

BO MMARURI: BOSADI

*MmaMolao o le segetse metsi. O le buletse phatlha.
Ka leina la Mmalegodimo le mowa wa boitshepo. A e nne jalo*

An exhibition, catalogue and accompanying text submitted for the award of the degree
Master of Fine Art (MFA) Faculty of the Humanities University of Cape Town 2021

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MFA RESEARCH PAPER

BO MMARURI: BOSADI

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DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature:

Signed by candidate

Date: 28 July 2021

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This exhibition together with this catalogue, are dedicated to Sheila Dineonyana Mokobi. Thank you Ma- for knowing and for showing me that some stories are only for those who are listening. For keeping me *home* while away from home and telling me, since I was small, that I am ‘big enough’. I will forever be grateful for the story that you are, and all the words, spoken and unspoken, between us.

To my friends, collaborators and colleagues; Kim Karabo Makin, Motlalepula Phukubje, Sefela Yalala, Akudzwe Elsie Chiwa, Brilliant Motshipi-Kodie, Katleho Mosehle, Thebe Phetogo, Thero Makepe, Sade Shoalane and Fernando Kapela. Thank you for the time you invested in me and this project, your presence is embedded on and in between the layers of this work and I am intensely grateful for your contributions.

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisors, Berni Searle and Jane Alexander, thank you for your guidance over the years, your invaluable contribution, your advice, and for your constructive insight. I am eternally grateful for your patience and for your constant support.

To Melvin Pather, Fazlin, Uncle Charlie, Duncan and Uncle Stan, thank you for your willing help and advice. With the most gratitude, I would like to acknowledge Ma K, the Siyakhula Fund and the McIver Scholarship for funding this project and for giving me the means to manifest it. Thank you to Thapong Arts Centre, Southern Africa Arts, The British Council and The Botswana Ministry of Health for your support.

Ke a leboga



BA SETLHOPO



MOTSAMAISI



MOHUMI



MMAMOLAO
KGOSE



MODISA
BISOPO



MOGOLWANE
BAITSHIRELETSI



MOKWALEDI



MODISA
BISOPO



MOPOROFETA



MOTLHOKOMEDI



MOTSAMAISI

BAITSHIRELETSI



GLOSSARY

	Meaning	<i>Alternative meanings in the work</i>
A basadi ba eme	<i>Are the women standing?</i>	<i>Are the women standing ((or)still)?</i>
Ba Setlhopo	<i>Those off/from the selection</i>	<i>Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi's governing body</i>
Baitshireletsi	<i>Those that protect themselves</i>	
Bakwaledi	<i>Writers. Secretaries</i>	
Basadi	<i>Women</i>	
Bišôpô	<i>Bishop</i>	
Bo Mmaruri	<i>An absolute, God-honest truth-sworn upon a maternal figure</i>	
Boammaruri	<i>Absolute truth, absolutely true</i>	
Bosadi	<i>To be woman. Vagina. Womanhood.</i>	<i>Place where the story is set</i>
Didiriswa	<i>Tools</i>	
Fatshe/Lefatshe	<i>Land/ nation</i>	
KgosiKgolo	<i>Paramount chief</i>	<i>Used in reference to MmaMolao</i>
Kgotso	<i>Peace</i>	
Kitso	<i>Caution or warning</i>	
Lefatshe	<i>Land/ Nation</i>	
Lesôlê	<i>Soldier</i>	
Masa	<i>Daybreak or new dawn</i>	
Mmalegodimo	<i>Mother of that which is above.</i>	<i>Heavenly mother</i>
MmaMaselamose	<i>Mother of the metaphysical/magic</i>	<i>Mangeloi/ (magical) angel</i>
MmaMolao	<i>Mother of the law/ commandment/ order-keeping</i>	
Mogolwane wa Masole	<i>The elder amongst the soldiers.</i>	
Moikemêlanosi	<i>The one that stands/ represents themselves only</i>	<i>MmaMaselamose</i>
Moitshepi	<i>The one that has pledged themselves. The holy one that is faithful. Devotee.</i>	<i>A spiritual/religious devotee</i>
Mokapelo	<i>The one of the heart. Spouse. 'sweetheart'.</i>	<i>MmaMolao's spouse</i>
Molaodi	<i>Director. Manager.</i>	
Mopapa	<i>Pope</i>	
Moporofeta	<i>Prophet</i>	
Morafe	<i>An ancestral subgroup under a particular chiefdom</i>	
Motlhokomedi	<i>The Caretaker. Guardian.</i>	
Mowa	<i>Air or spirit</i>	
Noka	<i>River/natural body of water</i>	
Pônagalô ya boraro	<i>In the third appearance</i>	
Pula	<i>Botswana's currency and 'motto'</i>	<i>Rain, water, prosperity & blessings</i>
Puso ya gago a e tle	<i>'Your realm/kingdom come'</i>	
Sekgabo	<i>Adornment</i>	
Setlhopo sa Balekane	<i>A selection of those that are equal</i>	<i>Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi's governing body</i>

ABSTRACT

Post-colonial Botswana is analysed in this body of work as an anecdote. Its landscapes, history, culture, traditions, norms and identity are deconstructed and reconstituted in a heterotopia of my own making. Motivated by the decline in the momentum and visibility of Botswana's women's movements, the project asks how non-male resistance and self-determination has and can operate in Botswana, particularly in traditional and cultural spaces. In this work, I identify storytelling and folklore as a device that though culturally-specific, is reflected across nations on the continent, and so, allows a meditation on personal and national identity that is not restrictive or isolating as it must occur in constant reference to the culture(s) around it. Through my own works and the works of Thebe Phetogo, Meleko Mokgosi, Athi Patra-Ruga and Kudzanai Chuirai, I discuss the 'making visual' of oral and folklore culture to highlight the interconnectedness of African narratives and oral storytelling/performing practices while deconstructing Botswana's conceptual basis, which this work sees as being folklore itself.

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INTRODUCTION

Bo Mmaruri: *Bosadi* is a body of creative work comprised of photomontages, posters, sound and video work, performance in custom-made costume, together with an augmented reality component. These elements combine to represent and depict an imagined rendition of Botswana through a set of characters that are based on governmental and spiritual leaders in the country and the imagery and aesthetics used by and associated with the country's ruling political party.

This document details the background against which the work was made and provides an explication of its conceptual and creative aspects. Overall, the project makes references to Botswana's history, the impact of colonization, Christianity, the national narrative, the development of Botswana's political machinery and the journey and current status of the women's movements in the country, all through the traditions of Setswana folklore and the lens of my own experience as a Motswana

As it stands, the dominant and widely accepted narrative that informs Botswana's identity is factually inaccurate and does not demonstrate ideological or chronological continuity. *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* looks at postcolonial Botswana as an anecdote, interrogating the inner workings of the systems that have driven the favourable reception of the narrative thus far. The consequences of this narrative are considered with particular reference to women¹, the community, and the emergence of the nation. *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* is an interrogation of power in the context of contemporary Botswana; of the beliefs and belief structures that provide it the authority necessary to maintain the status quo. To do so, this body of work seeks significance in the vague, somewhat unclear, whispered, and rumoured- covert signs and symbols that shape belief and support a 'believable' narrative as opposed to the overt, easily accessible, and readily consumed. The project identifies folklore as a way to review the ways that the culture of and around storytelling 'raises' a nation and to explore strategies for inverting the mechanisms that translate the myth of the narrative to accepted fact.

A set of posters, a flag, and a cabinet group portrait designed for *Ba Setlhopo's* campaign support the body of work as separate pieces and feature in the photomontage imagery. Two costumed performances were carried out in several parts of Gaborone in 2019. The first was a set of group performances conducted over the course of two weeks in parts of the city with high foot traffic. The second was a single performance with only one character, carried out on Kgale Hill, in collaboration with and documented by Brilliant Motshipi-Kodie. Lastly, *Ba Setlhopo's* campaign posters were installed in the city's oldest mall, Main Mall- in 2020 whilst I was in Cape Town as a 'test of value'. This remote installation was put into effect by Thero Makepe who photographed and took note of public response in my absence. The experience of and the public feedback from the performance and installation was taken into close consideration as the body of work developed. *Ba Setlhopo* are presented in a final live sculpture of costumed figures, accompanied by a sound piece and stationed outside of the entrance to the exhibition. A QR code is provided at the entrance which directs the viewer to an Instagram filter (made in collaboration with Xopher Wallace) with front and back views, that dresses the user as one of two characters from *Ba Setlhopo*.

¹ 'Women' as used in this paper and body of work relates to trans, non-binary, cis-gendered women and gender nonconforming people, to the exclusion of cis-gendered heterosexual men.

Initially, I had conceptualized and proposed *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* solely as a response to the decline in the visibility and representation of the women's movements in the country. I had aimed to trace the path and evolution of Botswana's women's movements within and beyond textual and physical evidence and to, in the process, cement proof of their existence within the narratives of my practice. However, upon arriving back home to find physical, non-digitized substantiation of the claim that the women's movement 'lives on', I found I took a more earnest interest in the oral exchanges I engaged in while journeying to the information I was seeking. I took note of people's reactions to the kind of information I was looking for, I enjoyed talking to people who were actively gate-keeping, engaging with people who answered my questions with stories about why they could not answer me or why someone like me should be doing something else and listening to what people actually regard as worthwhile discussions and endeavours. I encountered a moderately organized archive with missing information and a taxing access control system whose tedium I couldn't help but consider a contributing factor to the longevity of Botswana's apologue. Later, I discovered and became comfortable with the fact that even I, who was on a decidedly formal pursuit, was still a Motswana, who because their culture dictates them to be so, is more receptive of stories, stretched truths, conversation, and hearsay, no matter how far-fetched.

Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi's full title emulates prophetic prayer and divine declaration.

It is an experiment in 'artistic insurrection'. This body of work favours narratives written in faith. It aims to interrogate how and what Botswana believe through the multi- and cross-medium cues that scaffold and continue to reinforce these beliefs. I prioritize conversation, storytelling/folklore, idioms, proverbs, and prose poetry to lead my practice for several reasons; the nature of Setswana is metaphoric and self-reflexive. Its neologisms are telling of past and contemporary culture that can operate as 'cultural markers'. Further, an abundance of Setswana's colloquialisms are similes and metaphors. The language becomes increasingly vague and poetic in its expression the more skilfully one expresses it- this paradox has always been of interest to me because, it is almost as if the language suggests that more acute truths can be found in the density of what is undefined, unbound and ambiguous. I resonate with this because it allows for the earnest consideration of multiple supporting and opposing views. Folklore, in the contemporary community, is generally understood to be either under the guidance of *basadi bagolo* ('old women') or is dismissed, to a certain extent, as *dilo tsa basadi bagolo* ('the things of/that concern old women'). The ageism and sexism in these sentiments is obvious but I see it as embodied practice for the tellers. I consider folktale as being a recognized but underutilized tool that people could refer to as a powerful knowledge system and as an effective mode of communication. I believe folktale and storytelling operate with the objective to *unify* across nations and generations. Pabalelo G. Mmila, author of *A 'subordinate' genre in the voice of the 'subordinate' gender: the storytelling tradition in post-colonial Botswana*, considers storyteller-performers, who tell and embody folktales each "in a different manner which add flexibility to the transmitted knowledge" (Mmila, 2012: 242). Through inter-textualization and the layering and intertwining of image, symbol, and sign, *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* as a body of work, depends heavily on ambiguity to explicate the sublime, aiming to make opportunity for the elucidation of 'minor' or 'micronarratives' as a rebuttal to the dominant or metanarrative. I consider the title a short story, written in response to and adapted from many tales, and the body of work, as the visualization and elaboration of this story. Like Samuel Delany's *Triton*², *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* also aims to resist "the temptation of escapism" (Zamalin, 2019: 111) into the idea of utopia or a refashioned far-

² "*Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia* (1976) is a science fiction novel by American writer Samuel R. Delany. It was originally published under the shorter title *Triton*." (Good Reads, 2021)

future. It relies, rather on ambiguity and superimposition of symbol and image to create an adaptive space devoid of the expectations of futurity (though these expectations are not disregarded). The project unites a critique of power with Setswana storytelling, folklore, history, and literature. *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* intends to create an anachronistic, dimensionless 'stage' on which to perform an idea of a 'new nation'- of a heterotopia³ particular but not exclusive to Botswana. This while allowing myself, in the role of 'myth-maker', the opportunity to toy with the inner workings of the cultural system and identity in a way that hopes to encourage cultural dynamicity.

The formation of *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* and *Ba Setlhopo*, even if seemingly so, is not motivated by a sense of patriotism or in support of notions of nationalism. The work was rather influenced by a need to more thoroughly understand Botswana's identity as a locale that constitutes part of Africa's sub-Saharan region, of the continent, and of a global landscape that is fraught with interdependent issues that largely stem from a legacy of white supremacy and colonialism (which have manifested themselves very specifically in different parts of the continent). The need for this understanding is simply the need to interrogate my identity as a product of and as an artist who creates in the contemporary moment and within its discourse. This is not a need that is exclusive to me or my practice. In discussing art by makers from Africa and the shifts in the contemporary African art scene, Simon Njami notes an increase in works that are preoccupied with deconstructing and dismantling issues around national identities as well as preconceptions of the continent. The complexity and specificity of these issues is being revealed by makers who are becoming increasingly aware that "it is no longer enough to claim to be African. The definition of identity not only reflects one's origins but includes a way of looking at the world beyond regional borders." (Njami, 2019). In this way, I understand that being a 'Motswana' describes a worldview more than it describes a nationality, it describes a particular reality and a way of interpreting. This apparent move toward national specificity does not occur in conflict with ambitions of mobile, integrated, and networked African societies, "the way I use the term 'national' does not refer to borders. On the contrary. After the Berlin Conference of 1884–85, the African continent was divided artificially and I believe that in order to talk about Africa, we should be able today to address the countries that this ensemble composes. The stories are never totally similar. There are languages, for instance, that shape territories regardless of the political divides. In order to create that mobility you mention, one needs to know the nature of what is being moved" (Njami, 2019). By using the country's national narrative and language, *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* is an attempt at making sense of where Botswana *is* as a part of Africa; where it stands in terms of its own, the continental and the global narrative. Through the process of making this work, I attempt to *move* the nation into a rendition of a heterotopia because, as Njami puts it- "only experimentation can build theories of reality" (Njami, 2018). *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* endeavours to theorise and imagine, for Botswana, a reality and world-view that is influenced by the central thought⁴ of Black radical feminist theory, that subscribes to a continental 'cultural membership'⁵.

³ "Heterotopias are worlds within worlds, mirroring and yet distinguishing themselves from what is outside." (Heterotopia Studies, 2021)

⁴ That sees black women as valuable. It recognizes the intersections of racism, sexism, patriarchy and capitalism as inseparable forms of oppression for black women. "Radical feminists firmly believe that we must transform the entire basis of society... Only by opposing centuries of patriarchal oppression can society be reordered along a matriarchal basis." (Tutor2u, 2021)

⁵ The culture and practice of African folklore

“FATSHE LENA”- LA BO MANG?: BOTSWANA’S FOUNDING NATIONAL MYTH

*Fatshe leno la rona,
Ke mpho ya Modimo,
Ke boswa jwa borraetsho;
A le nne ka kagiso...*

This land of ours
Is a gift from God
Heritage our fathers left to us
May it always be at peace

Above are the actual opening lines of Botswana’s national anthem. ‘*Fatshe lena la rona*’ as a first and national statement, quite directly speaks to the sense of unity and equality that Botswana prides itself in. The second line reflects the nation’s belief in and gratitude towards a God. The third implies that it was owned by men and gifted to living generations. And the last line of the stanza is telling of Botswana’s aspiration for a peaceful society.

The accepted version of Botswana’s narrative as it is known today is that it is a peaceful, relatively wealthy nation- the general assumption is that this is mainly due to a booming tourism industry (prior to COVID-19) and the presence of diamonds in the country. In *The Invention and Perpetuation of Botswana’s National Mythology: 1885-1996*, Fred Morton and Jeff Ramsay identify that the principal accounts that inform the recognized version of the country’s narrative are somewhat inaccurate and therefore misleading. This creates the basis on which to frame and analyse the national narrative as an intricate mythology. Morton and Ramsay argue that Botswana “to a great extent abandoned their former ethnic and localized identities for” what attested to become “Botswana’s unifying ideology” (Morton & Ramsay, 2018:1). Because both parts of the national mythology involve inter-ethnic collaboration and consensus, they continue to resonate strongly with the citizens of the modern nation-state”. The authors suggest the myth can be looked at in two main parts that “can be recited in some version by the entire population” (Morton & Ramsay, 2018:1). I can, as a Botswana and a part of the said population, recite the story myself:

In the late 1800’s, Botswana asked to be taken under British Protectorateship, fearing the violence that was unfolding in South Africa. Then in 1895, the Three Dikgosi or The Three Chiefs (Bathoen I of the Bangwaketse people, Sebele I of the Bakwena, and Khama I of the Bangwato), fearing for the safety of their people in light of Dutch and German settlers closing in, travelled to Britain to meet with the Queen at Windsor Castle. After being well-received, they pleaded on behalf of the nation for their colonial mother’s protection against this imminent threat. Graciously accepting this request, the Queen sent them back home with the promise of safety. Sometime later, the chiefs again spoke to the British on behalf of the country, asking for it to be declared an independent state, and again, their wish was granted. A democratic election was carried out in 1966, the Botswana Democratic Party was elected and instated, and the Bechuanaland Protectorate became independent Botswana.

In truth, the Chiefs’ trip in 1895 was almost a decade after the British had established themselves in the country. It had been declared a protectorate in 1885 “after much hesitation

and reluctance, and only for strategic reasons to guarantee the route to the north” (Mogalakwe, 2003: 90). The fabled trip in 1895 to England was actually to protest the British handing Bechuanaland over to the commercial British South African Company (BSAC). Though their departure and return was viewed as an event of national significance, “nothing had actually happened, and no promises of any sort were made” (Morton & Ramsay, 2018:7). At several points, both colonizer and colonized covertly solicit parts of the myth to use it for their own gain, skewing it to their advantage using news media and speeches at public and private events to further the story’s reach. Though initially a construct of the British colonial administration, by 1908 they “rarely attempted to use the mythology to cement their hegemony over Batswana. In fact, they become hearers of the myth” (Morton & Ramsay, 2018:15).

According to the widely accepted narrative which itself is a fable, the Botswana Democratic Party was formed as a natural progression after proving its pertinence as the *morafe*⁶ leaders who led the country to the safety of its colonizers. The BDP is seen as one of the main reasons the country enjoys the status it holds today.

