

Colouring Continuity and Change: The Wentworth Community in Durban

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ABSTRACT Despite what many would construe as massive political and legislative transformation, many South Africans still inhabit what can be best described as a fragmented and discontinuous geographical and ideological landscape. A case in point is the 'township' of Wentworth as a spatial and temporally situated example of a community dispossessed. Wentworth is home to a historically disenfranchised Coloured community that holds to an identity that is rich, in as much as it is complex and fraught. This paper works through excavating memory of 'place' and 'people' as shared through the narratives of residents of Wentworth, a so called 'Coloured' suburb in Durban. It works through a social constructionist and interpretivist approach and proceeds through the narratives of a sample group of thirty one participants. It excavates, through narrative inquiry, a sense of self as articulated by the participants, through their experiences of living in Wentworth. Their narratives reveal that many of them still squat within fuzzily marked spaces delineated by a racial classificatory system framed by 'White' and 'Black' at either ends.

INTRODUCTION

While there has been political and legislative transformation in South Africa, it is nevertheless inescapably true that many South Africans today still inhabit what can perhaps be described as a fragmented and discontinuous geographical and ideological landscape¹. In the wake of over two decades of democracy, seemingly seismic political change and the construction of a new South African 'rainbow identity' or 'rainbow nation', 'the population groupings of the colonial and apartheid era still retain a powerful place in the national consciousness.' And what remains painfully obvious is that, 'urban residential areas and rural farming areas' for many categories of people, remain normatively segregated according to the architecture of the previous governments (Christopher 2002:406). One such urban landscape is Wentworth; a so-called 'Coloured'² suburb in Durban, in KwaZulu-Natal. The study of 'place' is among one of the most important ideas in geography (Cresswell 2004). 'Place' and the people that inhabit 'place' is likewise of profound interest to wider social science scholars (see Gupta and Ferguson 2001).

Wentworth is a 'place' and space that is home to a large disenfranchised Coloured community. This community of people holds to an identity that is at once complexly rich as well as troubled. The paper works through excavating narratives of 'place' and 'people' as shared by the

residents of Wentworth. The paper sees these voices as revealing a measure of the subaltern lived experiences of the people, some of whom reveal that they squat within fuzzily marked spaces delineated by a racial classificatory system framed by 'White' and 'Black' at either ends.

James Muzondidya (2006), reviewing Mohammed Adhikari's book titled, *Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community*, which appears in the Southern African History journal *Kronos*, claims quite rightly that identity is a popular topic in academic discourse. However, he continues, and one cannot but agree with him, that when it came to the study of Coloureds, 'the analyses of race, ethnicity, nationalism, gender and class' all of which, is potentially able to contribute to the complexity of Southern African historiography, 'have either mostly paid peripheral attention to subject minorities like Coloureds and Indians, or have been very shallow in their analysis of the past and present of these groups' (Adhikari 2006:280). One adds that this is perhaps more so with the former group, that is, Coloureds, than Indians, and that more recent studies, have (albeit not wholly successfully) attempted to address the gap in critical studies on Indians (see Desai and Vahed 2010; Duphelia-Mesthrie 2000). Of course Muzondidya is himself a disciple of sorts of the writer he reviews (as the supervised student of Adhikari at the University of Cape Town). Notwithstanding any collegial bias, his observations on the

dearth of a cohesive body of literature and social science analyses on the Coloured people, or rather the *incompleteness* of the extant literature; is a perceptive description of the state of research on particular minority groups. Perhaps it is in turn not too far-fetched an assertion that “South Africa’s coloured community has remained a marginalised community - marginalised by history and even historians” (Adhikari 2006:467). There are studies that focus on the coloured communities in Durban and Cape Town. However these are largely from the perspective of analysing crime and criminal behaviour within marginalised communities, like that of the coloured people. While there are studies (aside from the political science studies), also from a gender perspective (see Shefer et al. 2008) or a crime and abuse perspective (see Sawyer et al. 2006), there is not much literature from a humanities and social science perspective.

This paper wishes to contribute to the body of work on the Coloured people of South Africa. It does this however, by choosing to consciously and narrowly focus on the people themselves. Rather than an unpacking various grand narratives³ of the socio-political landscape of colonial and neo-colonial politics; in the ‘heat’ of which various identities, such as that of the ‘Coloured’ were constructed and ‘forged’, it proceeds more microcosmically, through the personal recollections and narratives of the people. Thus the study did not consciously seek out people who identified as being overtly political. The paper attempts rather to ‘listen’ to what the people have to say about their personal (lay?) understandings of living in Wentworth by unpacking various thematic aspirations, ideals and experiences that they share. The paper situates such an excavation against the wider (popularly construed) ideological and socio-political landscape as *they*, the participants themselves understand it. It is this *very personal history* and narrative that this paper is interested in. The narratives of the ‘Coloured’ people residing in the suburb of Wentworth in the KZN⁴ province in turn show them as a poignantly complex and disenfranchised community.

