Leslie Witz

Professor, Department of History, University of Western Cape,
Email: lwitz@uwc.ac.za

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ARCHIVES, MUSEUMS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY: REFLECTIONS ON WRITE YOUR OWN HISTORY (WITH A SMALL DETOUR TO THE UNIVERSITY OF BOPHUTHATSWANA)

Abstract

This article is the beginning of a series of critical reflections on three projects that employed different technologies to produce histories that were signalled as interior to collectivities of community and assertions of personhood: The Write Your Own History project and book, which was published in the 1980s, which I co-ordinated and wrote, the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, 40 kilometres outside central Cape Town, which opened in 2000 and where I have served on the museum board since its inception, and the University of the Western Cape-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archive. The three projects of writing history, museum making and archive assemblage I want to suggest can be connected. Not only are they points in what might be seen as a biographic positioning, of thinking about my own involvement as a writing project coordinator, engaged museum board member and a collector of documents, but they also are about history in the public domain and about what is constituted as the category of history. There is a concern in recovering and representing "words" of pasts and turning them into history. So what I do is run these three together; write your own history, make your own museum, assemble your own collection as a way to think about how words are made into history. Yet even in writing this I want to hesitate. How does one attach value to the personal "I" and "our", and how does that translate into "your own"? And part of that autobiographical hesitation takes us on a diversion to a university in a town then named Mmabatho in apartheid's bantustan of Bophuthatswana, some twenty odd kilometres from the Ramatlabama border post with Botswana.

Keywords: *archives; public history; oral history; museums; representation; Lwandle; Bophuthatswana; migrant labour; Mayibuye*

1. INTRODUCTION

> Have you ever thought of writing history? This book will help you write the history of your community, organisation, church, school or even the history of your family. It shows you how to begin the research and how to collect information. It discusses different ways of writing and presenting history.

These are the words that appear on the back cover of *Write Your Own History*, a book I authored (or perhaps, co-authored) in 1988. *Write Your Own History* was the outcome of a project by the same name that I had coordinated for the University of the Witwatersrand's History Workshop and the South African Committee on Higher Education (SACHED) over the previous two years. It involved working closely with three history-writing groups who were immersed in different forms of anti-apartheid struggles in the 1980s: youth structures, rural community political activism and trade union organisation. For SACHED, a NGO which aimed "to counter the imbalance created by the apartheid educational system", the book was indicative of its commitment to establish "participatory, non-discriminatory and non-authoritarian practices".[1] In the case of the History Workshop this was an extension of their work of making popular and accessible, the academic writings of radical, social historians: "Now it wanted to empower ordinary people to become producers of history, producers who would engage with the past critically by examining a variety of sources, detecting bias and evaluating evidence".[2]

From the early 1990s I shifted direction from projects of popularising history and began to concentrate, with colleagues at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), on public history and the poetics and politics of representing, producing and contesting history in the public domain.[3] We became very interested in the work of museums and in the late 1990s, a student of ours, Bongani Mgijima,

1 L Witz, *Write Your Own History* (Johannesburg: Sached / Ravan, 1988), back cover.

2 L Witz, "Write Your Own History Project". In: J Brown *et al.* (eds.), *History from South Africa* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), p. 370.

3 See, I Karp and SD Lavine, *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (Washington: Smithsonian Press, 1991), For joint work at UWC in the 1990s and early 2000s see amongst many, C Rassool and L Witz, "The 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival: Constructing and Contesting Public National History", *Journal of African History* 34 (3), 1993, pp. 447- 468; C Rassool *et al.*, "Repackaging the past for South African tourism", *Daedalus* 130 (1), 2001), pp. 77- 296; L Witz *et al.*, "No end of a [history] lesson: Preparations for the Anglo-Boer War Centenary Commemoration", *South African Historical Journal* 41 (1), 1999, pp. 370-387.

who was completing the Postgraduate Diploma in Museum and Heritage Studies (then offered jointly by UWC, the University of Cape Town (UCT) and the Robben Island Museum, which I co-ordinated with my friend and colleague, Ciraj Rassool) invited me to participate in the activities of the Lwandle Migrant Museum, a museum which he had been partially instrumental in bringing into being. Some 40 kilometres outside Cape Town, the museum was the first in a formerly apartheid designated "native location", or later termed "township", in the Western Cape province of South Africa. Early on, Mgijima also asked a friend and colleague of mine from UCT, Noëleen Murray, to be part of the museum project. Since then we have been active museum board members, carried out research, edited and designed exhibitions with other board members and museum staff, and assisted in curating and restoring a former migrant labour hostel in Lwandle into a memorial presence, which formally became a provincial heritage site in 2018, for the museum. The invitation to participate and our subsequent involvement, we have asserted, was based not only on the skills we could offer as historians and architects respectively but also because of our hesitations, questions and discomfort about our roles. "We would like to believe", we have argued, "that our cautious approach to the application of these [research and design] skills widened and complicated the possibilities of thinking the museum beyond outreach".[4]

In 2014 Noëleen Murray and I published a book which we called a biography of the museum entitled *Hostels, homes, museum: memorialising migrant labour pasts in Lwandle, South Africa*. This book is very different from *Write Your Own History*. It is a critical and at times deeply sceptical reflection on processes of museum making. The point we consistently make is that there is no prescription on how to make a museum. While *Write Your Own History* contained several recommendations about how community organisations, trade unions and so on could go about researching and writing up a history, we say that *Hostels, homes, museum* is a story of a museum which very few people wanted in both the museum sector and within Lwandle.

> Our book thinks about the history of the place named for being at the seaside [Lwandle means at the sea], beyond the planned invisibility of the labour compound and the intended visibility of the museum of chance. *Hostels, homes, museum* does not easily direct one to a destination in the *Rough Guide* or the *Lonely Planet*. Rather it describes the troubled passage of the becoming of a small museum that its founders thought would put Lwandle on the tourist map of Africa.[5]

4 N Murray and L Witz, *Hostels. Homes, Museum: Memorialising migrant labour pasts in Lwandle, South Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2014), p. 14.

5 Murray and Witz, *Hostels. Homes*, p. ix.

A key methodology we follow in our book is to explore the museum's active involvement in the ways in which it attempted to constitute its different communities. Underlying this proposition, we maintained, was the provocation that the community does not exist independently of the museum. The result is an account of the museum that foregrounds "the uncertainty of the museum's past and future". To reflect this continual uncertainty, we call this biographic rendition (following David Scott and Hayden White) a narrative of tragedy.[6]

In another sense though, the two book projects, from 1988 and 2014 respectively, are deeply connected. They are both about history in the public domain and about how and what becomes constituted as the category of history. They are about sets of collaborations: in museum making, in writing, in conducting research and in producing history. They both engage with the elusive concept of community: sometimes as given, and at other times constantly in formation. The two projects are concerned to varying extents with the recovery and representation of words and visual images of pasts and turning them into history (or rather histories). Then there is a set of assembled words that interrupts the two projects and connects them.