Botswana identity today-insofar as this identity is derived from history-is based on the belief that they asked their colonizers to both colonize and protect them. Batswana thus internalize an extremely passive, supplicant historical role- the opposite of what one would expect in the case of Africa’s wealthiest democracies. As a result, historical resistance figures who opposed colonization and conquest have been forgotten while “collaborators” have been enshrined as founding figures of the nation (Morton & Ramsay, 2018:1).

To date, independent Botswana has *only* been governed by the BDP and the party has, over decades, had a large role to play in shaping Botswana’s history and identity. There exists the perception that the BDP became the ruling party because it played an integral role in seeing Botswana to independence and that they have retained the reputation of good governance since. Though not false, according to Monageng Mogalakwe and others, “the BDP was part of the colonial administration since its formation in 1962 and the colonial state party of choice, with its leading member seen as trainee ministers under the tutelage of the colonial administrators whom they expected to replace. The BDP became the ruling party “without ever having fought an election or waged a nationalist struggle (1986:248)” (Mogalakwe, 2003: 92). The country’s independence was a British initiative- carried out in the hopes that introducing the country to the commonwealth would “keep Botswana pro-western in the era of the Cold War” (Morton & Ramsay, 2018:15). Botswana’s history shows the country at a cross purpose with the project of decolonisation. Newly independent Botswana was received with suspicion and reluctance by other African nations. Its celebrations were boycotted by several heads of state and the country was only allowed entry into the OAU⁷ in 1967. “The BDP and the British authorities had policies and aims which were virtually identical” hence the OAU “felt that self-government in Bechuanaland involved a surrender either to the colonial power or to white ruled South Africa” (Mmegi Online, 2002).

⁶ Refers to an ethnic, ancestral or cultural clan led by a Kgosi (Chief). These were not always hierarchical, colonial rulers “turned Dikgosi into territorial monarchs and always sided with the chiefs in internal conflicts. According to Samatar, (pp.46-47) the previously flexible *morafe* (ancestral, cultural or tribal (in the way of totemic affiliation) group) was turned into a rigid territorially based order and the colonialists inscribed into the soul of the protectorate local identity based on territory and tribal affiliation” (Mogalakwe, 2003: 91).

⁷ The Organisation of African Unity (OAU), established in 1963, promoted the spirit of decolonial thought, action and pan-Africanism amongst nations on the continent.

With several white ministers and all its first permanent secretaries being white expatriates, the initial structure of the party validates these suspicions. The London Constitutional Conference of 1966 was held the same year of Botswana's independence to structure the new constitution. Attended by twenty delegates in total, the number of Batswana reduced to only three when "the leader of the opposition (BPP), Matante walked out arguing that Batswana were not consulted (Mmegi Online, 2002). The remainder of the participants were white or Asian foreign officials and representatives. I find it important to note that, "completely not represented at the constitutional conferences were women, as all 19 delegates were men. Minority ethnic groups were not represented either as the three chiefs came from the 'main tribes'" (Mmegi Online, 2002). *The BDP and Botswana's False de-colonisation*, challenges the party's perpetuation of the national myth in the country's 46th year of independence because it still lives on in the minds of Batswana, state-approved textbooks, parts of speech, monuments, contemporary culture, in political and religious/spiritual spaces etc and it is broadcast and celebrated consistently. It is heavily enmeshed in our culture, traditions and identity as a people. Morton and Ramsay, through Eric Hobsbawm, observe that the intention of traditions is "essentially the process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition. ((Morton & Ramsay, 2018: 10). Because I am interested in the ramifications of Botswana's national myth and concerned by what its reverberations have caused at a national level, I gravitate towards the idea of artistic practice or creative interventions that can disrupt and complicate, specifically, the kind of formalization, ritualization and repetition that supports this mythology. Inspiration has been drawn from textbooks, short stories, anthologies, national monuments, newspaper articles, official documentation, books, television shows, interviews etc. that support how Botswana is characterized.

In the title of this section, I ask; "*Fatshe lena'-la bo mang?*" as a compilation of several, earnest questions: Is it one unified land? If so, what and where is this land? Whom has it been given to? Who narrates and curates it and do they own it? Is it 'led'? And if so, does the leader own it? This title looks at the nation, what has been built on it, what it is *based* on, and how it functions. It asks; whom do we gather to 'be a nation' (of this kind) for? Who benefits, ultimately? With the research that I have done towards this project, I cannot conclusively answer any of these questions. However, the various material that I have considered for this project, alongside my own experience, do not suggest that it is to the benefit of Black Batswana who are not men.

Tlhalefang: A National Anthem is *Ba Setlhopo's* 'national anthem' and the sound piece that is played overhead the living sculpture. The clip is adapted from Botswana's national anthem (written and composed by Kgalemang Tumediso Motsete), it isolates the second line of the second verse:

Emang, basadi, emang, tlhagafalang!
Stand women stand, close by!

This verse is looped several times before ending with the original closing lines:

Re kopanelang go direla lefatshe la rona
We have come together to serve this land of ours.

Tlhalefang: A National Anthem does not entirely dismiss the national anthem as it is but creates a space within it that allows for alternative 'hearing' or reinterpretation. If one willed,

“tlhagafalang” in the national anthem could easily be replaced with “tlhalefang” which means to ‘become wise, smarten up’. And though this has not been altered in the actual lyrics, the suggestion of this alteration in the titling is enough to encourage the hearing of this version.

A BASADI BA EME?: BO MMARURI: BOSADI AND BA SETLHOPO IN RESPONSE TO DECLINE IN BOTSWANA'S WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

Botswana received its independence in 1966, without strife. “Botswana gained independence as a bourgeois, bureaucratic state through a generally peaceful, colonially-mediated process, with no particular commitment to the emancipation of women’s status embedded in its Constitution as could be found elsewhere in Africa” (Ndengwa, 2001:43). The country doesn’t have a compelling ‘liberation story’ that led to its independence, “despite Botswana's proximity to and interaction with several southern African liberation movements” (Bauer, 2011: 27), Botswana did not follow suit. As a traditionally patriarchal state, the transition from British protectorate to independent country did not require uprising or a significant transformation of and by the male population. “Since independence, Botswana, under the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has wholeheartedly sought the capitalist road and has opened its economy to foreign capital, focusing on the exploitation of diamonds⁸ and minerals and a high-end tourist industry. The result has been class polarisation (predictably) and one of the highest income differentials in Africa, rural poverty, high unemployment and restrictions on union organising” (Bauer, 2011: 27). While the state of the country’s affairs has come into question relatively often, it has skilfully managed to maintain its image as a peaceful, civil society; a capitalist haven with a barely touched, sub-Saharan mise-en-scène.

Gretchen Bauer, in *Update on the Women’s Movements in Botswana: Have the Women Stopped Talking?* (2011), outlines the earlier successes of several of Botswana’s women’s movements. *Emang Basadi*, for example, began as a law reform and legal education project and later focused on political education and political empowerment following their success with either the abolition or amendment of laws that were indicative of gender inequalities. However, Bauer notes that although the structures that were established in the late twentieth century still stand, there is a notable decline in women’s mobilization in Botswana since 2010 or that perhaps it, “like others in the region, may be, in the words of one scholar, in “abeyance”. Bauer is of the opinion that this decline in motion was caused by “(1) the accomplishment of many of the women's movement's early goals; (2) challenges facing civil society in general in Botswana; (3) an increasing ambivalence within a powerful executive toward a women's rights agenda; and (4) a constitution that is essentially neutral (rather than egalitarian) in terms of gender difference.” (Bauer, 2011: 26) Leloba Molema suggests that possibly “the women’s movement suffered from its general failure to broaden its geographic base beyond the capital city and its socioeconomic base beyond educated, professional women”. Ataliah Molokomme considers that the achievements made in their time led the current generation to “feel that they did not have to make the noise that we did” (Bauer, 2011: 37). However one accepts that this decline came to be, it remains that this loss in momentum of the women’s movements in Botswana means that the country’s contemporary moment inherits a languid sense of gender equity and non-male empowerment.

⁸ Debswana was formed as the De Beers Botswana Mining Company in 1968 and controls all diamond mining in the country through four companies that are jointly owned by the De Beers Group and the Botswana government. Diamonds and diamond mining is glamorized and the country’s development is attributed to dazzling finds such as *Lesedi la Rona* (<https://www.thesouthafrican.com/news/graff-lesedi-la-rona-diamond-302-carat-unveiled-photos/>) or *Okavango Blue* (<https://www.billionsluxuryportal.com/post/culture-okavango-blue-diamond>). The origins and impact of the De Beers Group, especially on the continent, is not taken into consideration when the government renews its partnership with the Group. The mining-induced displacements in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve in 1997, 2002 and 2005 that forcibly removed almost the entire Basarwa population have continuously been swept under the rug in favour of a polished national mining persona that represents the country, the community and the environment all in fair and perfect unity with De Beers.

Generally, women in Botswana have not been given the room to operate autonomously. “According to Selolwane (2000), when they were formed, women’s wings neither encouraged women to participate in elections nor articulated the concerns of women voters. Rather they were “social clubs for spouses of male politicians, with their political activity mainly restricted to fundraising and canvassing for support for the men as well as providing entertainment during political rallies” (Bauer, 2011: 26). More recently women’s studies are driven by analyses of gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS, as well as the intersections between women, community, the environment and agriculture. This kind of research is essential, but equally essential, is ongoing and gender-responsive critiques of the power structures that govern the country and create the resultant circumstances in which these issues become possible.