In a fascinating and deeply revealing paper on the historical embeddedness of the racial classification in South Africa, which lays ‘bare’ the very genesis and usage (mine included) of the nomenclature ‘Coloured’, A J Christopher claims that the “racial polarisation in South Africa”, has

been shrouded in “myths of racial purity” (Christopher 2009:401). Within such a polarised construction, the Coloured people sit fuzzily as neither *this* (Black) nor *that* (White) in a liminal space that never quite meets the threshold of either ends, and is summed up in the titles of books such as that of Leo Spitzer’s (1989) entitled *Lives in Between* or Roy du Pre’s (1994) *Separate but Unequal*. However, more poignant than book titles, are perhaps the words from informants such as those shared by one participant; “*We are not white enough, but we are also not quite black enough.*” It was Farred (2000:57) who reminded us over a decade ago that ‘Coloureds are precariously situated at the raw and jagged edges of that contracted and contested space between the country’s disenfranchised black majority and the oppressive white minority.’ As the narratives reveal, there is a phenomenological experience of marginality that the Coloured residents of Wentworth live and articulate their lives through. The ‘predicament of marginality’ was a term coined by Spitzer (1989:42) and refers to some of the conclusions he drew from his use of cross cultural life histories (Brazilian and West African) to investigate the multiple social processes of assimilation and exclusion that subordinate and marginal groups experienced. This paper turns to one such group and community of Coloureds inhabiting the suburb of Wentworth in the KwaZulu-Natal province.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative approach was used in the study and narratives gathered from a sample of 31 male and female residents of Wentworth. The age category chosen for the respondents was 35-65 years old as the aim was to collect narratives or ‘storied accounts’ of events or memories that recalled experiences of having lived in the area. The sampling was initially non randomised and identified older males and females known to the interviewer and who were either known to have been active on some level in the community, or known to be good story-tellers, that is, people well known amongst the general community, for “*knowing a lot about Wentworth*”, and who enjoyed sharing what they knew. Thereafter the snowball sampling technique was used with participants often pointing the interviewer to other potential participants they felt had “*rich*

stories to tell". It was felt that a relative saturation point was reached with the 31 participants.

The narratives were collected over two months March to May 2012 by a research assistant, who was herself a resident of Wentworth and thus accustomed to the area. She was in her early twenties, and a University student who had had substantial experience with qualitative research work. A research assistant was used as the assistant was familiar with potential participants across the age groups identified. It was also believed that the participants would be more comfortable initially sharing their experiences with someone they felt was part of their 'community'. Thereafter the researcher met with approximately eight participants from the larger group, who indicated both consent and willingness to meet, for another set of interviews. As mentioned, the age range of 35-65 years was chosen as this sampling represented the so called older generations and the desire was to collect thick historical narratives. The interviews lasted approximately 30-45 minutes, and were conducted at a place that was comfortable to the participants; in most part, at their homes, although when indicated and requested by the participants, they also took place at their work offices and at the NGOs where some of the participants worked or volunteered. The responses were written down and later transcribed.

The interview questions attempted to probe wide issues of sense of 'place', 'self' and their understandings of 'Colouredness'. Narrative analysis was used to analyse the responses from the participants, and open ended questions were meant to encourage participants to talk about their past as well as their present experiences. Once the transcribed material was ready, it was read over several times to gain familiarity with the empirical data against the archival and textual research. The responses were then coded into thematic clusters, allowing potential patterns and commonalities to emerge. The data was in turn cast within an interpretivist analytic. An interpretivist approach does not assume there to be a dominant singular truth claim and the paper thus worked from the understanding that 'truth' and truth claims from the participants are relative and multiple, *and valid*.

Phenomenology, which is both a philosophical lens as well as methodological approach (in studying valuable subjective experiences), was used in order to attempt to 'penetrate' the expe-

riences of the participants. The understanding was that the '*historied*' narratives revealed an epistemic of privilege (Harding 2004), positioned and articulated as they were 'from the inside', capable of revealing an insider and emic perspective, based on the participants' lived phenomenological experiences *as people living in Wentworth*.

Rather than present these themes as separate issues to probe, the researcher approached them in the same vein as they were shared, as rather 'untidily braided', and as knitted and knotted together. The analytic advantage of this is that we are able at once to see how the thematic concerns 'bleed' one into the other and how each informs the other, in different ways and varying strengths for the people interviewed. In presenting the themes of discontinuity and marginality et al. that surfaced in the interviews, the researcher has opted to present them as they arose in what the informants had to share, rather than separate and sever sentences and shepherd into different thematic paragraphs of discussion. This affords the added opportunity to 'hear' and 'see' the people as their stories get told, in as much as some of their personality is simultaneously communicated. This is not to say that the narratives are presented in entirety⁵, as this is neither preferable nor profitable, as there were many open ended questions that were posed, and many responses elicited. However, what *has* been captured, are the points of the interview where there is a continuous space of story-telling, around notions of space and place, marginality and the 'Coloured identity'. This is when particular questions acted as trigger points prompting the informant to 'talk' in a self directed manner, rather than answer sequentially based questions. These were mainly the 'narrative chunks' or 'scripts' chosen and presented here for narrative and thematic analysis. As such when they shared biographical details woven into their responses to the questions, these are retained. As are other seemingly innocuous (yet vital) pieces of descriptive background, all of which again coheres in assembling a (qualitative) 'face' to the respondents.