As we were finishing *Hostels, Homes, Museum* I received an email from two students who were doing the African Programme in Museum and Heritage Studies (APMHS) at UWC, offered in collaboration with the Robben Island Museum. This was the new name of the programme that Mgijima, a founder of the Lwandle Museum, had completed in 1998. It included, in its offerings, the Postgraduate Diploma in Museum and Heritage Studies, but with UCT no longer part of the partnership because of the costs involved and its contention that it lacked expertise in the field. In their mail the students indicated that they were doing an internship at the UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives and they had been assigned to catalogue the "Leslie Witz" collection. Their request was to interview me to ascertain background to the collection.[7]

I was completely astounded. I had no idea at all that such a collection existed under my name. But I went to investigate and there it was, containing some documents that related to me but with many others that I had little or no association with. Yet they had all been gathered in a series of boxes in my name. As "a collection brought .... by Leslie Witz, in early 1990s at the genesis of the Mayibuye Centre", they provided the basis for biographical possibilities. Despite my dissociation with parts of the assemblage I was identified as the collector. The students catalogued the documents and it (I?) became "The Leslie

6 Murray and Witz, *Hostels. Homes*, p. 20; pp. 11-12; D Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); D Scott, *Omens of Adversity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013); H White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973).

7 E-mail: APMHS students to L Witz, 12 April 2014.

Witz Collection (MCH 93)" compiled by Berthilda Walter (Seychelles) and Elina Hamunyela (Namibia) APMHS, UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives.[8]

The three projects of writing history, museum making and archive assemblage are not only points in what might be seen as a biographic positioning, of thinking about my own involvement as a writing project coordinator, engaged museum board member, co-author of books and a collector of documents, but they also are about the production of history in the public domain, and about what is written, designed and assembled into history. What I want to do is run these three together, write your own history, make your own museum, assemble your own collection as a way to think about the technologies of making words and images into history. And the references throughout to these histories as forms of proprietorship, "your own" are constantly set alongside and in tension with forms of collaborative association. Whose are these histories of possession?

2. HISTORY, MUSEUMS AND STRUGGLES AGAINST APARTHEID

Let me start with the worlds and words of revolution and struggle where the institution of the museum hardly, and maybe indeed never, features. When claims were made in South Africa to recovering lost pasts and/or rectifying errors of misrepresentation in mobilising against apartheid, it was more than likely the terrain of formal education that was contested, at the same time asserting a claim for "People's History" beyond the classroom. Struggles against apartheid in the 1980s set in place three complimentary movements around the category of history and its deployment in the public domain. The first was, at best, a very deep distrust of what was being projected as history through the state broadcasting media and the school system. History was regarded as a series of falsehoods, imposed via the apartheid state, primarily through school text books, and learnt in a rote manner.[9] The question of "whose history" was always presented as key to developing the new historical material that was produced, distributed and disseminated, largely through non-governmental organisations and designed for political education.[10] The second movement, which sometimes contradicted the

8 University of Western Cape-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives, "The Leslie Witz Collection Catalogue MCH93", B Walter and E Hamunyela, 2014.

9 L Witz and C Hamilton, "Reaping the Whirlwind: The Reader's Digest Illustrated History of South Africa and Changing Popular Perceptions of History". In: P Stone (ed.), *The Presented Past* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 42.

10 This quotation comes from the back cover of the *Let Us Speak of Freedom* series from the University of the Western Cape, which, from the late 1980s, ran a People's History Programme. Similar formulations are to be found in the National Education Crisis Committee package of materials and sources that could be used by students and communities. See, National Education

former (and was indeed evident in the same publications), was that what was being produced as oppositional texts was authoritative. These texts included claims to be "the real history of the people of South Africa – a history that speaks of the majority of South Africans. It is a history that has been hidden from us, hidden from our text books".[11] Thirdly, associated with radical Marxist scholarship that flourished in several South African universities in the 1980s, was the emergence of social history. This history was about absences, distortion, silences, invisibility and marginality, with the task of the historian designated as recovering, correcting and giving voice, primarily through making use of oral history techniques, and then popularising this work through easy to read texts, or videos or slide/tape shows. The procedures of history as an academic pursuit were all presented as necessary in order to establish a "new" history that was all about "the doings and thoughts of ordinary men and women", that identified "historical sources of dispossession, oppression and exploitation", and examined "the ways in which these were resisted".[12]

All these three modes of history as struggle were brought together in *Write Your Own History*, a project that I coordinated, which started in 1986, and culminated in the book by the same name two years later that I referred to earlier. Drawing primarily upon experiences of a series of research and writing projects in southern Africa and in the United Kingdom, *Write Your Own History*, opened up questions of whose history and specifically pointed to the apartheid government and the large mining houses for presenting perspectives that promoted their interests. At the same time *Write Your Own history* advocated the idea that what "groups of people" (sometimes called "communities") needed to do was correct lies and distortions which "keep people suppressed".[13] But what was most important in the book was for communities to make history by recovering hidden lives though an oral history methodology. A poem by Antonio Mussapi from a People's History Project in Mozambique was cited in the book as illustration and an entreaty "to uncover ... stories ... ignored or suppressed". [14]

Crises Committee, *What is History? A New Approach to History for Students, Workers and Communities* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1987).

11 National Union of South African Students, *A People's History: Resistance in South Africa* (Cape Town: NUSAS, 1980), p. 3. This is probably one of the earliest examples of the use of the term "People's History". Other manifestations of the term "People's History" in published material are those cited above and also the series of people's histories produced under the auspices of the University of the Witwatersrand's History Workshop: L Callinicos, *Gold and Workers, 1886-1924*, Volume 1: *A People's History of South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981); L Callinicos, *Working Life, 1886-1940: Factories, townships and popular culture on the Rand,* Volume 2: *A People's History of South Africa* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); L Callinicos, *A Place in the City The Rand on the Eve of Apartheid,* Volume 3: *A People's History of South* Africa (Johannesburg : Ravan Press, 1993).

12 National Education Crisis Committee, *What is History?*, p. 1.

13 Witz, *Write Your Own*, pp. 11-12.

14 Witz, *Write Your Own*, p. 14.

I talk,
Talk with people,
The people who speak to me
Of time past
Which falls and does not germinate
If I don't talk.
I listen carefully.
I speak listen carefully.
I converse
With people.
.....
I, you and they
We,
All gathered round,
Talking, asking, looking,
I with pencil and paper,
By the tiny lamps of the sky,
The dark sky,
Recording the conversation.
Time past
Which lights up today
And tomorrow,
Making it clear.[15]

The poem evokes a romance of conversation at dusk, of the back and forth of talking and listening, of voices of the present being inscribed into words of the past, and opening up the horizon to a future that then achieves clarity through history. Using this idealised vision as a template of an oral history methodology (the last two verses were repeated as a frontispiece and the first verse was reinscribed at the end of the book as the last word), there was the possibility of "writing history yourself" so as "to uncover information about the past you can't read about elsewhere".[16] In a mode of history as reconstruction, the binding of oral histories with self-writing was seen to hold the potential for a transformative project of both the personal and of society : "South Africans are starting to realise that writing history will give them power, power to understand, power to resist and power to work towards change".[17] *Write Your Own History* maintained that this power would emerge from developing expertise in research, writing and argument. This knowledge and proficiency it was envisaged were transferable

15 Poem by A Mussapi, "Remembering" cited in, R Gray, ""Khalai-Khalai": People's History in Mozambique", Paper presented at the History Workshop, Autumn, 1982, pp. 143-152.

