9(2): 690-715.

- Burns, J. (2013) *Cinema and Society in the British Empire, 1895-1940*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- District Six Collection, Special Collections, University of Cape Town: Cds.03, 06, 32, 88, 90, 91-92, 96-98, 134-137, 165, 168-169, 171-173, 175-176, 179-181, 190, 191, 203, 211, 211a, 266-67.
- District Six Beneficiary Trust, <http://www.districtsix.za.org>.
- District Six Museum, <http://www.districtsix.co.za>.
- Ebrahim, N. (1999) *Noor's Story: My Life in District Six*. Cape Town: District Six Museum.
- Eckardt, M. (2005) *Film Criticism in Cape Town 1928-1930: An explorative investigation into the Cape Times and Die Burger*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.
- Erlmann, V. (1991) *African Stars: Studies in Black South African Performance*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Falola, T. and Fleming, T. (eds) (2012) *Music, Performance and African Identities*. New York and Oxon: Routledge.
- Field, S. (2008) 'Imagining Communities: Memory, Loss and Resilience in Post-Apartheid Cape Town', in P. Hamilton and L. Shopes (eds.) *Oral History and Public Memories*, pp. 107-124. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Fleischer, D. (2010) *Sandra McGregor: 'Onse Artist' in District Six*. Noordhoek, Western Cape: Print Matters.
- Fortune, L. (1996) *The House in Tyne Street: Childhood Memories of District Six*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Gutsche, T. (1972) *The History and Social Significance of Motion Pictures in South Africa 1895 to 1940*. Cape Town: Howard Timmins.
- Harris, V. (2002) 'The Archival Sliver: Power, Memory, and Archives in South Africa', *Archival Science* 2: 63-86.
- Kuhn, A. (2002) *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory*. London: I.B.Tauris.
- Kuhn, A. (2010) 'Memory texts and memory work: performances of memory in and with visual media', *Memory Studies* 3(4): 298-313.
- La Guma, A. (1962) *A Walk in the Night*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Mbari.
- Maingard, J. (2003) 'Bokkies/Moffies: Cinematic Images of Black Sexual Identity in *Zonk! (1950)*', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 16(1): 25-43.

- Maingard, J. (2007) *South African National Cinema*. Oxon and New York: Routledge.
- Maltby, R., Biltereyst, D, and Meers, P. (eds) (2011) *Explorations in New Cinema History: Approaches and Case Studies*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Maltby, R., Stokes, M., Allen, R. (2007) (eds) *Going to the Movies: Hollywood and the Social Experience of Cinema*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press.
- Martin, D-C. (1999) *Coon Carnival: New Year in Cape Town, Past and Present*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Martin, D-C. (2013) *Sounding the Cape: Music, Identity and Politics in South Africa*. Somerset West: African Minds.
- Musser, C. (2011) 'Why Did Negroes Love Al Jolson and *The Jazz Singer*?: Melodrama, Blackface and Cosmopolitan Theatre Culture', *Film History* 23(2): 196-222.
- Nasson, B. (1989) "'She preferred living in a cave with Harry the snake-catcher": Towards an Oral History of Popular Leisure and Class Expression in District Six, Cape Town, c.1920-1950', in P. Bonner, I. Hofmeyr, D. James, T. Lodge (eds) *Holding Their Ground: Class, Locality and Culture in 19th and 20th Century South Africa*, 285-309. Johannesburg: Ravan and Witwatersrand University Press.
- Ngcelwane, N. (1998) *Sala Kahle District Six: An African Woman's Perspective*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- Omar, D. (1990) 'The Murder of District Six: Some Thoughts and Reminiscences', in S. Jeppie and C. Soudien (eds) *The Struggle for District Six: Past and Present*, pp. 191-196. Cape Town: Buchu Books.
- Pinnock, D. (1984) *The Brotherhoods: Street Gangs and State Control in Cape Town*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Rassool, C. (2007) 'Memory and the politics of history in the District Six Museum', in N. Murray, N. Shepherd, M. Hall (eds) *Desire Lines: Space, Memory and Identity in the Post-Apartheid City*, pp.113-127. London and New York: Routledge.
- Republic of South Africa. Group Areas Act, 1950.
- Republic of South Africa. Population Registration Act, 1950.
- Republic of South Africa. Restitution of Land Rights Act, 1994.