Narrative analysis, quite importantly, does not consider narratives as stories that convey a set of facts about the world, and is not primarily interested in whether stories are 'true.' Rather narrative analysis views narratives, as interpretive devices through which people represent

themselves and their worlds, to themselves and to others. Narrative inquiry is the interdisciplinary study of the activities involved in generating and analyzing stories (or 'scripts') of life experiences through interviews, journals or memoirs (Schwandt 2004). Scripts are the referential core of personal narratives and the analytical frames from which particular behaviour is interpreted culturally (Labov 1997). Also with this technique, in most instances the researcher says very little, acting primarily as an attentive listener, or decoder, which was especially suited as some of the informants were eager to share their stories. This kind of analysis sees narratives or stories as linking the past to the present (May 2002).

Preamble

The narrative blurb of a 'township tour' offered by Compassline Tours, entitled *The Coloured Experience*, reads;

On the day democracy finally dawned in South Africa, Arch-Bishop Desmond Tutu spoke with great excitement about 'The Rainbow People' in describing the wondrous diversity of their language and culture. The 'Coloured Experience' tour will enable you to gain a better insight into the roots of a multi-racial community living in Wentworth known as 'The Coloured People'. Gale, a local resident of Wentworth, created this tour with the intention of showing off a community that had survived through apartheid and continues to do so today. She will, very proudly, begin the tour at the Natal Command Bluff Military Base and meander along the Bluff's Marine Drive, through Wentworth and finally completing the tour at her family home, to enjoy a traditional lunch⁶.

Niren Tolsi is a journalist who appears to have taken the tour in 2008, and wrote in a Sunday supplement of the same year;

Included [in the tour are] the first government houses, called Noddy Houses because they were so small and look like something out of Enid Blyton's books⁷.

The researcher, having personally taken (in 2009), and experienced the packaged tour experience of 'living in Wentworth' and being the Coloured People⁸, was keen to hear from the people themselves. That particular tour, which had been taken as part of another project on packaged tours and commodification, was in turn the genesis for this particular study.

Gail Snyman's description and the tourist blurb-descriptions are markedly different from other documented descriptions about Wentworth. While the tourist blurb enthused about Archbishop Tutu and the newly coined phrase of 'Rainbow Nation' and 'wondrous diversity' and wending ones colourful way through the different sections of Wentworth, it fails to mention that much of Wentworth's troubled history and discontent, remains (on many levels) for the Coloured people living there. It makes no mention of pollution and the people's indignation at environmental concerns that buttress deeper resentments of belonging and non belonging.

Conversely the Wiley et al. research report on perceived environmental and health threats, paints a different picture, and describes Wentworth as;

11km from the city centre, Wentworth, also a creation of Apartheid was converted from a World War II military transit camp into an area for those people designated 'coloured'. Flanked by the industrial area of Jacobs on one side and an oil refinery on the other, the township of Austerville/Wentworth is situated in the heart of the industrial basin south of Durban (Wiley et al. 1996).

It is particularly apposite that this description of the suburb is contextualised within an environmental report and documents the suburb as being flanked and enclosed by major industrial and potentially polluting structures. It also spells out that the suburb was conceived within apartheid ideological and segregationist policies of the Group Areas Act⁸, and thus offers up both the 'image' (visual description) as well as the 'text' (apartheid doctrine) behind the birth of the space. Perhaps what is most revealing is that Wentworth is a residential space hastily 'converted from a World War II military transit camp into an area for those people designated *coloured*'. It is rather more than merely semi-otic that the history of the suburb points to its 'transit-camp' status which calls up images of military type barracks and expectations of temporary-transient type housing and living, rather than notions of spatial history, 'roots' and community living spaces. However this was (made to be) home to a large number of people designated as 'Coloured'. For from 1961, the Coloured people; first from various Durban residences, followed by the other parts of the province, were all formally moved to Wentworth.

Oddly (sic) enough, none of the narratives shared by the participants referred to themselves as fitting into the 'Rainbow Nation' that Gale Snyman and the tourist blurb alluded to. Instead are a poignant and in some instances, a painful sharing of a sense of home and self. While the insert referred to earlier by the journalist Niren Tolsi quite rightly speaks of the so called 'Noddy homes', this is not because they look quaint and like something out of a charming Enid Blyton book, but rather they refer to what is also termed 'Noddy Box' housing or 'Shoddy Noddy Housing'.⁹ It was not very surprising that none of the people interviewed spoke about the quaintness of these (crowded) homes.

While the structured 'Coloured Experience' tour wends its colourful (sic) way through the suburb and past 'charming' Noddy homes, ending symbolically (and in epicurean style) at the tour leader, Gale Snyman's home; *home* was something somewhat more fraught and ambiguous for the people interviewed. Narratives themselves of course, are fluid and shifting and 'shift and change in their 'telling', and are different from an individual to another. However, repeated, iterative storylines amongst different 'tellers' offer thematic issues for scrutiny. Using narrative analysis, one is able to discern particular themes or scripts that emerge in the stories that the informants 'told.' The two that I extract for engagement can be summarised as;

- ♦ Dispossession of space and place
- ♦ Marginality and non belonging

Excavated Narratives of Place, Home and Self

Mrs Rosemary a woman in her late fifties shared;

The road leading up from Clairwood race course-Duranta Road- housed 100s of families in makeshift tin-shanties. A plot was set aside directly across from Engen Refinery for the people who lived in these shacks. The housing that was promised turned out to be hollow brick houses with a flat tin roof, in a barrack shape, resembling the Rainbow Chicken farm sheds- hence the name Rainbow Chickens. We were tightly compressed and while it was better than the shacks we lived in, in a way we were still disadvantaged. We lived practically on top of each other so people knew your business- and also the conditions weren't good. The rains would come in ... also sitting on top of each

other... There was a lot of unemployment, poverty and substance abuse. Plus because we were directly across the road from the refinery, it affected us all in a very serious way health wise (We all have chest ailments/ asthma/ severe headaches etc.). But the good thing is we were like a family, and one community, in these chicken homes. We stood together. When the name was changed from Rainbow Chickens to Rainbow Gardens- it was a good thing because it's like we had some dignity now. ...they were comparing us to how the chickens all live together- and that wasn't a good thing. When we were recently, around 2009, moved to Landsdown... into the flats, it was an upgrade, because now people had their own space, their own homes at least...