16 Witz, *Write Your Own*, p. 14.

17 Witz, *Write Your Own*, p. 17, History as reconstruction is a genre identified in K Jenkins and A Munslow (eds.), *The Nature of History Reader* (London: Routledge, 2004).

to the domain of anti-apartheid struggles and organisation, would enable mobilisation through generating and drawing upon memories, and assert localised control and agency in the midst of the most severely repressive conditions.[18]

This political power was to be mobilised through writing groups learning a set of skills defined through history as an academic profession. Writing about the project in 1990 I said that instead of looking at how the past was represented and succumbing to "populist excess", the project was intent on "giving ordinary people the historical tools to engage with the past". The project, and the book which emerged, was intent on developing historical skills such as evaluating evidence, drawing up an interview outline, locating books in a library. What I called "the most crucial objectives" was "to help develop a critical understanding of the past": to find bias; interpret interviews; and evaluate evidence such as court records. This was the way to make history as an academic discipline into history by and for "communities" as "a critical engagement with the past".[19]

So how was this supposed to happen? In my reflections on the project in 1990 I indicated that I was appointed by SACHED and the History Workshop in 1986 to "facilitate the process". My tasks were: "to set up groups of people who would write their histories"; through "skills workshops", to assist these groups with their writing; to establish contact with similar history writing projects particularly in southern Africa; and then to produce a book that reflected these experiences and would encourage others "to engage in the process of writing history". I wrote in 1990 that the first of these "tasks" of finding groups that "would research and write history" - in itself an interesting choice of words indicating duties and obligations in a listing was demanding. Given the limited resources available for the project and the political context of prioritising activist political struggles against apartheid, it was difficult to find groups who were willing to participate. Despite these problems, I asserted that "we made contact with three groups of people who decided, in June 1986, to embark upon the Write Your Own History Project". These were a group of workers from Kagiso, on the West Rand near Johannesburg; students from Soweto "the massive township which borders on Johannesburg"; and a group of "rural youth … from the settlement of Driefontein about 200 miles from Johannesburg". Although not spread across age, and all in relatively close proximity to Johannesburg, as urban and rural, women and men, workers and students, they appeared to establish a form of representivity in a project that defined itself as seeking to establish "a broad outreach" through access to history as a form of knowledge.[20]

18 Witz, *Write Your Own*, pp. 17-18.

19 Witz, "Write Your Own History Project", pp. 369-370.

20 Witz, "Write Your Own History Project", pp. 370- 2. *Write Your Own History* drew upon a range of similar projects to show variability, extent, possibilities and methodologies. These included the People's History work in Mozambique which has already been cited, autobiographical accounts

But who was I? How had I come to be "project co-ordinator"? And how had these groups come into being other than being associated with a search for representivity? And once established, how did these groups "write" their history? To think about some of these questions, I interrupt the narrative of the article here to go into the assemblage of Leslie Witz collections housed at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg and the University of the Western Cape in Cape Town.

3. THE LESLIE WITZ ARCHIVES

When the Nelson Mandela Centre for Memory and Commemoration in 2005 published a selection of what they termed "Nelson Mandela's Prison Archive" under the title *A Prisoner in the Garden* they noted that the idea of a singular Mandela archive is possibly infinite and scattered over multiple locations. It refers to "documents … sites, landscapes, material objects, performances, photographs, artworks, stories and the memories of individuals. The list is endless". Much the same could be said about the collections of most of our lives "allowing for a myriad of threads" which "can be followed".[21] As I write this article, I look about my study seeing documents which I have collected over the years, photographs arranged in albums, artworks on the walls, diaries and notebooks stacked alongside each other, and shelves packed with books, magazines and comics. And while I make use of these objects (to write this article for instance), their meaning could, in Baudrillard's terms, be determined in relation to each other as a constitutive whole and to a subjective self. As part of a system they "piece together" a world into becoming "a personal microcosm". In this way, they perform the function of possession, asserting "an autonomous totality". This is the realm, according to Baudrillard, where the promise of perfection lies, "a space where the everyday prose of the object-world modulates into poetry, to institute an unconscious and triumphant discourse".[22] This is the archive by and of the self, constituted as unique, important and appealing. Collected objects as a system of possession create and assert the possibilities of "my history".

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of workers and working class communities in South Africa and the United Kingdom, such as the Ravan Press Worker Series of the 1980s and the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers in London, and organisationally based history projects such as the Grahamstown Oral History Project and the United Women's Organisation people's history of Claremont, Cape Town.

21 C Hamilton *et al., A Prisoner in the Garden: Opening Nelson Mandela's Prison Archive* (Johannesburg: Penguin Books, 2005), p. 35. As both this list of writers and the rest of acknowledgements in the front of the book indicate this was a deeply collaborative project, "a collective endeavour spearheaded by the Nelson Mandela Foundation's Nelson Mandela Centre of Memory and Commemoration Project".

22 J Baudrillard, "The system of collecting". In: J Elsner and R Cardinal (eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), pp. 7-8.

But those assertions of collection as possession are always also arbitrary. Their provisionality revolves around the availability of space, rearrangement and destruction of collections, and "changes in desires, changes in form of storage, sales, gifts or death".[23] Indeed, at a moment in the mid-1990s I deliberately destroyed a set of papers I had on labour history in order to make way for other material that I was collecting. If one thinks of the archive as assemblage, then different parts are brought together, taken apart and re-assembled in movements of both creation and contingency. One can then pose the question: "What does it mean to assemble, what is the work of assemblage, how is work assembled?"[24]

In the "pressure of the contemporary moment of one's reading" and "the history of the archive itself" [25] when the APMHS students contacted me about a collection in my name at UWC my initial thought, apart from my amazement, was that they had somehow made a mistake. I knew I had handed over a set of papers to the University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers when I left Johannesburg for Cape Town in 1990 and that was where the Leslie Witz collection was located. As indicated in the catalogue to the collection at Wits University most of the papers are related to the Tswana ethnic entity of Bophuthatswana. Created and controlled by the apartheid state, Bophutswana consisted of six separate islands of land mainly set in the north-western part of South Africa. In a strategy of balkanisation, people racially classified as "white" were citizens of South Africa and black South Africans were cast as ethnic subjects of separate dependent regional localities under an illusion of autonomy.[26] In the inventory of the "Leslie Witz Records, 1985-1992", it is indicated that the collection is kept in two boxes, catalogued as A2356, and that the documents pertain to Bophutatswana and the university that was created there:

> Events at University of Bophuthatswana 1985-1990; Various statements and summaries of events leading to the closure of UNIBO in 1986, and other conflicts within the University between 1985-1990; Deportation of University Staff: correspondence and official notices. Photographs of L.Witz. 1986; Press cuttings UNIBO; Articles on UNIBO and other universities; UNIBO. Academic matters.[27]

23 M Bal, "Telling objects: A narrative perspective on collecting". In: J Elsner and R Cardinal (eds.), *The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), p. 113.