- Rive, R. (1986) 'Buckingham Palace', District Six. Cape Town and Johannesburg: David Philip.
- Soudien, C. (2008) 'Memory in the re-making of Cape Town', in B. Bennett, C. Julius, C. Soudien (eds) *City.Site.Museum: Reviewing memory practice at the District Six Museum*, pp.18-31. Cape Town: District Six Museum.
- Stacey, J. (1994) *Star-Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship*. London: Routledge.
- Stokes, M. and Maltby, R. (eds) (1999a) *American Movie Audiences: From the Turn of the Century to the Early Sound Era*. London: BFI.
- Stokes, M. and Maltby, R. (eds) (1999b) *Identifying Hollywood's Audiences: Cultural Identity and the Movies*. London: BFI.
- Stokes, M. and Maltby, R. (eds) (2001) *Hollywood Spectatorship: Changing Perceptions of Cinema Audiences*. London: BFI.
- Taylor, H. (2014 [1989]) *Scarlett's Women: 'Gone with the Wind' and its Female Fans*. London: Virago.
- Till, K. (2008) 'Artistic and activist memory-work: Approaching place-based practice', *Memory Studies*, 1(1): 99-113.
- Times Literary Supplement*, April 7, 1966.

¹ From one of the life history interviews in the District Six Collection, Cds.175-176, held in Special Collections, University of Cape Town (UCT) Libraries.

² The Centre for Popular Memory closed in 2013 and transferred its collections to Special Collections, UCT Libraries.

³ The title of English, radical, social historian E.P. Thompson's influential article published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, April 7, 1966. The History Workshop at the University of the Witwatersrand is the key programme in South Africa adopting oral history methods. See *African Studies*, Special Issue: 'Life After Thirty' - A Critical Celebration', 69(1), April 2010, for articles from a colloquium marking 30 years since the establishment of the History Workshop, that includes detailed critical reflections on oral history as a methodology.

⁴ The reference indicates the catalogue number in Special Collections, UCT Libraries. The 'C' in 'Cds' reflects the first level category of 'Communities' and 'ds' refers to 'District Six'. I have quoted the words exactly as they appear in the transcriptions, with an additional comma, or changed spelling, on only one or two occasions to support clearer meaning. I have retained transcribers' comments when they appear. These are in round brackets. Anything I have added or omitted appears in square brackets.

⁵ This article has benefitted from presentations at the July 2011 workshop, Archive and Public Culture Research Initiative, UCT; Society for Cinema and Media Studies conferences, Seattle, 2014, and Montreal, 2015; and HoMER@NECS conference, Milan, 2014.

⁶ The study of wider contexts however, does not replace the significance of understanding specific films as textual forms from which audiences derive meanings, for example *The Jazz Singer* (1927) in the case of District Six. This is one of the methods I incorporate into the larger project I am conducting on District Six's cinema-going histories. Like Kuhn (2002), I take the view that this is a crucial arm of studies of cinema memory.

⁷ Nasson and Jeppie were then in the Department of Historical Studies at the University of Cape Town. Nasson subsequently moved to the University of Stellenbosch and is now retired. Jeppie is Associate Professor and Director of the Institute for Humanities (HUMA) at UCT.

⁸ Personal communication [email], Debra Pryor, 26 January, 2011. The spreadsheet is not dated.

⁹ Based on the transcripts to which I have had access. Nasson (1989) suggests 1901 as the earliest date of birth.

¹⁰ Personal communication [email], Debra Pryor, 26 January, 2011.