The dwindling legacy of Botswana’s women’s movements resulted in a lack of purpose-built and robust, contemporary feminist identity and this consequently means that issues experienced in post-colonial Botswana, more often than not, miss the opportunity to be analysed through the lens of a feminist ideology that is specific to Botswana and centres Black Botswana women. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (2002) informed much of my thinking towards *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*. In the fifth chapter of the book, the author, Robin D. G Kelley refers to *The Black Woman*⁹ as a black feminist manifesto and a work that was a critique of “the culture’s degradation of black women” that “exposed how traditional ideas of masculinity not only undermined gender relations within black communities but also served as a fetter to the liberation of men and women. In other words, a politics wedded to the idea that men needed to rule women would not result in liberation for anyone.”(Kelley, 2002:14). These are ideas that resonate with me but that I have not seen evidence of in any major facet of the community in the context of Botswana. Our traditions (cultural and contemporary), politics and spirituality, for the most part, institute and encourage male supremacy. *Ba Setlhopo* aims toward a gender ambiguity that only alludes to the feminine in the hopes of including a broader spectrum of gender identities, the character’s pronouns are either *o/they/she*. Male figures of God, the messiah, religious, spiritual, and political leaders are supplanted and exchanged for non-male bodies in *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*. The body of work aims to represent the reclamation of power from all salient ends through storytelling which is a practice seen as belonging to (older) women and so somewhat irrelevant to the contemporary moment for that fact.

Just like its executors, storytelling occupies a subordinate position in the eyes of those who control the production of knowledge. As Mugo (1999) argues, this dismissal of oral genres as non-developed theatre stems from the Western definition, which gives greater importance to written text. At the core of such dismissals lies the desire to silence African (and Setswana) perspectives and paradigms that fall outside of the narrow definitions of theatre and performance. This invasion by dominating paradigms amounts to what Mugo (1999, p. 198) calls ‘a variation of colonialism’s violent refusal to accept Africans as co-producers of intellectual knowledge.’ In the Setswana context the subordination of storytelling translates to a dual subordination of women as performers and as keepers of a knowledge system. Thus colonial and gender politics combine to banish storytelling and its performers (women) ‘to the periphery of “real knowledge”’ (Nnaemeka 1997, p. 7), rendering it subjugated knowledge (Mmila, 2012: 238).

⁹ An anthology of works by female African American writers, edited by Toni Cade and published in 1970.

I believe that Setswana and other African folklore are important to the contemporary. Though non-male authority and influence can be more easily identified on the ‘sidelines’ or in the ‘peripheries’ and adjacent sub-realities, these are the spaces and practices I believe to have the potential to remould the metanarrative, because, culturally, non-males *are* the narrators and community-makers. Through *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*, I aim to take on this small privilege that I am culturally afforded and narrate a reality parallel to Botswana’s whose women’s movement not only gains massive traction as opposed to losing it but is also who curates and systematizes the nation's guiding principles.

PROPHECIES AND DECLARATIONS

The following sections will dissect and explain *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*'s full title as well as the significance of the naming and titling throughout this body of work.

*Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi: MmaMolao o le segetse metsi. O le buletse phatlha.
Ka leina la Mmalegodimo le mowa wa boitshepo. A e nne jalo.*

Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi's full title supports the layered and interdependent themes that the work explores. It tells of a matriarch who arrives to part waters so as to allow her people passage (to a 'promised land'). The statement is then blessed in the name of the heavenly mother and the 'holy spirit. The title mirrors the style of a prophetic prayer or declaration- in line with the several declarations, true, false and imagined that have contributed to the 'national statement' that now particularizes Botswana.

Setswana does not have gendered pronouns, 'o' refers to everyone. 'Mma' and 'Rra', however, are gendered, and are considered respectful terms. 'Mma-' can be used as a prefix that feminizes what precedes it whilst 'Rra' is its antithesis (makes masculine). 'Molao' is the law or any rule/structure that is understood to govern a society. Therefore, with the introduction of the prefix 'Mma-', '*MmaMolao*' becomes a feminization of the law or judicial system. "*O le segetse metsi. O le buletse phatlha*" references a Judeo-Christian tale that unfolds in Exodus 14. Moses, with instruction from God, leads a group from slavery. They are pursued, and as they flee, they find themselves caught between a mountain range, their coming oppressors and, the Red Sea. An angel as a cloud pillar blocks the pursuit; Moses parts the sea and clears a path for them to pass through. Upon their safe arrival on the other side, Moses closes the path again, drowning everyone that was in pursuit. The end of the story goes that even though the newly free people had witnessed this miracle, they did not trust the God that had sent Moses to deliver them to the promised lands. For their lack of faith, they were sent to wander through the desert for forty years until the generation died. This biblical story is often told in tandem with that of an unnamed woman- Lot's wife, who in Genesis 19:26 was turned, as per a previous warning, into a pillar of salt for looking back at the destruction of Sodom after God had granted them circumstance for escape. This is firstly to emphasize the extent to which Botswana have adopted and conventionalized Christianity- particularly Anglican and Catholic sects. And secondly, to draw on the style and nature of these stories- which are considered cautionary tales for those that endeavour to free themselves from the oppression of a 'nation' that is violent and does not serve or acknowledge them sufficiently, such so that they determine to build or find another. This is not far from how I imagine or 'make a fable of' the decolonial project.

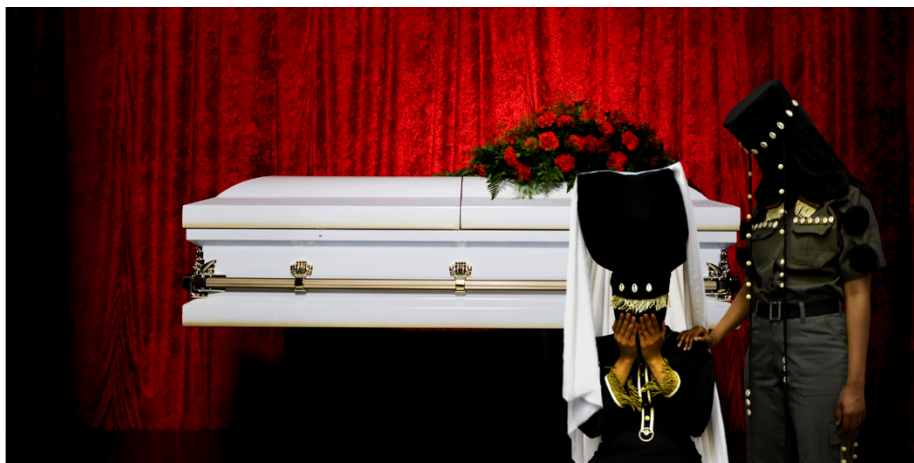
Phatlha is a space, although, it can also mean 'opportunity'. With regards to the country's climate, water and rain are national symbols of wealth and prosperity, of good fortune in general. The symbolic parting of the waters assigns *MmaMolao* a messianic role in the work while indicating through metaphor that the signs, symbols and stories that make up the national narrative of wealth, unity and prosperity need to be parted (i.e examined, deconstructed and readjusted) in order to make way for safe passage towards a 'new nation'.

"*Ka leina la Mmalegodimo le mowa wa boitshepo. A e nne jalo.*" (In the name of the heavenly mother and the holy spirit (spirit of faith). Amen/ let it be so) is a slight alteration to the known ending of a Catholic prayer; 'In the name of the father, the son and the holy spirit,

Amen'. This is to shift the object of faith, belief and the 'signifier of emancipation' away from masculine representation.



Gatwe e rile: News of the Third Coming. Digital photomontage. 2019



Lefoko la Moswi ga le Tlholwe. La bo le fela . Digital photomontage. 2021

in *Gatwe e rile: News of the Third Coming* (It was said/ Once upon a time) is the name of the first piece I made towards this body of work. The piece is set on the surface of the Gaborone dam and depicts a fish and two identical figures looking up after being disturbed in their discussion (by the viewer's presence). In folklore, fish are wise and oracle-like creatures, the title is uttered by the fish and received by the two figures and the audience/onlooker. This piece makes reference to Supersymmetry¹⁰ in the duplicated figure and through the reflections on the surface of the water. In the way that I envisioned it, this moment and statement represents the meeting of 'twin' realities¹¹, the two intertwine and events that occur during this enmeshment are represented throughout the body of work. 'Gatwe e rile' is how Setswana folktales begin and can be considered "a verbal contract between the narrator and the audience. We (the audience), prepare ourselves for the performance and are ready to delve into our selected roles of co-creators of a performance" (Mmila, 2012: 240). The work acknowledges that it does not and cannot exist without the multiple audiences that influence the story and bear witness to its telling.

Lefoko la Moswi ga le Tlholwe. La bo le fela. (The words/ the will of the deceased shall not be transgressed. And that is how it ends) is the name of the last and closing piece of this body of work. Though not explicitly said, *Lefoko la Moswi ga le Tlholwe* implies that *Ba Setlhopo*'s leader has died. The title declares that *MmaMolao*'s words will not be corrupted in future or degenerated their 'absence'. This is said well-aware of the fact that *MmaMolao* is not present and makes no statements throughout the body of work. Rather, the premise of *MmaMolao*'s leadership together with their objectives are exhibited through those that support their headship. This is to create the implication that *Ba Setlhopo* and *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*'s identity and cause for action are not contingent on a leader, and in that way the 'movement' is able to 'live on' after death. The story begins and ends without *MmaMolao*, suggesting that the power and influence experienced by *Ba Setlhopo* and the imagined nation is in actuality, their own. 'La bo le fela' is the 'The End' of Setswana folktales and is used at the story-tellers discretion. 'And then it becomes finished' is a more accurate translation of the phrase. As many stories in Setswana folklore are intertwined, adapted from one other and lengthened to include several stories in one, 'la bo le fela' closes a storytelling session but doesn't necessarily close the story being told or signify the discontinuation of the character's lives. *Lefoko la Moswi ga le Tlholwe. La bo le fela* represents the closing of this storytelling session.