24 H Pohlandt-McCormick *et al.*, "Red Assembly: East London Calling", *Parallax* 22 (2), 2016, pp.125-126.

25 A Burton, "Introduction: Archives fever, archive stories". In: Antoinette Burton (ed.), *Archive Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 8.

26 See amongst many, M Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

27 University of the Witwatersrand, Historical Papers Research Archive, Inventory for A2356, Leslie Witz Records, 1985-1992, http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory/U/collections&c=A2356/R/6245, accessed 5 June 2016.

I had collected many of these documents in 1984-5 when I was employed by the university and staying in Mmabatho, the self-styled "capital" of Bophutatswana, and subsequently following my deportation at the beginning of 1986. In my collection at Wits in the File A2 is a letter Ref 4/6/4/2 from the Secretary for Internal Affairs, Republic of Bophuthatswana, to Mr Leslie Witz, dated 23 December 1985:

> ORDER TO LEAVE BOPHUTHATSWANA UNDER THE ALIENS AND TRAVELLERS CONTROL ACT, 1979 (ACT 22 OF 1979) AS AMENDED
>
> 1. I have to inform you that the Honourable the Minister of Internal Affairs has under powers vested in him by Section 65 (1) of the Aliens and Travellers Control Act, 1979 (Act 22 of 1979), as amended, instructed that you be ordered to leave or be removed from the Republic of Bophuthatswana forthwith.
> 2. .....
> 3. Should you, after having left Bophuthatswana in pursuance of this notice be found within Bophuthatswana without lawful authority, you render yourself liable to be dealt with as a prohibited person.

It was soon after my expulsion that I successfully applied to SACHED and the History Workshop to become the Write Your Own History project coordinator. In the interim Robert Morrell a fellow deportee, though from the University of Transkei (UNITRA), and Paul Crankshaw who taught Development Studies at UNIBO, and I, wrote a paper reflecting on the roles of bantustan universities in apartheid South Africa entitled "Deportations, Detentions and Disturbances". Our conclusions were that both UNIBO and UNITRA were more concerned with prestigious building projects than any sense of providing community "upliftment"; the essential task of both universities was to staff the administrations of the respective ethnic homeland governments; at UNIBO student resistance had been crushed while at UNITRA the campus still served as a focus for mobilisation; and that the UNIBO administration seemed for the time to be less in cahoots with the homeland government than the UNITRA administration was. But we warned "this might change soon as there is speculation that Mangope will begin to exercise more of his power in the UNIBO council". This meant that at UNIBO in 1986 there was still the possibility of "considerable progressive content to be included in courses". The danger, we warned, was "that one will be pushed to apply an amount of self-censorship to preserve one's position". And overall the possibilities for progressive academics at these universities was likely to "become blocked completely" as the political crisis in South Africa in the late 1980s deepened.[28] The only place where

28 L Witz *et al.*, "Deportations, Detentions and Disturbances: Notes Towards a Contemporary History of the Universities of Bophuthatswana and Transkei". Paper presented at the Association of

this paper with its speculative predictions for the future of the past can now be found is in the Leslie Witz collection in Historical Records at Wits. There, one can also find material of the crises which followed, further protests, more detentions and another round of deportations (including the president and vice-president of the UNIBO staff association) as I took an ongoing interest in events at UNIBO, collected newspaper clippings and had colleagues send me material. Paul Daphne who was one of the deportees in 1991 wrote:

> At the time of my deportation I was vice-president of the staff association of the university, and I was also a lecturer in the Department of Development Studies. I think both those activities clearly contributed to the deportation. Ten staff members have been deported from the university since 1985, and four of them were in the Department of Development Studies. In development studies I think one is faced with a choice, one can either lecture within a framework of grand apartheid, where you talk about development in the context of an independent Bophuthatswana; or you can lecture, which is the more honest course, in terms of assessing development, discussing development, within the context of a single South Africa, in relation to both politics and economics. I think that the Department of Development Studies has been particularly hard hit by deportations because credible people in the department have chosen to be honest in the way they teach.[29]

Although containing no direct linkage if one was to plot a life in a sequential chronology then a diachronic biographer, making use of this Leslie Witz archive, might begin to construct narrative associations between a time spent teaching history at UNIBO, banishment from a pseudo-nation state created by the apartheid regime and the beginning of my part in a project that set out to enable the writing of possessive pasts as history.

That same biographer though might find more direct associations by going to the other Leslie Witz Collection that I had no idea existed and which is located on the premises of the University of the Western Cape. According to the catalogue for collection MCH93 (indicating the 93rd collection) there are altogether 4 boxes, containing documents from 1986 pertaining to the Write Your Own History project, records from an oral history project in Johannesburg under the auspices of the Institute of a Democratic Alternative in South Africa in 1990 (IDASA) and correspondence, minutes and reports dating back to 1985-6 from the South Africa Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) which was allied to the African National Congress (ANC) and the South African Communist Party (SACP). What the

Sociology in Southern Africa Conference, University of Natal, Durban, July 1986, pp. 28-9.

29 Human Rights Watch, "Out of Sight: The Misery in Bophuthatswana", 16 September 1991, https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1991/southafrica2/, accessed 3 September 2019.

catalogue also notes is that there are "no acquisition records". With no archive to establish provenance the catalogue compiled by Walter and Hamunyela states that "the acquisition file only holds the name of Leslie Witz".[30]

Again by correlating dates, the beginnings of the Write Your Own History project coincide with the period indicated on "Leslie Witz's" collection of papers relating to SACTU. Amongst many documents in the folders are:

2.1.27	SACTU Position Paper (Newsletter), The formation of the Congress of South African Trade Unions
2.1.31 5/81)	South African Congress of Trade Unions, (Circular No. Minutes of extended meeting held by NEC in Maputo, 14th January 1986
2.3.16	South African Congress Trade Union, Correspondence, 16th April 1984
2.3.17	South African Congress Trade Unions, Suspension of South African Miners Strike, 5th September 1985
2.3.18	South African Congress Trade Unions, The Sanctions Campaign, 17th October 1985. [31]

While the ANC and the SACP were banned SACTU ran its operations largely from exile and there is a large debate about its efficacy as a trade union organisation, whether it was able to keep contact with issues and organisation taking place locally, and its involvement (or otherwise) in re-establishing worker militancy in South Africa from the 1970s.[32] Without taking a position in this debate it would seem that either the Leslie Witz in whose name the collection is inscribed in 1986 was possibly either directly involved in the activities of SACTU or else had a very strong interest in collecting material pertaining to its activities. If this was then linked to Witz being a labour historian in the early 1980s (the title of his MA thesis at University of the Witwatersrand completed in 1984 was "Servant of the Workers?: Solly Sachs and Garment Workers Union, 1928-1952)", it would enable an account that installs him as the Write Your Own History project