It is rather ironic that aside from the semiotic facade of a name change, from 'Rainbow Chickens' to 'Rainbow Gardens' just prior to 2004, the actual flat-roofed dwellings were not given any change or upgrade in a material sense. The word 'rainbow' in the former label referenced the claustrophobic cubicle style dwellings or 'rooms' in a processing plant for breeding chickens, such as the plant in Hammarsdale, KZN province, founded by the late Stanley Methven. The 'rainbow'; in the latter label was of course meant to refer to (living in) the Rainbow Nation. This is perhaps more bizarre and meaningless than even a perfunctory slapping on of a coat of paint. And although some, like the respondent who shared her story above, felt that the name afforded some dignity, others, such as the respondent's younger cousin, said that this "was like putting a pretty pink bow on dirty laundry". It is as if the slapping on of a new name was meant to qualitatively change the experience of living in the dwellings. From what some of the participants shared, one of whom had lived there for thirty five years, this was however, far from the case. Ironically, there was no room for any 'gardens', only "small patches of grass" and small spaces "where people planted a shrub or so". The houses were said to "often house more than ten people each".

Writing about these small houses in 1996, Wiley et al. state:

[So]me tiny and barely habitable units, known locally as the "Rainbow Chickens", were built in 1974 as "sub-economic" units for temporary use but still are occupied today in spite of their primitive facilities, extreme densi-

ty, rooms without doors, flooding in rainy seasons, and their immediate proximity to two industrial truck corridors and the Engen Refinery (Wiley et al. 1996: np). Rachel Tenney, writing about eight years later, well within the post democracy transition in 2004 writes that;

"In Wentworth there is a mixture of dwellings, including flats, single-family homes and the recently renamed Rainbow Gardens, which is made up of "sub-sub-economic flat roofed, two-roomed houses," formerly called the Rainbow Chickens, which front the Engen Refinery on Tara Road (Tenney 2004:16).

Rachel Tenney wrote this in 2004 and her description is a faithful echo of the earlier 1996 Wiley et al. description. However, Tenney lived with a host family in Wentworth for several months for the duration of her research and her description speaks to an 'inside' lived perspective, rather than a mere quotation of an earlier documented record.

Around late 2009, the people from the 'Rainbow Chicken homes' were relocated to flats in Landsdown Road. In essence the move was from the small hollow brick homes to what appeared as larger more modern 'flats' (larger from the outside). This at superficial glance appeared to be an upgrade, especially from the outside, which was how it must have appeared to the people being moved. However the semi-detached houses, stood four to a stand in long rows (hence the facade of enormity from the exterior). As another resident put it; *"Nice from far, but far from nice."* These new apartments or 'flats' as they would be known, were almost as small on the inside as the so called Rainbow Chicken dwellings had been. According to the people interviewed, they also carried with them the name of 'barracks' in what must have felt as being qualitatively similar living conditions, as the former dwellings in Tara Road. However, it is not only the people in Landsdown that voiced indignation. There were others such as the participant Maria Spencer.

Maria Spencer¹⁰ has long straight hair and oriental features. Her sense of indignation at where she was born and where she now lives is quite palpable;

I am a BCom graduate from UKZN, and I'm now employed by a NGO that focuses on environmental issues in Wentworth.... I was born in Wentworth. I am still angry at the whole concept of Group areas act and apartheid....ripping

people, my people from their communities just to suit the minority...and put into a hell hole of a place. Heck no, I won't continue living here.... as soon as I'm more settled, I'm out. The pollution is just awful!! I don't want my kids to grow up with cancer and leukaemia...

Mr van der Ryle is seventy seven years old. He is light in complexion and has pale blue eyes and says that he is often mistaken for 'white'.

I live in this house with my wife ... it's a comfortable home ... it's got everything we need. You know, (he beams) I made most of the furniture in this home myself..., and I still make furniture. And I am still driving my little run down car... (He smiles again slyly). But we are not truly happy living here, but what can I do? The polluted environment here is not very nice...This is what the government gave us ... I came from a mixed area in Town. Ah it was soooo nice there (he says nostalgically). We didn't see any difference in each other. Then this place was made a Coloured area ... people from Adams Flats, Mayville, Overport and Sydenham, we were all just put here...why weren't we given the opportunity to live where we wanted? Why were we put into an army camp? It was devastating to us because we didn't have a choice...

Mr Naude is forty eight and talks while playing with his eight year old daughter. He is tall, light in complexion and sports curly hair.