¹⁰ A theory in particle physics. "Supersymmetry is an idea that history repeats itself to solve similar problems. For every particle, there is a superpartner whose spin differs by 1/2. By doubling the number of particles again, there is similar cancellation between the process with ordinary particles only and another process with their superpartners" (Introduction to Supersymmetry, 2021). Basically, that each particle has a 'twin' or 'superpartner'.

¹¹ There is no evidence that supersymmetry exists, but if it did the superpartners are heavier particles that could exist anywhere and at any point in time. "Superpartners may actually be everywhere without us noticing" (Introduction to Supersymmetry, 2021).

LEINA LEBE SEROMO

Leina lebe seromo is a well-known Tswana idiom that reflects the importance that Batswana place on names and naming- it literally means that a bad name is a bad omen. According to the idiom names are prophetic but in addition to determining the destiny of what has been named, they can simultaneously describe the circumstances around, history, lineage and attitude towards the named.

Botswana is considered an African nation that has ‘made a name for itself’ in comparison to other countries on the continent¹² (it is commonly referred to as Africa’s democracy poster child). As a Motswana who was raised in Botswana but educated in South Africa, I have, over the years become more aware of ‘outside’ perceptions of the country and of Batswana. I have considered the name of the country, how ‘powerful things’ within it have been named, and I have found that they are largely shaped by a history of colonialism and patriarchy. The country is referred to as ‘the land/country of the Tswana people’, ‘Botswana¹³’ or ‘Bechuanaland¹⁴’. There is no record of name or nation before this. ‘Botswana’ presents the country as a mono-ethnic state and homogenizes ethnically and culturally diverse people¹⁵. This erasure of identity has been protested numerous since independence but remains largely unaddressed at a national level. This leads one to the reasonable assumption that the country has never ‘named’ itself, it instead took on names. And, as Mmila aptly puts it, “external definitions are not only limiting, but they also distort and misname for they only serve those who name” (Mmila, 2012: 242). In this way, it can be said that the ‘character’ or destiny of the land, country or nation- is not self-determined, the identity of the country is tied to the ordinance of coloniality.

Positions of power and leadership in Botswana have primarily been held by men, which is true for both contemporary and traditional spaces and frameworks. Chieftaincy existed in Botswana before the intrusion of colonialism, but it was only in 2003 that Kgosi Mosadi Seboko was installed as the country’s first female paramount chief. In 2019, it was reported that only 5% of political positions in the country were held by women (Apiko, 2019). *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* imagines a rendition of Botswana where the extreme opposite of this inequality is true. *Bosadi* is imagined as a nation of people, not a country, that ‘makes a name for itself’ in the body of work. Literally, by a change of name but also through a change in systems of governance, belief systems, knowledge systems and cultural norms in favour of a vague structure that is not completely separate from the reality of patriarchy, capitalism, technology or colonialism etc. but is not in any way dominated by it.

Bo Mmaruri is adapted from the Setswana word; ‘boammaaruri’, which means ‘absolute truth/ absolutely true’. In the context of this body of work, ‘Bo’ is ‘of’ and emphasis is placed

¹² The country is nick-named ‘The Gem of Africa’.

¹³ The name given to the country after its independence in 1966.

¹⁴ The Bechuanaland Protectorate was established in 1885 by British colonizers in Southern Africa. (That ‘Botswana’ is the same as Bechuanaland is a common misconception. Bechuanaland was divided into north and south and administered by the Cape Colony and British Crown Colony respectively. The country was split along in the Molopo River in 1885 and the southern divide, British Bechuanaland, now forms a part of South Africa. The northern divide became the Bechuanaland Protectorate which then became modern Botswana. Thus, there are Batswana who still consider themselves South African and vice versa.

¹⁵ There are twelve prominent ethnic groups in Botswana, namely: Batswapong, Babirwa, Bakgalagadi, Batswana, Bakalanga, Basarwa, Bayei, Hambukushu, Basubiya, Banoka, Bahurutshe and Baherero

on the ‘-mma’ before ‘ruri’ (which on its own means ‘truly’). This to imply that a ‘higher’ truth/reality is in a ‘feminist’ truth and not the more masculine truth (reality) we have come to know. “Self-naming resonates with the concept of self-representation and is tied to the need for context and specificity, ideas that are central to black and African feminism... Lorde further argues that ‘the fear that we cannot grow beyond whatever distortions we may find within ourselves keeps us docile and loyal and obedient, externally defined, and leads us to accept many facets of our oppression’ (Mmila, 2012: 242). *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* recognizes self-naming and self-definition as “the first step towards the empowerment of those who stand outside the domains of power” (Mmila, 2012: 242). In this work, the name of the entire body, the characters and the names of each work, have all been carefully considered. I think of the process of having named each component of this work as a deliberate act and as an “artwork” in itself- giving names in this way is intentional and conceptual.

TRANSPOSITION OF MULTIMODAL TEXT AND ORALITY

The narrative that informs and sustains Botswana's identity relies on a support system of countless transmedia texts¹⁶. *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* aims to complexify several of these texts by working similarly- across mediums and modes of text. This section will consider some of the key aspects that bind the national narrative as they can be seen through cultural expressions and popular culture. These will be looked at alongside semi-factual and fictional works of literature that have gained notability for being representations of Botswana as a nation and of Batswana as a people.

¹⁶ "Transmedia: a narrative that extends beyond multiple media forms that also plays to the strength those forms; may or may not be interactive" (Teach Thought, 2021). 'Transmedia texts' as the oral, written or visual material that inform the transmedia narrative.

FACT, FICTION AND FOLKLORE

Folklore (as well as other aspects considered in my work) is a prominent feature in contemporary artworks by artists from Africa such as Wangechi Mutu¹⁷ and Sekai Machache¹⁸. From Botswana specifically, is Meleko Mogosi and Thebe Phetogo who also work in this way. Both painters show a similar concern with the examination of Setswana culture, Botswana's history and identity formation (personal and national) through the translation and recontextualization of national narratives and corresponding symbols. In this work, I take particular interest in both artists' practices because they actively consider Botswana's narrative in ways that are cognisant of folklore, storytelling, neighbouring narratives and the continent's history.

Mogosi's *Comrades*¹⁹ magnified the relationship between communism and Southern African liberation movements. "Mokgosi asks how the idea of democracy, articulated during the struggle, has shaped and continues to shape the current state of citizens' experience and reciprocation of democracy" (Stevenson, 2019). This is explored through a series of figurative paintings that were exhibited alongside text-based paintings in Setswana which were presented in the space without translation. The texts for those that are able to read the language are folktales and short stories that, because of their presence change the reading of the figurative paintings that they have been partnered with. The works question how historical texts or imagery have been recorded and they also question the effects that these methods have had on how the past is understood at present. Jason Farago, in his supporting essay, says; "To revalorise the language takes more than just writing it...It has to be reconstituted into a new and more efficacious narrative structure, routed through the past and the terms that constructed it" (Farago, 2016: 9).



Meleko Mokgosi. From *Comrades*. Paintings on canvas. 2016.

¹⁷ <https://www.economist.com/books-and-arts/2021/05/07/wangechi-mutus-alternative-mythologies>

¹⁸ <https://www.list.co.uk/article/114693-sekai-machache-as-artists-we-have-the-space-to-consciously-create-new-narratives-that-can-catalyse-a-process-of-healing/>

¹⁹ <https://www.stevenson.info/exhibition/36>



Meleko Mokgosi. From *Comrades*. Paintings on canvas. 2016.

On the other hand, Thebe Phetogo’s unpublished Master of Fine Art thesis and body of work, *Bogasatswana: Rebuilding the Boat While Sailing*, imagines postcolonial Botswana both as a fictional place and as a boat already on its course through time. The work ‘builds’, through painting, an adjacent world with information from the reality it references (only what already constituted the ‘boat’ is used to ‘rebuild’ it mid-motion). Symbols and images are complexly translated through colour and geography imaging systems into Phetogo’s constructed realm. Using the experience of blackness and the national mythology as motivation, *Bogasatswana: Rebuilding the boat while sailing* becomes the site upon which the narratives and experiences of the ‘blackbodies’ that inhabit this realm unfolds- experiences which, are inextricably linked to the artist’s experiences as a geographically removed, Black Motswana man.

In this comparison, Mokgosi uses Setswana folklore to complicate a perception of history and contemporaneity while Phetogo uses it to create a space in which to theorize and visualize a world-view for “both creator and audience” (Phetogo, 2019).