30 Walter and Hamunyela, "The Leslie Witz Collection", p. 2.

31 Walter and Hamunyela, "The Leslie Witz Collection".

32 See, JS Sithole and S Ndlovu, "The Revival of the Labour Movement". In: South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy 1970- 1980* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2006), pp. 187-242; D Hemson *et al* , "White Activists and the Revival of the Workers' Movement". In: South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy 1970- 1980* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 2006), pp. 243- 316; M Legassick, "Debating the revival of the workers' movement in the 1970s: The South African democracy education trust and post-apartheid patriotic history", *Kronos* 34 (1), 2008, pp. 240-266; JS Sithole, "Contestations over knowledge production or ideological bullying?: A response to Legassick on the workers' movement", *Kronos* 35 (7), 2009, pp. 222-241.

coordinator and the selection of a group of workers from the abattoir and the light industries in Krugersdorp to become part of the project. Their participation is cited in my (Witz's) reflections on the project in 1990 as coming from self-motivation for worker organisation: '"If you are organising in a factory", said Myboy Moketsi of Young Christian Workers, "you need to know about past struggles in the industry to help you organise effectively. By asking why things happened we can learn from our mistakes and successes and build up strong worker organisation". [33] The Leslie Witz collection at UWC establishes (confirms) an explanatory relationship between labour history (1984), the Write Your Own History project (1986) and the analysis and evaluation of the project (1990).

Another archive though belies this account. My memory. I had little interest in SACTU, was not in any way involved in their activities and have no recollection of collecting the documents related to them that are now inscribed in my name in the UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archive. Moreover, as I told Walter and Hamunyela when they interviewed me on 29 July 2014, I also do not recall how the collection came about and found its way to the Mayibuye archives. My words from the interview were transcribed by Hamunyela in her research paper:

> Possibly there are two origins of this, one possibly is that I was clearing out space where I live or else I was clearing out my office at UWC and I just wanted to pass on papers. I have no intention of creating a Leslie Witz collection.[34]

Later on, in the interview I speculated that perhaps another reason was the establishment of Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture at UWC. "I possibly thought that these papers would fit in and be appropriate with the aims and objectives of Mayibuye", I said to them. On how the SACTU documents came to be amongst them I professed ignorance. There may have been a mix up in the documents by staff at Mayibuye at the time. Maybe someone else had left them at my home or office, or I was bringing them in on someone else's behalf. Or someone else had brought in all the documents on my behalf and mixed them up. Whatever had happened the archive of remembrance had failed me. According to Walter and Hamunyela I insisted that the documents were not mine. They were not my assemblage.[35] Yet they sit catalogued in the Leslie Witz collection, and for the foreseeable future my past may be tied into an association with SACTU.

Even if I was not entirely at ease with the discovery of my collection at UWC and the documents which I could not link into an autobiographical recollection, there was a sense of exuberance when I found boxes and files that I could clearly

33 Witz, "Write Your Own History Project", p. 371.
34 Interview: Author with B Walter and E Hamunyela, UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives, 29 July 2014.
35 Interview: Author with Walter and Hamunyela.

identify. Walter accounts that when I saw documents written by me I exclaimed "This is mine! This is mine! I can see this".[36] Later on when she and Hamunyela interviewed me as part of their heritage internship I tried to express my feelings:

> I started to look and see where I could find my handwriting and I started to see things that were mine in the collection. And it's very interesting. What it means to me, is that there are things that enable me to reflect upon activities I was doing in the past and rethinking some of those activities to rewrite .... Because I have been thinking about some of these activities, it enables me to rethink about them, reinterpret the history that I was involved with. I think that is what it means to me, it's quite a nice feeling that they are there and that I can call upon them.[37]

According to Walter, what had happened is that the archive had served "as memory prompt" and "allowed Witz to relate himself to a collection to which he had originally denied ownership".[38]

4. WRITE YOUR OWN HISTORY – THE DRIEFONTEIN REBUILDERS YOUTH CLUB

What I did find in the collection at UWC were many documents related to one part of the Write Your Own History project around working with the Driefontein Rebuilders Youth Club (DRYC) members Temba Dlamini, Bongane Mkhize, Mkhawuleni and Viky (in the case of the latter there are no indications of their surnames). They were to "find information on coming to Driefontein", "life in Driefontein", "removals" and on their own organisation, "the DRYC".[39]

Driefontein is a farm about 220 miles south-east of Johannesburg near to the border with Swaziland. It was purchased in 1912 by a consortium of black business people. Surrounding it was land owned by white farmers. In apartheid's terms Driefontein was a black spot in a racially designated white area and from the 1960s the apartheid government consistently attempted to remove the people of this "black spot" into an ethnically designated homeland. There was tremendous resistance to this scheme, and a prominent leader of the resistance, Saul Mkhize was shot and killed by a member of the South African police. The struggle against removal continued, the Transvaal Rural Action Committee

36 B Walter, "Figuring the Leslie Witz Collection: The process of an archival production", Postgraduate Diploma in Museum and Heritage Studies long essay (University of Western Cape, 2014), p. 12.
37 Interview: Author with Walter and Hamunyela.
38 Walter, "Figuring", p. 19.
39 Witz, *Write Your Own History*, p. 22.

(TRAC), which was part of the Black Sash, along with the Legal Resources Centre, assisted in a series of lengthy court battles and in 1985 the Driefontein community won the right to remain on the land.

As a result of the court cases, the publicity given to the attempted removal and the newspaper accounts of events surrounding the shooting of Sauk Mkhize there was a great deal of material that could be located about Driefontein. I found much of this in the Leslie Witz collection at the UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives. These are accounts from newspapers, magazines and the court record which I had located from the Legal Resources Centre in Johannesburg at the time of the Write Your Own History project. And much of this found its way into the book itself, particularly the stories of the attempted removal and differing accounts of the shooting of Saul Mkhize as examples of how to evaluate and interpret sources. In effect this history of Driefontein had already been told many times over and published before the DRYC had begun their research. But with these events so recent and important in the lives of members of the DRYC, and with Bongane Mkhize, the son of Saul Mkhize, involved in the project, they insisted this was the history they primarily wanted to research and write about.

With Driefontein located a long way from Johannesburg and the scarcity of telephones in the area it was difficult for me to keep contact with this project. With the assistance of Aninka Claassens of the TRAC and the generosity and hospitality of Beauty Mkhize (Bongane's mother) who had taken over the fight against removals, "She challenged the authorities to dig her grave and bury her in Driefontein instead of removing her".[40] I was able to spend nearly a week at a time in the area, helping participants in the process of researching and writing the history. In the morning we would go out interviewing people, with the DRYC members translating from isiZulu for my benefit. When the day was over we would go through the interviews, discuss major points that had emerged and set the agenda for the next day. I wrote in the article on the project in 1990 that it was "through the actual experience of conducting research, the Driefontein youth developed historical skills".[41]

But what historical skills had they developed and how was this reflected in *Write Your Own History?* I think the first point is that like the two other groups, the time constraints meant that DRYC in the end only presented their history in draft form. The wording in the book alludes to this indirectly.

