

REVIEWS

Noëleen Murray and Leslie Witz, *Hostels, Homes, Museum: Memorialising Migrant Labour Pasts in Lwandle, South Africa* (Cape Town: University of Cape Town Press, 2014), 187 pp, paperback, ISBN 978-1-77582-077-2.

I first visited Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum in 2014 at the recommendation of University of the Western Cape historians Patricia Hayes and Ciraj Rassool. I was teaching US and South African students as a part of an international exchange programme and looking for ways to convey the complexities of South Africa's past and present. It was in the museum itself that I first encountered the architect Noëleen Murray's and historian Leslie Witz's *Hostels, Homes, Museum: Memorialising Migrant Labour Pasts in Lwandle, South Africa*. Adding yet another layer of complexity to the processes Murray and Witz describe, I not only read this book for the information it contained but also evaluated it as a three-time repeat visitor to the museum.

Hostels, Homes, Museum tells the story of the inception, evolution and elaboration of the Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum, although not necessarily in that order. The authors reject the notion of Lwandle as a community-based institution, 'arguing that placing the Lwandle Museum in such a location is inappropriate. Whereas apartheid sought to make Lwandle as a "native location" the categorization of the museum as "community" fixes its past and future into a narrow frame that denies the profoundly dislocating and uneven processes of making museum communities' (20). The authors develop this argument over five chapters, preface, and postscript with two photographic essays of the museum and the surrounding neighbourhood compiled by Paul Grendon and Thulani Nxumalo.

Self-described 'long-time champions of the museum and board members since 2001' (7), Murray and Witz use Kratz and Karp's (2007) concept of 'museum frictions' to craft a narrative that disrupts linear understandings of movement toward a specified goal. The book serves as a sort of biography of place, detailing the actions that allowed a committed group of individuals to begin the process of seeking funding to turn a migrant labour hostel for black male labourers under the apartheid system into a post-apartheid museum. From the original grant application to the US Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation to negotiations and renegotiations with community members for whom the hostel could have met the material need for housing, to detailed discussions of construction materials, the authors engage in an auto-ethnographic critique.

Chapter One, 'Dislocation: Grounding a Museum at the Seaside', frames the book temporally, spatially and theoretically so that readers can appreciate and evaluate the choices the authors make in what they include and exclude in the remaining chapters. Significantly, in this chapter and throughout the book, the authors situate

Lwandle Migrant Labour Museum in a comparative framework with other museums throughout the world, including the District Six Museum in Cape Town, the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in New York City, Musée du Quai Branly in Paris, and the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam, among others. Chapter Two focuses on restoration and rehabilitation and will be of interest to those most engaged by details associated with those hands-on processes. In my favorite chapter of the book, Chapter Three, 'Museumization: Inventing an Institution', they turn the ordinary descriptions of somewhat bureaucratic processes into material that can be mined for meaning. Reminiscent of David Graeber's (2015) *The Utopia of Rules: On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*, Murray and Witz dig into and find meaning in what some might pass over as the mundane details of lived experience. In so doing, they create a sort of social history of a set of processes that might otherwise remain overlooked and, in effect, provide a template for others embarking on similar endeavours. Moreover, this level of detail flags what is overlooked in other settings, where we are presented with final products but not a guide to how the end was achieved. Chapter Four focuses on images, photography and visual representation. One of the reasons photographs feature so prominently is the relative dearth of artefacts or material culture, as Lwandle, the authors argue, was always intended to be a place of impermanence. The visual is a thread that runs throughout the book, with well over fifty images interspersed throughout the text – all captioned, meticulously credited to photographers and, as the authors describe (15), published with the permission of the individual photographed. Chapter Five discusses the transformation of the oral and the visual into text. While interactive museums where visitors are exposed to multi-media representations are in vogue these days, those kinds of exhibits also require resources and upkeep – in short supply at Lwandle. In line with their focus on process, the authors include an excerpt that includes both the original Xhosa and the English translation from an interview transcript with a Lwandle resident. They also include the further refined version that was crafted for display (133–5). This approach provides an invaluable degree of access for outsiders (particularly for students engaged in their own projects) into how interview materials feed into the construction of knowledge. The book concludes with a postscript that reaffirms the authors' central argument about the museum as a 'volatile' (158) and very much contested and ever-evolving space.

To return to my earlier note that not only was I reading the book for information, I was evaluating it as a repeat visitor to the museum: I found myself very actively engaged by the text. I had encountered or heard of many of the key stakeholders mentioned in the book. I (and my students) shared and experienced some of the tensions inherent in being an outsider to Lwandle who visited not just the museum but the community it was in. This book gives outsiders a glimpse into the complexity that is hinted at in narrated tours of the museum, Hostel 33, and the surrounding community.

The book makes a good case for the museum as a vehicle for social transformation, geared externally toward international visitors but also internally toward the larger Lwandle 'community'. Out of character with the fine-grained treatment in the

rest of the book, however, 'tourist' remains an ill-defined figure that lurks on the margins, presumed to be international but not necessarily categorised as such. One perceives that Lwandle, as the first township-based museum in the Western Cape after the formal end of apartheid, might also be an educational site for South Africans who don't live in Lwandle, but that angle isn't probed. In a similar vein, I found the discussion of the relationship between ethnicity, ethnic groups and the museum to be incomplete and therefore unsatisfying – leaving me with more questions than answers. Upon deeper reflection, though, that may have been the authors' point.

On balance, however, this is a theoretically rich, empirically grounded and methodologically innovative book. It engages important debates and controversies that will be of significant interest to those working in studies of narrative, public history, museum studies, anthropology of bureaucracy, South African history, architecture and restoration (as well as the literal role of architecture and space under apartheid), autoethnography, and participatory research methodologies.

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