Thebe Phetogo. *How to Biforate a National Symbol*. MFA Exhibition. 2019



Thebe Phetogo. *Movable and Mutable narratives* (Installation image). MFA Exhibition. 2019

With the understanding that, as it pertains to Botswana and other countries alike; fact, fiction and folklore are heavily intertwined with representations of history and identity. *Bo Mmaruri* explores alternative ways to cement the more transient aspects of Setswana culture and the identity of the Republic within a contemporary art practice that is cognisant of everyday technology²⁰. In an effort to further understand the value of orality as a tool of cultural preservation, *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* concerns itself primarily with the subjacent aspects of the national myth and, of folklore as they arise across seemingly disparate aspects of Tswana life.

In the way that I have come to understand this, there exist innumerable ‘texts/scripts’ that form integral parts, which cannot be separated from the entire experience of Botswana and the performance of ‘being’ a Botswana. Botswana, especially those born before independence, still rely heavily on newspapers, radio and televised news for national updates and information. Writers, journalists and newspapers have and still play a large role in the perpetuation of the national mythology. It became interesting for me to note then, that several of the texts that have ultimately shaped the ‘character’ of the country are skewed to match, sensationalize and romanticize the dominant narrative. The examples I will use in the following segments were chosen for their writer’s arguable distance from the space and people they describe, their national celebration and international acclaim.

The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency’ is Alexander McCall Smith’s set of twenty novels that went on to become a movie and a television series in 2009. McCall Smith and the books are now somewhat synonymous with Botswana even though the author is not a Botswana and only spent a few years in the country in the late 90s. And although the bestsellers were set in Ramotswa (a neighbouring village) and included spoken Setswana, the series was filmed in the capital city and the protagonist was played by American singer/actress Jill Scott.

Guy Hibbert’s film *‘A United Kingdom’* (2016) frames Sir Seretse Khama and Ruth Williams as the pioneering couple that led the country to the supposed interracial and ‘colour-blind’ unity it celebrates to this day. This section of the national mythology undermines and glosses over the reality of British colonial presence in Botswana. Analyses of race relations are often omitted from the discourse of this era but are necessary to take into consideration when looking at Botswana’s post-colonial landscape. These are recognized ‘translations’ of the

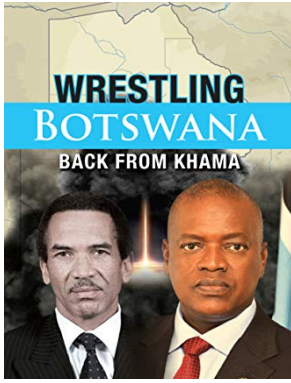
²⁰ Expressed as ‘a capability given by the practical application of knowledge’ (Merriam-Webster, 2021)

national narrative that in different ways, have facilitated the acceptance of the myth by ‘playing along’. They have been consumed as credible representations of Botswana’s ‘peaceful’ history, its successful transition from protectorate to an independent state, gender and race relations, politics and feminism, traditional and moral philosophies, cultural life and occupations etc.

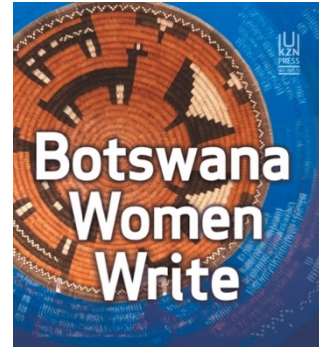
For the purpose of this project, I sought out contemporary and somewhat comprehensive (compilations, anthologies etc) written accounts from and of the country that would assist in guiding the work. *Wrestling Botswana Back From Khama* and *Botswana Women Write* are two recently published books that reflect or support some of my sentiments and are the primary influence for the aesthetic of the catalogue that is attached to this body of work. Borrowed aspects from both covers have been intertwined in a style that mirrors the accompanying body of work. This was done to immediately place (visually and theoretically) the work in the same space that has been circumscribed to the aforementioned texts- one that can present a national narrative on behalf of Botswana.



Bo Maruri: Bosadi (Mma Molao le Ba Setlhopo). Catalogue cover. Digital photomontage. 2021



Wrestling Botswana Back From Khama.
Reverend Bishop Enole Ditsheko. 2019



Botswana Back Women Write. Maitseo M. M. Bolaane, Mary S. Lederer, Leloba S. Molema and Connie Rapoo. 2019

Wrestling Botswana Back From Khama by Rev. Bishop Enole Ditsheko was published in 2019 and reflects on the history of democratic Botswana from the perspective of a ‘man of the church’, “the voice of a Moruti²¹ is always there” (Morton, 2019). The book is a call to action for Botswana citizens, encouraging a patriotic stance in the reader and a nostalgic feeling towards ‘fatshe leno la rona’ (this land of ours). *Wrestling Botswana Back From Khama* details the disreputable machinations and ensuing atmosphere of Sir Seretse Khama’s presidency and presents this largely experiential information through an intriguing intersection of storytelling, references to archival information (newspaper articles), gossip/rumour and the Reverend’s own experiences. Being both an accomplished scholar and a bishop who fulfils the expectations of respectability within the community, Rev. Ditsheko’s opinion is therefore noteworthy as an example of the privileges afforded to men and clergymen in terms of the weight that certain narratives carry. *Wrestling Botswana Back from Khama* is in many ways a story. Though it is mainly a political story, it is presented biblically. This is confirmed by an article published by *The Patriot* newspaper which states that the book is based on a story from Genesis 32: 22-33 (‘Ditsheko’s book launched’, 2019), in which Jacob wrestles a man all night and overpowers him and in the morning, it turns out that the man had been God. In *Wrestling Botswana Back from Khama* the country is placed inside the triangle of three men; Rev. Bishop Enole Ditsheko is framed as *the man of god/ the prophet*, Sir Seretse Khama as *the sinner/betrayer* and Mokgweetsi Masisi as *the saviour/messiah* and The Republic, at their mercy, is analysed in this way.

“In contrast, *Botswana Women Write* is edited by Maitseo M. M. Bolaane, Mary S. Lederer, Leloba S. Molema and Connie Rapoo who are all well-established, nationally and internationally acclaimed academics in their respective fields. The anthology includes writings from prominent figures such as Bessie Head, Unity Dow, Wame Molefhe, Tjawangwa Dema, B. K. Knight, Lilian Ngwenya Khupe, Mabel Kebotsamang and Athaliah Molokomme.

This anthology is notable for a nation that has yet to propagate an overtly Black feminist movement. The fact that the first comprehensive anthology to be produced by and about Botswana Women was published outside of the country, in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa and over fifty years after the country accomplished independence, can be seen as reflective of larger cultural and institutional issues that fail to preserve the matrilineal credos which edify Botswana’s cultural identity- the inclusion of more expressive, sublime pieces of writing in way of short stories, extracts from novels, traditional and neoteric poems which provide a

²¹ ‘Teacher’ but in the way of a preacher, pastor, reverend etc

hearty exemplification of the connotations of *bosadi* (womanhood) as experienced and inured by Batswana women. This is particularly the case with the motions and *parti pris* of female education in a ‘new nation’ (independent Botswana), love, marriage, child-bearing, widowhood and the metaphysical, as well as the tension between colonial and customary laws and the effect of said experiences on the current reappraisal of womanhood. Considering that a vast majority of readily available writing and research on and of Batswana women has largely been concerning gender-based violence and the still prevalent HI-Virus, *Botswana Women Write* challenges these quantitative analyses by making prominent the subtleties behind and beyond measurable data. To mention this is not to discount the importance of that kind of research. Rather, it is to use this juncture to mention that more holistic ways of interpreting the lived experiences and experiential environments that Batswana women inhabit exist. The inclusion of legal reform documents in the publication is a testament to the democratic and social advancements afforded to the country solely through the efforts of the early women’s movement—unambiguously through the work of non-profit and non-governmental entities such as *Emang Basadi* which can be said to have established what we now understand to be the quotidian of gender-equity pedagogy and proselytization in the context of Botswana.

To archive in this apparent and intentional way is not only to acknowledge the harm of a colonial and male-centered legacy, through both act and omission but it is also to purposefully create circumstances that allow for remedy and resolution through re-narration and repositioning of the historical vantage point. This is crucial for Botswana whose traditional, patriarchally inclined culture has created an environment that systematically quietens and erases women’s voices while taking precedence over their narratives and experiences. It is integral to take note of this to acknowledge the strides the country has taken as far as gender reform and transformation is concerned, which is not overtly evident with regards to this anthology and its titling. It however, does not dismiss the discrete and distinct experiences of cis-gendered Batswana women and so, this anthology remains invaluable in that regard.” (Makgekgenene, 2021)

Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi aims to create a coextensive relationship with these texts by similarly incorporating the use of multiple texts to support a predestined, broad-ranging narrative. Like *Botswana Women Write*, *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* centres the narratives of non-male Batswana as they are a demographic that has not been duly represented. *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* adopts the righteous and ecclesiastical tone of *Wrestling Botswana Back from Khama*. Speaking in the present tense, *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* also references a biblical story and adjusts it to be linked to the fate of a nation. Where *Wrestling Botswana Back from Khama* draws on a male-dominated national narrative for support, *Botswana Women Write* depends on the more sublime narratives. *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* sought to engage with the subliminal narratives that exist within and as a result of the dominant narrative by capsizing the order of power so that the dominant narrative is that of women. This is reflected in the storyline, imagery, text, naming and making of the work. I intentionally align *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*’s visual language to visual vocabularies familiar to Batswana to problematize popular assumptions in order to encourage critical conversation and an imaginative perception of a shared narrative and reality.