> When there is a special occasion in your community ask the organisers if you can give a talk. In Driefontein every year the people celebrate their reprieve from removal. Many speeches are made on this occasion and there is a lot of

40 The Presidency of the Republic of South Africa, "Nomhlangano Beauty Mkhize (1940 -), The Order of Luthuli in Bronze", http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?relid=7958, accessed 7 June 2016.

41 Witz, "Write Your Own History Project", p. 374.

> dancing and singing. This would be an ideal time for the DRYC to present their *Umlando We Driefontein* to the community. Young people will start to learn about their community's history. Older members of the community could also comment and make suggestions about the history.[42]

The performance of history is set in an "ideal" future time. That time is one indicated through the subjunctive auxiliary verbs, "could" and "would" and a hypothetical occasion where history is present and presented.

What I did find in the archives at Mayibuye was a beautifully crafted hand written manuscript in elegant script in English entitled "The History of Driehoek, Driefontein and Daggakraal" It does seem to be the most complete account of Driefontein's early history and how the farm was secured by a consortium of black famers at the beginning of the twentieth century.

> Next to the Orange River in the O.F.S. near the Bolkrust farm, there were many black people who had settled there. Most of them had cattle or were farmers.
> One day a race took place between the blacks and the whites but towards the end of this race a fight took place between the blacks and the whites. The blacks were beaten by the whites and people like Mr Nthebe Ngwenya and Lungolo Ngwenya with others. These guys were beaten in such a way that they had to be fetched with wagons and taken to hospital. Their conditions were critical.
> The matter was taken to the court of law. The black people against the whites of Bolkrust. After all the court proceedings the verdict favoured the blacks. One of the whites was found guilty and fined three pounds. The black people were not really satisfied with this decision and consequently a delegation was formed. These men would travel to Pretoria to inquire about this. On their way to Pretoria they passed through J.H.B. They were advised by other blacks about an American lawyer, Dr P.I. Seme who would perhaps help them with this matter.[43]

What then follows is an account of further court cases, the black famers being evicted, then going on to purchase land at Daggakraal, Driefontein and Driehoek under Seme's name, and more farmers moving on to the land, "different people from different tribes i.e. Swazi's, Zulus and Sothos".[44] The history ends with an evocation of the telling as an oral tradition: "When I arrived to Daggakraal in 1948

42 Witz, "Write Your Own History Project", p. 120.
43 PM Ntshalintshali, "The History of Driehoek, Driefontein and Daggakraal", unpublished manuscript, Leslie Witz Collection, UWC-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archives, MHC 93-2-2.
44 Ntshalintshali, "The History".

I was lucky enough to find old residents from Daggakraal no. 1 who then told me about the events which led to the founding of Daggakraal".[45]

In the archive of memory, I have no recollection of how this manuscript came into being. It is most likely a careful word for word transcription of a story that was told to Bongane Mkhize and/or Temba Dlamini. I am also unsure about the language the story was related. What I do know is that despite it possibly being the most comprehensive account available from the Driefontein project it did not make it into the *Write Your Own History* book, either as history or as a source. Perhaps it did not make the cut because of its use of ethnic categories; or its emphasis on a less recent past than the story of the threat of removals under apartheid and the killing of Saul Mkhize? Or was it its lack of a clear chronology? Was it the way it is written through metaphoric allusions to a race between whites and blacks which meant that it was difficult to deal with or explain in a "how to" manual. The emphasis on developing historical skills, as Rousseau points out "do not include ... "imagination", "creativity" or any such criteria that unmask the extent to which history is equally a process of creating and making stories". What is excluded are "the kinds of skills participants may possess in relation to other ways of processing the past".[46] These are not history.

Rousseau, Minkley, Rassool and Witz have all pointed out that the oral history methodology in Write *Your Own History* is that of recovery of hidden voices, ignoring issues of power, performance and appropriation of knowledge. [47] What becomes "the word" of the community comes through a methodology called history and a specific narrative framework where, in this instance, Driefontein became an exemplar of resistance to apartheid. This apartheid / resistance narrative could then be combined with establishing the "critical" as setting in place a methodology that is generalisable as history. A substantial exercise on evaluating evidence in *Write Your Own History* presented varying accounts of the killing of Saul Mkhize that come from the court record of the trial of Constable Nienaber that I had obtained from Legal Resources Centre: that of Mordechai Maseko, a Driefontein resident, Constable Nienaber who shot Mkhize, and of Detective Adjutant Officer Bazil Norman Young, a firearm investigator. Readers of the book were invited to "evaluate the evidence", establish facts, such as who pulled the trigger, distance, and so on, work out the reasons why there were different versions, where more evidence could be located and reach

45 Ntshalintshali, "The History".

46 N Rousseau, Popular History in South Africa in the 1980s: The Politics of Production (MA, University of the Western Cape, 1994), pp. 71–2.

47 G Minkley and C Rassool, "Orality, Memory and Social History in South Africa". In: S Nuttall and C Coetzee (eds.), *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998); C Rousseau. "Popular History"; G Minkley *et al.*, "Oral history in South Africa: A country report". In: L Witz *et al.* (eds.), *Unsettled History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), pp. 27–51.

a conclusion as to what "happened on that day". After this, the judgment of Justice P O de Villers, who acquitted Nienaber, appeared and readers were invited to make comparisons with their own accounts they had reached on the basis of the evidence.[48] Although there was the inference of different views influencing these differing accounts there was the stress on skills of evaluation as if they could be a universal, "technical and neutral" methodology. There was little doubt though that in the apartheid /resistance framework the version of the police and the apartheid government was to be discounted and those constituted as the residents of Driefontein affirmed by the reader. Indeed, the account of the residents of Driefontein is one I accepted then and do so today. But it is the "veneer of scientificity" that validates certain approaches and invalidates others as myth or propaganda. The idea of a neutral methodology of establishing validity is a mechanism of "masking its own positionality and the extent to which it too is engaging in the construction of political subjects".[49]

5. WORDS FROM A SEASIDE MUSEUM

The one word that is hardly mentioned in *Write Your Own History* is "museum". There is a section on exhibiting your history which uses an example from the New York Chinatown History Project. It refers to either laying out documents and artefacts on a table as one option or placing photographs and documents on walls for viewer accessibility. Alternative locations for such exhibitions that WYOH presented were classrooms, community halls, or church halls. In this way, it was claimed, "members of the community can see your work, learn about their history and comment on what you have done".[50] There was not even the thought of a museum as the site for community and history. The only mention of the word museum was in the list of resources at the back of the book where they were a place where "documents, newspapers and photographs about the history" of a locality were kept.[51]

The absence of museums in *Write Your Own History* which advocated a search for history as a means of furthering the struggles against apartheid can probably be explained by both museums themselves siting themselves as zones of exclusion and, on the other hand, on notions of culture expressed in forms of song, dance, visual arts, drama and poetry as forms of popular expression that held the potential for political mobilisation against apartheid. Soon after what was envisaged as a transition to democracy in South Africa began in the 1990s

48 Witz, *Write Your Own*, pp. 109-112.
49 Rousseau, "Popular History", pp. 71-3.
50 Witz, *Write Your Own*, p. 126
51 Witz, *Write Your Own*, p. 139.

this began to change. Museums presented, as Ciraj Rassool, Gary Minkley and I have argued, "the possibility of changes in the domain of visualising society", creating what Tony Bennett calls a form of "civic seeing" in constituting a new nationalised citizenry.[52] Placed in the realm of institutional change and charged with the call to "transform", heritage became the modus operandi to display and claim a new museology for post-apartheid South Africa.