I was moved here with my family from Town... I still have memories ... maybe not so much my own, but those of my parents...they often spoke about our previous neighbourhood in Town...they loved it... Pollution is a major problem. If I won a million rands, I'd move for her (points to his little daughter). It's tough raising a child in this place because of the pollution... We are surrounded by factories... and then there is the gangsterism over and above that ... so you can't just go where you liked, you have to stick to your area. Even if you are not involved in gangs, you are still classified with them.

Maybe if I was a little financially okay, I would move from here, from this box of a house... This is a dumping ground in more ways than one and we got dumped here just like so many other things... (He sighs). But this is so called home until I perish... (While looking lovingly at his daughter).

The actual dwellings; flats, free standing houses, and semi-detached houses, were dis-

cernibly, and in the descriptions of the participants, relatively different one from the other, and indicated the different socio-economic backgrounds of the inhabitants¹¹. The space and the dwellings were thus heterogeneous and indexed the diversity amongst the people themselves. However, most participants like Maria Giles, Mr Naude and others, both in recollections of the past, as well as in evoking the present, spoke about being (re)moved to spaces that were far from ideal. Even for those who were born in Wentworth, it became increasingly clear as they became parents themselves that they had been rounded up and herded into a space that was already “*zoned more industrial than residential*”. Their concerns and indignation extended to their children, who they feared, would continue to inherit and inhabit this space.

From ‘space’ to ‘place’ to ‘home’, the terms *space*, *place* and *home* hold different qualitative and phenomenological meanings. While ‘space’ is a rather more abstract concept and is not used by the respondents themselves, ‘place’ is word that is deployed often (although less frequently than the word ‘home’). Cresswell points out that a vital contribution of humanistic geography is perhaps the distinction between space and place, where there is a distinction between an “abstract realm of space and an experienced and felt world of place” (Cresswell 2009: 384). The people of Wentworth, lived and raised children here, dressed them for schools, attended church, volunteered at NGOs, worked within small businesses in the suburb as well as outside the suburb, and enjoyed the company of loved ones while abhorring that of the notorious gangsters and gangsterism that they claimed surrounded them. They were teachers, academics, clerks, salespeople, lawyers and they were mothers and fathers. Wentworth was of course the *space* that could be called up with spatial co-ordinates on a map. However, it was also the texturised and phenomenological lived ‘place’ that was called up in memory, both past and present of the residents. ‘Place’ thus emerges as conceptually rich, ‘thick’ and more complex than ‘space’. Place is a “meaningful site that combines location, locale, and sense of place” (Cresswell 2009:384). Yet quite often, as with Maria, place is prefaced by the words ‘hell-hole’, or articulated as ‘dumping place’. “[P]lace-making” is thus rendered complex in the context of displacement (Beyers 2008:361), and in the context of segregationist ‘placement’ one adds.

American academic in geography and communication studies, Michael Curry claimed that;

“The relationship between an object and where it belongs is not simply fortuitous, or a matter of causal forces, but it is rather intrinsic or internal, a matter of what that thing actually is. When things are not where they belong, when they are out of place, they cannot truly be themselves” (Curry 1998:48).

While this statement could easily pass as a blurb for the architects of the apartheid government and the segregationist policy makers, it of course only really makes sense when one is talking about non volitional and inanimate ‘things’, and this is what was meant, writing as Michael Curry was, on digital technologies and geography. *People* however, have ontological value and worth and they are not born with an innateness of ‘where’ in space they ‘belong’ (sic). Yet ironically this was, in a sense, exactly how space came to be ideologically carved out and apportioned to the (constructed) racial groups, together by the apartheid state, with its use of so called expert (anthropological and scientific) knowledge.

None of the respondents self identified as being highly political consciousness. Neither did they did speak in any kind of overtly politicised language. They spoke instead in deeply emotional terms that captured, more potently, the meaning of space and place and the discontinuous sense of place and home for them. There was of course a deep and layered sense of place, as having been born or raised in Wentworth, and having themselves raised children here. While some of the residents and respondents did refer to Wentworth as being ‘home’ to them, and referred to a sense of community, many claimed (even those who currently lived in what would be considered the more affluent sections, such as the areas around Quality Street), that they did not really think of Wentworth as ‘home’. Many claimed that they were happy, and one informant said, *“There is always a (happy) ‘vibe’ in many of these homes.”* However, in recollecting the past, they articulated varying degrees of discontent with the present. Many were ‘happy; as they declared, yet ‘home’ itself appeared to hold a mixed and ambiguous value for many, perhaps best illustrated by the comment of long time resident Mr. Morgan, who says; *“This is still not home, although I was born here....”* Mr. Morgan did not say where he be-

lieved home was, and this was perhaps understandable, since he had been born in Wentworth. This assertion was also all the more potent because *he had been born in Wentworth*. For Mr Morgan was summing up his experienced sense of home, and sharing on some levels, his alienation and non-belonging, experienced through being constructed as Coloured.

The apartheid machinery had a particular ideological hermeneutic, of where people needed to be moved, that people needed to *put in their place*. The different racial(ly) constructed groups, (the Coloured being one such group) in turn experienced traumatic forced removals and dispossession from spaces and places that they had considered 'home', to new spaces that had to be rendered into living places and new homes. The dispossession of both space and place accordingly emerge as a potent *leitmotif* in many narratives.