BAITSHIRELETSI AND TLHOPA BA SETLHOPO AS PERFORMANCE AND INFORMAL RESEARCH

In response to the lack of information accessible to women in Botswana and as an integral part of this project, *Baitshireletsi* was arranged as an artistic intervention toward empowerment for Botswana women as well as a social experiment and informal research.

Baitshireletsi ('those that protect themselves') form part of *Setlhopo sa Balekane* and first appeared in Gaborone in July 2019. The performance/intervention featured a group of three or more who moved through public spaces in Gaborone costumed and giving out secret 'Didiriswa'²² ('tools') to women throughout August 2019 while wielding axes that spoke to the subversion of a popular Setswana idiom; "Monna ke selepe, o a adimisana" ("a man is like an axe, he is to be lent (to one's neighbour) liberally"). I consider this as being an example of how the re-telling of such sayings without alteration for fear of diluting or corrupting the culture perpetuates a traditionalism that can be seen as toxic because it has not 'changed with the times' and has not been reconsidered despite the clear consequences that are seen in the high rates of assault, 'passion killings', rape, gender-based violence and discrimination in Botswana. Another example is "'Monna thotse o a nama' (A man has to spread just like a pumpkin plant), identified by Mmila as one of the proverbs that "perpetuates the man's dominant position in relation to his wife, authorising his promiscuity"(Mmila, 2012: 237) as well as encouraging a submissive position in regards to non-male bodily autonomy.

Botswana are considered a fairly conservative people and as a result, sex is a taboo topic. Naivety is generally expected from women- as it is seen as a sign of sexual purity and as the idiom illustrates; the same behaviour is not expected of men. As the 'heads', men are expected to know and lead all, while women generally take on a more passive and submissive role. Ultimately, even the act of attaining knowledge, especially about sex and sexual health, becomes daunting as it is seen as cultural defiance- for it would suggest that the men do not know and that the women dare to know. And so, *Baitshireletsi* seeks to encourage a 'focused militancy' amongst Botswana women with regards to their physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing. The intervention and its costume point to the interconnectedness of Southern African countries by borrowing its aesthetic from Zimbabwe's all-female Anti-Poaching Unit, *Akashinga* (The brave ones). Adorned in a style similar to the patterns Botswana women are known to decorate their traditional homes and furniture with, the form and carved decoration of the axes and their use as 'weapons', in my mind, is a suggestion to Botswana women not only to subvert the ideas that the culture teaches but also to use them as tools to aid the progression of our consciousness and our wellbeing. This project considers contemporary constructions of both femininity and masculinity in Botswana, with an emphasis on how they feed into gender-based discrimination/violence, disdain for LGBTQIA+ concerns, notions of sexuality and morality/respectability as well as access to comprehensive sex education.

The performative project responded to these issues and created a sub-reality as *ba Baitshireletsi* moved through space. The group of performers seemed to evoke in the public, sensitive memories of Lt. General Seretse Khama Ian Khama's time in office²³. The now ex-

²² Sealed envelopes that contained information about the project, information on sexual and reproductive resources and clinics available to Botswana women as well as a substantial amount of condoms, all donated to the project by the Ministry of Health.

²³ Ian Khama was President of the Republic between April 2008- April 2018.

military man served two terms as the President of Botswana, and in his time, military presence, violence and censorship were experienced in the country for the first time since independence. I recall a conversation that began as the unit moved through the space behind Main Mall Police Station; “Ba ga se ba SKI?(Seretse Khama Ian)” (*Are they not (agents) belonging to SKI?*) “Nyaya, ba ke basadi, hela ke ipotsa gore kgang ya bone ke eng.” (“No, you can see these ones are women, I’m just wondering what their agenda is.”).

The group was instructed not to speak to anyone at any point. This was in an attempt to limit any possible transfer of knowledge of the activity amongst the unit to the women that the envelopes were shared with. In this way, the work used quietness and ambiguity to encourage a perception of the work that led the viewer to participate in the work as they (unwittingly) spoke the beginnings of contemporary myths/ urban stories amongst themselves as the moment/performance passed. The overheard conversations and visible reactions became important to how I would go on to shape the rest of the work. Notable reactions were those of the men, who witnessed their exclusion from the exercise and tried to attain envelopes. The women who watched their rejection had mixed reactions to the selective giving- some clutched their envelopes tighter and expressed pleasure in receiving the secret package, while others refused to receive them or allowed men to peek inside their envelopes. Interestingly, most older women took offence to the contents of the envelopes, seemingly outraged at receiving such information or, with receiving contraceptives at random and in public. These observations made clear to me, my own interest in troubling the expected or uncontested in the minds and everyday lives of those who move throughout the capital city. I was drawn to the passing comments and used questions raised and statements made to draw more questions, conversations and assumptions out of the viewers as I began to consider *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* as a body of work that could potentially make micro changes to the nature of Botswana’s oral culture by housing itself within it.

Tlhopa Ba Setlhopo (‘Choose (vote for) the chosen (selected)’) is a selection of *Ba Setlhopo*’s campaign posters that deliberately and almost directly mimic those of the Botswana Democratic Party. Over the years, the BDP has developed a distinctive visual language that mainly relies on the colours red, white and black, the silhouette of a car jack and the party motto- “*tsholetsa domkrag/a e jeke*” (“raise the democrat(ic)/let(may) it be lifted”). The aesthetic of the series and the act of abruptly inserting them in real spaces, by direct route, debates, not just the primacy of the BDP, but more crucially, Botswana’s enduring civic proclivities, and their motivations. This, while again rousing the spontaneous creation of ‘urban myth’ in public spaces to add to the archive of immaterial²⁴ stories that are known to Botswana.

²⁴ Spiritual rather than physical, unwritten.



Baitshireletsi (Performance stills).
Performance and costume. 2019.





*Tlhopa Ba Sethopo (Performance/installation stills).
Digital photomonatges. 2020.*





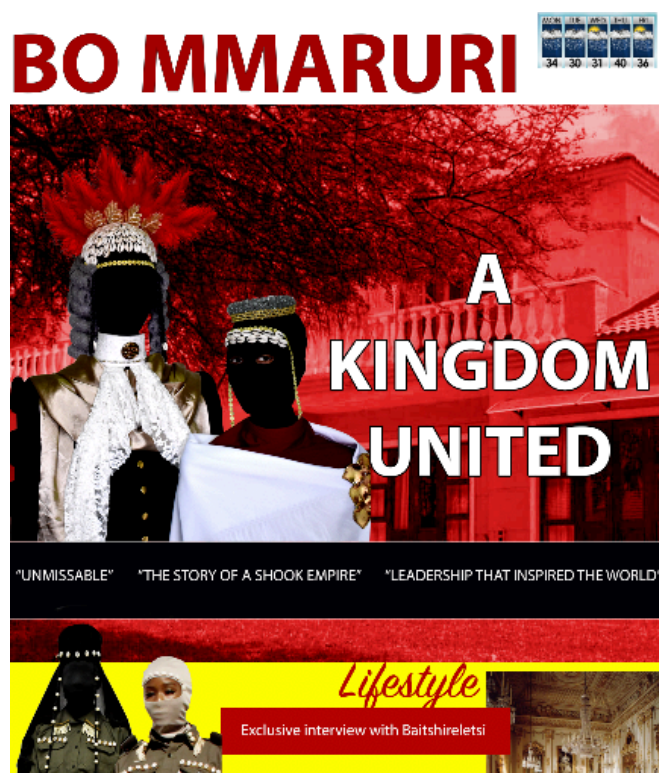
*Thopa Ba Sethopo (Performance/installation stills).
Digital photomontages. 2020.*



TRANSPOSING FOLKTALES

In *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*, I aim to use material that already exist within the traditional parameters of Setswana oral and folklore culture, alongside facets of contemporary art practices from Africa in order to encourage an examination and critique of the culture itself as well the notions that support the way that it functions. *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* exists in loose but also, in interdependent groupings of works that broadly tell of the transformation of a nation through the arrival of, and transfer of power to *Ba Setlhopo*- who, in their mission deepen and transform the atmosphere of several politically charged sites in and around Gaborone- the national monument, the Labour and High Courts and areas in both the old and new central business districts. Operating through a considered network of signs and symbols, *Bo Mmaruri* ‘transposes’ folklore and oral culture across a set of chosen mediums, using methods similar to those that characterize the working infrastructure of orality in Botswana.

In this section, I will discuss how I incorporate multimodal transpositions of texts²⁵ and orality into the body of work, through selected pieces, with the intention of contributing to the transformation and visual extension of oral culture in Botswana



Masa. Digital photomontage. 2020

Masa ('daybreak' or 'new dawn') is presented in the body of work as the first newspaper cover after the unseen inauguration of *Ba Setlhopo*. *Masa* plays on the format of one of the country's oldest and most popular newspapers- *Mmegi*. *Mmegi* is generally seen as less

²⁵ That are based on a story resultant from or influenced by orality in Botswana and pertain to the national narrative.

‘formal’ than the likes of *The Guardian* but more credible than *The Voice*, for example, which is seen as a sensationalist publication. Straddling this in-between space allows for *Mmegi* to be both an archival, factual document but still save room to incorporate aspects of tabloid culture—which is more reflective of public opinion and experience. Simon Seisa (pseudonym Selefu) has been the political cartoonist for *Mmegi* since the 80s and his works have continuously archived and visualized the community’s perspective on politics and other social issues. For me, Selefu’s works offered an alternative access point to national discussions and causes for concern before I was able to develop reasonable knowledge and actual understanding of certain issues. While crafting a visual language for *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*, I refer to Seisa’s works, often drawing on their style of composition and their folklore-like way of storytelling in order to encourage a sense of familiarity for Batswana in a way that creates images that can be recognizable as ‘works of social critique’.