The research and methodologies of social history were ideally situated to provide new museums, and those older ones seeking to present themselves as transforming, a means to strive for inclusivity by adding more and more voices, objects and explanations. Social history research not only provided a content and context, but also through inserting written text or video clips from interviews, related moments of experience. Social history and its methodologies took root in new museums, as the conveyor of an authentic narrative and as a means to affirm communitiness.

The Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, which I have worked with since the late 1990s, has made extensive use of the methodologies and content that have emerged from South African social history research to claim its existence. Lwandle, set up in 1958 as a labour compound for workers in the municipal services of the seaside resort of Strand and the growing fruit and canning industry in the region of Somerset West, had consisted entirely of hostels for male workers who were officially regarded as ethnically bound rural migrants. In the late 1990s as the hostels were upgraded into family-type accommodation, the executive of the local Helderberg municipality decided, in principle, to support a proposal to establish a museum that would evoke a memory of migrant labour, locally and more broadly as part of a national narrative.[53]

Two individuals seized the initiative. One was Bongani Mgijima, a student at the University of the Western Cape who lived in Lwandle and the other, Charmian Plummer, a teacher and resident of Somerset West who had carried out a considerable amount of community work in Lwandle. There were precarious beginnings for the museum. Not only was there a lack of financial resources but the relationship with communities the museum was claiming to represent was at times precarious, especially the contests over relating to the prioritising of material needs such as housing.[54] Yet the institution which opened its doors

52 L Witz *et al.*, "The Castle, the Gallery, the Sanatorium and the Petrol Station". In: L Witz *et al.* (eds.), *Unsettled History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017), p. 104; T Bennett, "Civic Seeing: Museums and the organisation of vision". In: S MacDonald (ed.), *Companion to Museum Studies* (London: Blackwell, 2006).

53 Lwandle Museum Collection. Memorandum, Helderberg Municipality, "Proposed Museum in Lwandle", 17/18/1, 1 July 1998.

54 This is elaborated upon in Murray and Witz, H*ostels, Homes*, chapter 1. See also, B Mgijima and V Buthelezi, "Mapping Museum- community relations in Lwandle", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32 (4), 2006, pp. 795- 806.

on 1 May 2000 was still in existence and indeed flourishing almost 20 years later. It is these struggles over museum and community that Noëleen Murray and I attempted to represent in *Hostels, Homes, Museum*:

> A history of what became called a museum in Lwandle is necessarily one of displacement, unease and the oscillating pressures of constructing an institution situated between the effects of apartheid — the migrant labour system and the remnants of the labour camp — and post-apartheid discourses of development as hostels were reconfigured as homes. By pausing to think about museum-making in relation to the dislocations of township experience that persist well into the present, we hope to open up a mode of thinking about how the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum figures in the interstices of effect and development. It is a book which is deliberately set in the past, ending a little beyond the celebration, trepidation and discomfort of the museum's 10th birthday in 2010. Of course, since then there have been events and dilemmas that have amplified the uncertainty of the museum's past and future. In this biography of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, we present an account which deliberately foregrounds this uncertainty. It is a story of Lwandle and the museum, which is fixed and temporary, planned and providential, seen and unseen, settled and unsettled.[55]

From very early on, one way for the museum to set in place both a collection and locate the insecure institution within the contested space of community was through oral history research. This was seen by the museum's founders to connect into forms of community and simultaneously establish uniqueness. The many and different stories that could emerge from this process of oral history collection held the promise of becoming a very different type of museum that emphasised the distinctiveness of local pasts. Oom Raymond Ntako, an elderly Lwandle resident, whom Bongani Mgijima interviewed very early on as a means to promote the museum project in the local press, echoed the words from *Write Your Own History*, when he said that these stories would enable "our children" to "know where they are coming from", [56]

Yet, as the museum grew in the following years it became apparent that the research required for exhibitions would provide the impetus for the growth of the collection. Exhibitionary imperatives came to constitute the voices of Lwandle. This had a bearing upon the variety and difference that the museum had sought at the outset. What occurred in Lwandle, was that it was the museum that was making "us to be here".[57] With very little material and a lack of

55 Murray and Witz, *Hostels, Homes*, p.20.
56 *Heldeberg District Mail*, 26 June 1998.
57 Interview: NC Makhabane with B Tyhulu, Lwandle Museum Collection, 24 August 2004.

resources, it was very difficult to establish a history that could be displayed. The first move in exhibitions then became one of making context and a narrative of migrant labour, implicitly derived from the diamond mines of Kimberley and the gold fields of the Witwatersrand, was drawn upon extensively by the museum.[58] Instead of enabling the locality to emerge through the collecting process, instead a social history narrative that had its origins on the gold mines in the nineteenth century took precedence. The local in effect became nationalised.[59]

When the exhibitions in the museum moved from depicting generalised accounts of migrant labour in a national past on to Lwandle, as the locality, and then on to portraying individual life stories of Lwandle's residents, oral histories and photographs are used to represent the ambiguity and meanings attached to the concept of home. Large format colour photographs with extracts from interviews in isiXhosa and English create a biographical gallery where the different renditions of home are represented. Home, as it appears in the exhibition, is most definitely "not a reference to a designated ethnic rural space where the planners of apartheid sought to place the migrant worker" but an ambivalent and constantly shifting "dislocation". [60]

Even then, there was not very much available and what appears is inevitably bitty and slight. As Jos Thorne, the exhibitions designer has pointed out, "much" had to be made "out of a little".[61] A large part of the exhibition came to be about "exhibiting the interview". Edited extracts, with the focus on "home" are placed alongside "big and very loud" photographs of the interviewees, "giving the appearance of speaking through the self of the full body rather than in the head and shoulders image so often used for purposes of identification". [62] According to Thorne, the idea was that these interviews on display would not become representative of "the voice of the people". Rather, by "creating a presence of people in a museum" the intention was that they would provide an impetus for others to come forward and tell their stories.[63] But by and large, the interviews on display, adjacent to the exhibited national and local context, have become Lwandle's past. Through the visual strategy adopted, the translated, edited interviews from over a three-year period, made "the interviewees ... very important people" [64] who have been interviewed again and again. It is these few "important people", with the assistance of the museum's researchers,

58 Murray and Witz, H*ostels, Homes*, p. 64.

59 This is a formulation from G Minkley and L Witz, "Sir Harry Smith and his Imbongi: Local and national identities in the Eastern Cape of South Africa, 1952". In: JR Forte *et al.* (eds.), *Out of History: Re-imagining South African Pasts* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2016), p. 53-72.