It was John Agnew who said that space and place are about the "where" of things and their invocation heralds different understandings of what "where" means (Agnew and Livingstone 2011). The 'where' of the place was and is critical. Just to be told that someone lived in Wentworth, for many years, and perhaps even now, translated to 'knowing' in advance that, 'that person must be Coloured'. Likewise, living in Wentworth carries with it deep seated connotations of *being Coloured* and being been herded and 'forced' into Wentworth. Levels and articulations of power are of course implicated and woven in the "construction, reproduction, and contestation of places and their meanings" (Cresswell 2009:3). In the narratives of the respondents, are the phenomenological textured realities of polluting living environments, overcrowding, gangsterism, rife unemployment, and of course the massive destabilisations of the forced (re)movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The Coloured people, like members of the other so racialised groups, become firmly fixed as 'members' in various groups. As AJ Christopher tells us, the census imposed order (sic) of a statistical nature. In time the creation of a new ordering of society by the census, acted to reshape that which the census sought to merely describe (Christopher 2002: 401). But perhaps even within the segregationist politics and racially constructed 'groupings' of people, the 'Coloured' is *more, constructed than most*. This is not as facetious or odd a statement as it may initially

appear. "Coloured" is after all a racial construction of what has been deemed *neither this* (white), *nor that* (black), and seen (ideologically) as comprising what is left over.

The South African social anthropologist, Christiaan Beyers, while researching and writing on the notion of (Coloured) 'community and citizenship' in the context of the District Six Museum in Cape Town, says that the term *coloured* is "a residual racial category designating a very diverse group of people who were not considered 'White' or 'African' or 'Indian' but somewhere in between" (Beyers 2008). The term 'residual' I feel, is a powerful semantic. The signification of the term 'residual' is evocative of that which is left over and which is left behind. It is as powerfully evocative as sitting in a Grade 9 (then standard 11 class) and listening to a lesson on Athol Fugard's masterpiece, *Boesman and Lena*. The play titled *Boesman and Lena* portrays the lives of the indigent or homeless Coloured couple, who live at the bleak Swartkops River mudflats at the edge of Cape Town. Their lives play out *in and through* the semiosis of 'mud'. The imagery of mud is a visual as well as emotional signification that evokes and references the Coloured, as someone (something?) that was created out of two different elements, water and soil, which in coming together, became mud, a third 'something' that is variously perceived as 'messy and perhaps even 'dirty'. Said differently/discursively, two different discrete elements combine to become something 'fuzzy'.

While scholarship of course recognises that 'race' is a discursive construction, at the popular level, race or racial identity is something that, within the South African context, has been appropriated as a 'fixed' marker of identity at a popular level. AJ Christopher (2002:401) states that the national census reinforced the groups it was initially meant only to observe. He notes rather pointedly that "there was not even a distinction of "Coloured" until the Population Registration Act, which defined Coloured as "the remainder". Christopher continues that "when the Union of South Africa was formed in 1910 there was no constitutional difference made between whites and those later classified as Coloured; indeed in Natal those meeting typical voting requirements were allowed to vote" (Tenney 2004:5).

Needless to say, race is a "fluid, transforming, historically specific concept" and as Gold-

berg puts it, it is “parasitic on theoretical and social discourses for the meaning it assumes at given historical moments” (Goldberg 1992: 553). While the participants interviewed confessed that they felt that they were ambiguously placed in a liminal state betwixt ‘black and white’, they nonetheless clearly self identified as being Coloured. There was no reticence from being seen and seeing themselves as Coloured people. However, there was deep and profound resentment at how Coloureds had been constructed and rendered almost invisible within the South African racial fabric. Their own understanding of being a Coloured was richly layered in as much as it was simultaneously fraught.

Victor Buchli maintains that “memory requires a certain degree of iterability, both material and discursive in order to sustain it”. It is of course this ‘iterability’ that “presences” the ‘something’, in this instance, a cherished sense of ‘self’. The vital point that he makes is that “when this iterability fails, both materially and discursively, then there is a crisis of being” (Buchli and Lucas 2001). This ‘*crisis of being*’ is perhaps what comes through in many of the narratives. The participants appeared to indicate that they felt a profound absence of an iterability of their value at *being Coloured*. This in turn came to be phenomenologically grasped and viscerally experienced as deep resentment at being, neither white nor black.¹² It is not that the participants interviewed were perpetually unhappy or in some morass of sustained existential angst. They ‘lived, laughed, loved’ and enacted all of the other corny but much needed social transactions that are the stuff of everyday life and living (and of Hallmark cards!). However, in reflecting back, or in being asked to share thoughts and feelings about *being Coloured* and being Coloured in Wentworth, they shared feelings and memories that reveal levels of a ‘crisis of being’. Nowhere is this more discernible than in their phenomenological experiences and in their perceived and experienced sense of where they ‘fit’ in the current South African racial landscape. The participant, Mr. Naude’s comment that Wentworth was a “*dumping ground in more ways than one*” and that they as Coloured people were “*dumped here just like so many other things*”, spoke to the heart of the discontent.

Christian Beyers claims that popular understandings of ‘self’ tended to be more apolitical

and unproblematised (Beyers 2008:363). However, for the people of Wentworth, while their understanding of ‘self’ was, in a sense, apolitical¹³, it was not however, unproblematised. There was no question that they self-identified as ‘Coloured’. This in itself was not a problem or concern as such. There was no crisis of being in terms of ‘who’ they saw themselves as, rather the ‘crisis of being’ lay at the heart of where they felt they belonged, and rather that they felt, *that they did not belong* and they spoke about a deeply ‘felt’ sense of marginalisation, or as Mr van der Byle shared, a deep sense of ‘neglect’.