¹¹ A further interview is with the wife of Ken Jordaan, a radical figure in 'coloured' politics, who was a member of the Non-European Unity Movement, went into exile in the 1970s, and published in the academic journals *Race and Class* and *Race Today*.

¹² The total population figure varies between 40,000 and 66,000, but the latter figure features most often.

¹³ The Population Registration Act, 1950, classified South Africans according to race: 'white', 'coloured', or 'native'. It was later amended to include Indians. While classification by race is problematic, these categories continue to be used in everyday parlance as well as in specific instances of officialdom, with 'native' being replaced by 'African'. I have thus incorporated these as they pertain to necessary descriptions.

¹⁴ Dullah Omar (1934-2004) grew up and went to school in District Six, after which he studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1982. He was a member of the Non-European Unity Movement and subsequently joined the ANC-aligned United Democratic Front in the 1980s. Under apartheid, he was banned, detained and survived two assassination attempts.

¹⁵ The Cape Flats refers to a vast, low-lying, sandy expanse southeast of the Central Business District, where many racially-divided townships were built under apartheid, to which 'coloureds' and African were removed from the 1950s onwards.

¹⁶ See the District Six Beneficiary Trust website: <http://www.districtsix.za.org/>. For earlier commentary on the process see Beyers (2007).

¹⁷ Cinema exhibition was not a singular activity in that a film screening event usually included trailers for forthcoming films, newsreels and advertisements before the main feature. Indian films were also exhibited, as well as South African films, which a fuller account would need to include.

¹⁸ Detail on the cinemas, when they were converted into cinemas or built, who owned them, how long they survived, and how they came to their demise, needs further research. Thelma Gutsche, the key South African cinema historian who published her detailed history in 1972, indicates that there were eight cinemas in District Six that closed down for a few weeks during the 1918 Spanish influenza epidemic that swept through the country and particularly the Cape (1972: 157) - also cited in Burns (2013: 29).

¹⁹ 'Pass' and 'ID', refer to the South African identity document, which included the record for Africans of their permission to work and reside in the city under apartheid legislation - hence it was known as the 'pass' or 'passbook'.

²⁰ Dr Abdullah Abdurahman (1872-1940), was born and grew up in South Africa, trained as a medical doctor in Glasgow, and ran a practice in Cape Town. He was president of the African Political Organisation and was the first ‘coloured’ councillor in South Africa. Isaac Purcell was a white local merchant, who became an M.P. representing ‘coloured’ interests.

²¹ For a detailed discussion of the *ghoema* drum and the *ghoema* beat see Martin, (2013).

²² Charles Musser’s (2011) article on African-Americans’ love of Al Jolson and *The Jazz Singer* is an exemplar of how to approach this in another setting. Erlmann (1991), Falola and Fleming (2012), and Martin (1999) treat this subject in the South African frame, but within larger works.

²³ The transcript is a little unclear and I have used the version that appears in Nasson (1989: 294).

²⁴ Tyrone Power’s visit that coincided with the filming of *Untamed* (1955), in which he plays the lead, is not mentioned in the interviews to which I have had access.

²⁵ On triangulation as method in the study of historical cinema audiences, see Biltereyst, Lotze and Meers (2012). Kuhn identifies triangulation as her ‘objective’, using ‘three parallel sets of inquiries’, which draw on ‘contemporary records of various kinds; on ethnographic-style inquiries among surviving cinemagoers of the 1930s; and on readings of selected 1930s films’ (2002: 7).

²⁶ For example, Adams and Suttner (1988), Ebrahim (1999), Fortune (1996), and Ngcelwane (1998).

²⁷ Photographers include: Cloete Breytenbach, Clarence Coulson, Jan Greshoff, George Hallett, Jackie Heyns, Bryan Heseltine, Gavin Jantjes, Jimi Matthews, Wilfred Paulse, and Jansje Wissema.

²⁸ For example, La Guma (1962), and Rive (1986).

²⁹ It was simultaneously, as they propose, an ‘unbounded space which transcends physical boundaries’ (2008: 52).