60 Murray and Witz, *Hostels, Homes*, p. 66; chapter 1.

61 J Thorne, "Designing Histories", *Kronos: Southern African histories* 34 (1), 2008, p. 155.

62 Murray and Witz, *Hostels, Homes*,p. 103.

63 Thorne, "Designing", p. 155.

64 Thorne, "Designing" p. 155.

designer, staff and board members, that have made Lwandle into a place not to be designated as a location.[65]

6. VOICES OF THE PEOPLE

The invocation of voice has a somewhat ambivalent genealogy in African history. On the one hand it has been used to assert processes of recovery and correction, making claims for African pasts through a record based upon oral traditions and experiences of the marginal through the collection of oral testimonies. *Write Your Own History* was based on this premise. Voices were to be made into words, and the contention was that these words could become historical evidence. Much like written texts an entire phalanx of oral history methodologies were called upon to enable assessment as sources and perhaps attribute to them a status of being more worthy as a way into evoking and invoking experience.

Simultaneously, voices have been turned into words that legitimate forms of authority, be they colonial, nationalist, postcolonial regimes and in some cases scholarly practices. According to Cohen *et al*, "the African 'voice', cradled, massaged, liberated, and authenticated within the expert approaches of the African historian – comes to represent (or at least represents the opportunity to reach for) truth while it bolsters scholarly claims to objectivity". The voice performs the dual role of "speaking from" and "speaking for", with an appearance of democratic sensibilities sustaining claims "to be more authentic, and thus more objective". [66]

Nonetheless, Carolyn Hamilton, writing in 2002 suggested that "oral historical accounts" also held the possible seed for "for germinating radical institutional transformation". Their fluidity, performativity and forms of mediation held the potential to both think through the incorporation of unstable histories and open up question of who holds authority over the words created by multiple authors. The latter resonates with a key issue that museums have faced at least since the 1990s if not earlier: repatriation of collections to what has sometimes been termed "source communities". Of course, identifying "the source" has been the problem when it is not singular and boundaries (if that is the correct word) are always porous and shifting. But Hamilton has maintained that oral histories, with their multiple authorships and mobile meanings, could add "new dimensions" to "the custodial role of the material or physical".[67] What

65 This is a key point that emerges from the Murray and Witz, *Hostels, Homes*, Chapter 1.

66 D William *et al*., "Voices, words and African history". In: L White *et al*. (eds.) *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 3– 4; p. 15.

67 C Hamilton, "Living by Fluidity": Oral histories, material custodies and the politics of archiving". In: C Hamilton *et al*. (eds.) *Refiguring the Archive* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), p. 225.

these "new dimensions" would need to think through would be forms of access, authority, possession and proprietorship.

Museums have hardly been places which have welcomed such disruptive influences to their authority. They have also never been sites of revolutionary struggle. Yet in the restructuring and reformation of citizens they have been used to visualise and make apparent notions of newness through their framings of collection and display. In South Africa, Hamilton has suggested, that the idea of "living history" through the continual mediations of orality invites possibilities beyond mere augmentation of data.[68] The artifact of oral history has indeed been at the source of the transforming museum in South Africa, but not in the way that Hamilton anticipated or desired. Implying (sometimes deep) origins, development and transparency, oral histories in new museums have come to stand for the ability to reach hidden core truths. It is these somewhat disembodied voices translated, transcribed and exhibited as text, mostly alongside photographs of those depicted as the interviewees, which have come to stand for an authoritative past called history. In effect *Write Your Own History* was turned into Make Your Own Museum, where the methodologies of oral history garnered and culled from social history, became the authorised voice of community in collection and on display. As Gary Minkley, Ciraj Rassool and I argue, "by combining deep pasts and anticipated futures, photographs and voice asserted the museum and the community as one and the same [and] brought together the living and the dead in a discourse of disappearance and recovery".[69]

If one thinks of voices as words that are archived as a composition (or as an assemblage) then the notion of ownership, according to Mbembe, becomes collective. Here is the potential for different histories and challenging institutional practices. The community is one "of time, the feeling according to which we would all be heirs to a time over which we might exercise the rights of collective ownership". This, says Mbembe, "is the imaginary that the archive seeks to disseminate". Yet as Mbembe intimates implicitly the archive also holds the personal, privately owned individuated time. The moment which intersects the time of the self with that of the collective is that of consulting the archives, "an "inquiry" into time inherited in co-ownership".[70] Although the archive in itself is a place of consignation that achieves its status through selection, the intersection of time of the personal and the collective can be an opportunity for disruption and instability.

That instability can be found in the Leslie Witz archives at the University of the Witwatersrand. When I requested from the archivist a copy of the

68 Hamilton, "Living by Fluidity", p. 225.
69 Witz *et al.*, *Unsettled History*.
70 A Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and its Limits". In: C Hamilton *et al.* (eds) *Refiguring the Archive*, (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002), p. 21.

deportation order that the government of Bophuthatswana had issued she also included two photographs of myself departing from the gates of the university at the end of February 1986. "Hi! Couldn't resist sending these photos as well", she wrote to me. "I remember this car!!!!".[71] One of the photographs is a close-up portrait of myself standing in front of the buildings of the university. In the other I am standing next to my car, facing the camera, as I appear to be about to enter it and drive off. The security booth, with a guard standing in front, and the lowered booms are in the middle ground and again a parking lot with university buildings are in the background. This was the very moment of deportation. But was it? The night before Joe Alfers, the university photographer, and I had been at the wedding of our friends and colleagues, Rob McCallum and Teboho Moja at the Mmabatho Sun. Joe was there also in his capacity as a photographer and I recall many of the wonderful photos he took of the occasion, some more impromptu but others, as is the case in this genre, carefully composed and stage-managed. In the way the guests and the wedding party were grouped together they appeared as if they were invoking Leonardo Da Vinci's *The Last Supper*.[72] My recollection is I had to leave Bophuthatswana the following day and we talked about meeting up so that he could photograph my departure. As we agreed, we met just beyond the gates of the university. Joe directed me to take up various poses with the university as backdrop, one which included me about to climb into my car. It is this photograph which now appears amongst all the other papers in the Leslie Witz archive at the University of the Witwatersrand relating to my time spent and deportation from Bophuthatswana. Together Joe Alfers and I had deliberately staged a contemporary moment as if it was history. But how was that performance of the "as if" to be produced and re-produced in the telling of history?[73]

71 E-mail: M Pickover, to L Witz, 6 June 2016. RE: University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers.

72 These wedding photographs are today elusive. Joe Alfers cannot find them in his collection and thinks they may be with Rob McCallum whom he handed them over to.

73 See, Anna Selmeczi's article on producing the "as if" in relation to Simon Gush's artwork, *Red*. A, Selmeczi, "Art/work: Fabricating freedom or, thinking about instrumentality ion relation to political art", *Parrallax* 22 (2), 2016, p. 219-234.