Mr van der Byle was eager to share his feelings;

We are downtrodden. Afrikaans man did it, now the black man is doing it. Coloureds are neglected...

The Coloured culture is too diverse and you can't put your finger on it. Ja...in present political times the emphasis is on black and all other denominations (sic) is left out.

It is similarly echoed in the words of fifty three year old Paton. Paton is of average height and dark in complexion. She speaks with a ‘nostalgic’ look on her face and a wistful voice;

Because of apartheid, for fifteen years we weren't allowed into the cinemas. So on a Friday, we would have movie Friday at the school and ‘Braai and Swaai’... it was not much, but it was good ... [gets a wistful look]. We should have been able to make our own decisions and move and live where we wanted. I don't think all Coloureds need to be in one space, we need to be diverse so we can learn, respect and accept each other ... Generally in the country, there's no hope for coloureds.... where do we belong....

This sense of marginalisation, Adhikari maintains, is the single most important factor in the making of a Coloured identity” (Adhikari 2006:473). This non belonging and marginalisation reflected in quite a visceral way in the manner that most respondents felt about the place or space that they (were compelled to) live in. Even the participants who had been born in Wentworth and had no other frame of reference, so to speak, seem to have inherited a sense of discontent that they appeared to live their lives through. This discontent is heavily signified in what they bemoan as the extremely polluted en-

vironment in which they find themselves. It is perhaps an evocative reminder of the Swartkops River mudflats and the characters of Boesman and Lena. Boesman and Lena are Athol Fugard's archetypal (though of course not typical) 'Coloured couple', who are forced to eke a living, off the Swartkops mud flats. This polluting and environmental/spatial messiness is socially echoed in the respondents' feelings (and fears) about the sordid gangsterism, that they claimed plagued the place. Consider this quote by Stephen Sparks;

"Landowner interests have played an important part in mobilisations against pollution on the Bluff and in the wealthier parts of Merebank, while Wentworth's mobilisations appear to be more *unambiguously rooted in grievances related to the perceived persistence of injustice in a post-Apartheid context*" (italics mine Sparks 2006).

Such an analysis discursively undergirds, in a material sense, the perception that the polluting and environmental/spatial messiness is socially echoed and understood by the participants as an (racial) injustice of dispossession and displacement. Thus the environmental or spatial 'messiness' is echoed in a kind of social messiness or social anomie. The anomie or social instability in turn describes and inscribes a 'normlessness', and an alienation and a breakdown of social bonds between the person and their community. For while there were respondents that evoked the indexical terms of 'community' and 'home' when they spoke about Wentworth, there were just as many participants who shared that 'Wentworth' was not their rightful home. Moreover, although some individuals shared that they was a strong sense of community, oftentimes this translated to their immediate neighbourhood, or those living within their particular 'section of Wentworth', rather than the wider notion of the 'Coloured community in Wentworth'.

Victor Buchli and Gavin Lucas (2001:80) wrote that "the relation between remembrance and forgetfulness is not a linear process but a struggle, a tension ... it is what is *not there*, what is *absent* that causes this tension." For many of the participants who shared their feelings and thoughts, what was *absent*, was a sense of worth of who they were. They were not agitating at being racially and politically labelled as *Coloured*. They were lamenting what they perceived as a social injustice and at being dispos-

sessed of both a space and a sense of worth and belonging. This non belonging for them, articulated through everyday social transactions, and what they perceived as lack of opportunities (for Coloureds).

Self identifying as 'Coloured' did not mean for the people interviewed that they felt that they were they were not diverse. On the contrary, many spoke about how rich and internally "*different*" the "*Coloured people were, even among ourselves.*" This is the reason that I have retained descriptions of many of the participants, who can be visually (phenotypically) 'seen' as diverse. This point lay behind light complexioned and blue-eyed Mr van der Ryle sharing that he is often mistaken as a 'white'. Conversely fifty three year old Paton is of relatively dark complexion, and could be mistaken for Zulu. When asked, she indicated, that yes there were times that people addressed her in *isiZulu*, thinking that she was Zulu. Then there was the outspoken Maria, who had long straight hair and so called Indian features. Perhaps the words of Anita, sums it up well;

Our coloured culture is very rich...Our Coloured cultured is mixed (she laughs) Even amongst the Coloured people you get diversity. But there is so much focus on black and white- and not enough emphasis is put on the grey or brown. We are a forgotten people, we not black or white enough in most instances.

CONCLUSION

The narratives in this study weave together and reveal that many residents of Wentworth feel a deep sense of dispossession and indignation. Their narratives give voice to a complexly layered phenomenology of disenfranchisement and a sense of self that is rich, in as much as it is burdened, cast as they are against the creation of a racially segmented residential landscape. Notions of space and home and self weave together in a complex interplay of emotions that are excavated in memory.

The last words above, although spoken by one particular respondent, could easily be uttered by many of the other participants, in as much as it encapsulated what almost all of them deeply experienced. Such utterances bring up to the gaze their liminal location at fuzzily marked spaces inscribed within a historic (and seemingly persistent) racial classificatory system of

'White' and 'Black'. One adds that future research amongst the Coloured community in South Africa has much to gain by further qualitative studies that attempt to afford a space for the Coloured people to lend their voices and have their stories heard within the ideological (and racially constructed) landscape of South Africa.

NOTES

1. This expression is borrowed from Sharad Chari as it powerfully sums up for me, the space occupied by the residents of Wentworth. Chari's work deals with the visual images offered up by the suburb. See Sharad Chari, "Photographing Dispossession, Forgetting Solidarity: Waiting for Social Justice in Wentworth, South Africa", *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 34, 4, 2009, pp. 521-540.
2. According to the scholar Mohamed Adhikari who has worked extensively in this area, the term 'coloured' refers to a "phenotypically diverse group of people derived largely from Cape slaves, indigenous Khoisan peoples, and other blacks assimilated to Cape colonial society", see Mohamed Adhikari, *Coloured Identity and the Politics of Coloured Education: The Origin of the Teachers' League of South Africa* *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 27, 1, 1994, pp. 101-126, p101. Coloureds are popularly regarded as being of 'mixed race'. They occupy an intermediate or in-between status and 'fuzzy' space in the South African racial classificatory 'hierarchy'. Within this paper I have chosen to use the South African classificatory terms of Coloured, White and Black and Indian.
3. For studies of this nature the reader is pointed to: Stanley J. Morse and Stanton Peele, "Coloured Power" or "Coloured Bourgeoisie"? *Political Attitudes among South African Coloureds* *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, 38, 3, 1974, pp. 317-334; G. Lewis, *Between the Hire and the Wall: A History of South African "Coloured" Politics* (Cape Town, David Phillips, 1987); I. Goldin, *Making Race: The Politics and Economics of Coloured Identity in South Africa* (New York, Longman, 1987); Mohamed Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (Cape Town and Ohio, Double Storey and Ohio University Press, 2005).
4. Coloured South Africans are spatially concentrated, with the great majority residing in the Western Cape Province. Most place the beginning of a sizable Coloured community in KwaZulu-Natal, to the mid 1800's, with the influx of people from Mauritius and St. Helenans. See Rachel Tenney, "With All Out Differences We Work Together": A Critical Case Study of Wentworth Civil Society", MA Thesis, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2004, p15.
5. Given that the interviews were meant to be fluid rather than structured and heavily 'directed' by the interviewer, there were instances where respondents shared feelings of resentment towards other racial groups or referred to the Coloured (lack of) involvement in the country's political processes. While these are of course important shared perceptions and experiences, they lie outside the parameters of this study.
6. Compassline Tours, <http://www.compasslineafrica.com/>
7. Wending through Wentworth: A historical tour of the ghetto is one way to experience the area's history, writes Niren Tolsi, 1 June 2008 <http://mg.co.za/article/2008-06-01-wending-through-wentworth>.
8. The Group Areas Act No 41 of 1950 was promulgated during the Apartheid Regime cutting up and dividing urban areas in different racial zones, for Africans, Indians, Coloureds and Whites. The laws applied from everything to sexual relations and marriage to segregation in trains. In 1956 a law passed banned mixed trade unions, p.37. Also significant in that year was the removal of Coloured men from the voter roles in Natal. Tenney "With All Out Differences We Work Together": A Critical Case Study of Wentworth Civil Society", p15.
9. This term is a reference to low cost, low design and highly commercial housing, often typically flat-roofed boxed shape houses, considered not very aesthetically appealing. They are often also found to be structurally unsound due to the emphasis on low cost. See Ian Colquhoun, *RIBA Book of 20th Century British Housing* (New York, Routledge, 2nd Edition 2008), p 45.
10. In most instances pseudonyms have been used. However, there are also instances when the original names have been retained as an expressed wish of the participants, who shared that they wanted their 'voices heard'.
11. A concerted effort was made to obtain a sample of participants from different parts of the suburb.
12. This is not to say that the Coloured people wished to give up their so called liminal state and be seen as black or identified with the African population of the country. This is a sensitive issue that lay outside this particular study. It is also revealing that when Coloureds were moved into Wentworth they demanded that the name of the area be kept the same as when whites were living in the area (the government had attempted to rename it Austerville). See Rachel Tenney "With All Out Differences We Work Together": A Critical Case Study of Wentworth Civil Society", p 16. Mohamed Adhikari refers to the quest of coloureds to attain whiteness or put differently, to become assimilated - politically, economically and socially - into the dominant white society. Adhikari states that "If coloureds could not become white, they most assuredly did not want to become African, with all the downward social mobility such a status implied". See Mohamed, Adhikari, "Hope, Fear, Shame, Frustration: Continuity and Change in the Expression of Coloured Identity in White Supremacist South Africa, 1910-1994", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 3, 2006, pp. 467-487.
13. This did not mean that there was no civil society in Wentworth, or that all the Coloured residents of Wentworth were passive victims. What is being

alluded to is the residents' deep(er) sense of social and racialised injustice that appeared to underpin their understandings of the problems of environmental pollution, housing, gangsterism etc. For a discussion of civil society and mobilisation on the South Basin (Merebank, Wentworth and Bluff) see Stephen Sparks, 2006, *A Long History: Civil Society, Pollution and the Wentworth Oil Refinery*. 2006 Research Sage Report, University of Kwazulu-Natal and University of Michigan. Available online http://ccs.ukzn.ac.za/files/RREPORT_VOL106_SPARKS.pdf. Accessed 1 July 2013.

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