Far left: *Mmegi* Newspaper. 2019
Above: *A United Kingdom*’s poster. 2016

Right column: Examples of Simon Seisa’s work in *Mmegi*

The headlining image in *Masa* mirrors *A United Kingdom*’s poster design, placing *MmaMolao le Mokapelo* in front of the statehouse which, because of its high walls and barely seen interior harbours its own myths and superstitions. Botswana is not humid and mist in the southern region of the country is unusual. In Setswana ‘mowa’ means ‘air’ but also refers to the energy or spirit that something or someone carries. In this work, I attempt to illustrate the changes ‘*tse di bonagalang mo moweng*’ (that can be ‘seen’²⁶ in the ‘air’) by changing the colour of the air and sky, making it representative of what is ‘in’ it- this is a device carried

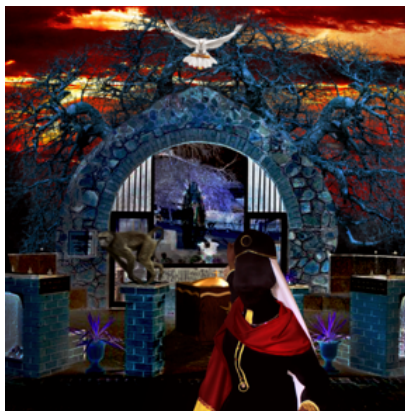
²⁶ Felt in the sixth sense

through several images in this project. Air heavy in water says that the spirit in or of it is fluid and wealthy in what it has to offer. There are scenes in the untouched ‘air’ that progressively become saturated in *Ba Setlhopo*’s red as their presence permeates the city²⁷. Blue tints that can be seen in *Noga ga e latelwe mosimeng* (a snake is not to be followed to its hole) and ‘*O tletseng grasia. Rapelele baleofi*’ (the one who is full of grace, pray for the sinners) suggests ‘spiritual turning points’ and black ‘air’²⁸ which, allude to the void that *Ba Setlhopo* emerge from. I say ‘void’ here in the sense of a space that is not valid and in reality does not have (legal) consequences. It is also perceived as a vacuum and seen as hollow or empty because it is black.

In *Masa*, for example, I draw on a fragment of the national mythology that has to do with the Gaborone Dam. The dam is known for having overflowed during the rainy season of 1956-1966, which, for many, served as an affirmation of the perceived ‘miracle’ of independence in 1966. The weather forecast in the top right-hand corner of *Masa* predicts only rainy weather for the week following the imagined ‘instating’ of *Ba Setlhopo*, foreshadowing the success of their leadership.



Noga ga e latelwe mosimeng. Digital photomontage. 2019



O o tletseng grasia. rapelele baleofi. Digital photomontage. 2019



Masa (detail). Digital photomontage. 2020

²⁷ See *Le tšhepa mang go le bolelela nnete: The Third Address* and *Le bipa dimpa ka mabele*.

²⁸ See *Baitshireletsi I,II* or *Returning Okavango Blue I,II*.



Gatwe e rile: News of the Third Coming. Digital photomontage. 2020



Tladi e iteile gararo. Digital photomontage. 2021



Ineeleng:Le batlang nokeng. Digital photomontage. 2019



Botswana's coat of arms

In the instance of several works such as *Gatwe e rile: News of the Third Coming* and *Tladi e iteile gararo* (Lighting struck thrice) for example, the presence of clouds indicates imminent rain. The title of *Where Rainclouds Gather* by Bessie Head who, despite being South African, is known as 'Botswana's most influential writer' (Good Reads, 2021) also played a part in the use of clouds and mist. *Where Rainclouds Gather* is a story set in a rural agricultural village in Botswana. For most of the year, the village (*Golema Mmidi*) is inhabited mainly by women, known to openly welcome refugees and is said to be a place where 'clouds always gather but rain doesn't fall'. Despite this, the community thrives on the faith that one day, rain shall fall. Maru a pula (clouds of rain) are a symbol of faith or hope in this way and are treated as such throughout *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*.

While English idioms such as ‘to have a cloud hanging over one’s head’ or ‘a cloud on the horizon’ convey despair, worry, despondence and incessant or approaching unpleasantness, this is not at all the case in Setswana idioms, proverbs or stories. Dark clouds, rough waters, storms and floods still speak of and symbolise more positive sentiments than drought or any lack of water. *Ineeleng: Le batlang nokeng?* (Surrender/ give yourselves over: What do you want by the water’) is adapted from the idiom; ‘Phokobje o batlang nokeng o re gaonwe’ which asks the Jackal what they are doing by the water, since they say they don’t drink (water). This idiom warns one to be wary of those with ulterior motives or covert intentions. In *Ineeleng:Le batlang nokeng?* the hare and the zebra collectively represent *Phokobje*. The hare is placed in *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*’s narrative in the traditional role of the trickster, and is adjoined to the Zebra who is representative of Botswana’s identity (as the animal that features on the coat of arms). They together represent the mischievous and fable-like nature of the national narrative. The story finds the pair, who ventured out into the water to place themselves on a pedestal, stranded in the middle of this large expanse of man-made, contained (so somewhat false) water²⁹. And because their ship is now ablaze, they are forced to surrender (to Ba Setlhopo).

Setswana storytelling uses animals to represent many different kinds of tropes in order to impart ‘life lessons’ and demarcate to their recipients, the range of socially acceptable behaviour and responses to certain situations (Ngapo, 1995). In *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*, I have used animals and animal-like figures in several ways. In some instances, where animals are situated but unchanged, this is to express an idea (e.g. A fish as an oracle or cows as representative of wealth in Botswana. I have used morphed animals in the work as a way to discuss an ideology or mythology that is housed and expressed through people (as with the hare and the zebra). In the case of a morphed human, this is representational of the effects of certain ideas *on* a human being, the two figures in *Gatwe e rile: News of the Third Coming* are an example of this. They are ‘painted’ blue³⁰ ‘by Botswana’ but are spiritually alienated³¹ from their (national) identity. Where I have portrayed masked/costumed figures, I understand this as the manifestation of radical imagination or thought through human presence and action, i.e. those who support, belong or form a part of *Ba Selthopo*.



Insults of Inconsequence:Ka tlhagoleta mooka ya re o gola wantlhaba. Digital photomontage. 2020

²⁹ In reference to ‘pula-prosperity’

³⁰ In reference to the blue that is characteristic of the country. The figures are modeled after myself but aimed to speak to Batswana who have the experience of a similar positionality.

³¹ Shown in the shape of their faces, which doubly references the inverted teardrop mask shape that is perceived as ‘African’ generally, though it is actually characteristic of Nigerian and other West African masks.



Kitso: Those in grass houses should not stoke fires’.
Digital photomontage. 2020



Above, left: *Ba Setlhopo’s Flag*. 2021
Above, right: *Ba Setlhopo’s Official Seal*. 2021

Both *Insults of Inconsequence* :*Ka tlhagolela mooka ya re o gola wa ntlhaba* (I raised the tree and it grew to prick me³²) and *Ineeleng: Le batlang nokeng?* depict a hare beside a zebra. Botswana’s coat of arms was not designed by Batswana, instead, the task was undertaken by Peter Fawcus and Sheila England³³. Central to the emblem is a shield supported by two zebras to symbolize wildlife as an important aspect of the economy. The use of the pair is to suggest some cunningness or trickery in terms of this national symbol and the traditions that began around the time of their inception. The figures maintain a human presence in their lower halves to say that, though it is our idea of nationhood and its symbolism that is under interrogation, these myths have been perpetuated by a series of people in positions of power. On the banner that runs over the lower half of the shield (*thebe*) is written ‘Pula!’ which became the national ‘motto’ as a result of the climate and later the name of the country’s currency for its’ cultural significance. A hundred *thebes* make a Pula, thus ‘Pula’ directly relates to wealth-monetary or otherwise. For a landlocked country, a call for rain is a call for national prosperity and a plea for heavenly blessings to fall upon the nation. The shape of the *thebe* on the coat of arms is not of Botswana or Batswana, it bears resemblance to the traditional Zulu shield and although this error has been pointed out before, it remains unchanged. *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi’s Seal* is a reimagination of the coat of arms and incorporates the correct shield shape, which is also alluded to in *Ba Setlhopo’s Flag* design. The use of animals in my work is to take advantage of their implied impartiality to the affairs of humans. Their perceived objectivity to the nuances of our existence serves to make what could potentially be their observation of the human condition satirical or absurdly tragic. While the presence of metaphoric animals is sophisticated in Setswana proverbs and stories, in conversation, it is more often than not, a harsh criticism to compare one to an animal. The

³² Similar to ‘biting the hand that feeds you’.

³³ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sir-peter-fawcus-bslk57qch0t>

common exception is when one is referred to by one's totem, which also carries presumptions about identity, class and behaviour. '*Kitso (Warning): Those in grass houses should not stoke fires*' is a proverb illustrated using only animals. In folklore, the baboon or monkey is often the character who is wiser than others perceive it to be but still 'doesn't know better' and this is often reflected in unconsidered actions that have to be rectified by others later. The cow here is representative of Batswana's social and economic investment in cattle- they represent social, cultural and monetary wealth. The proverb and the work allude to the care that must be taken when introducing or adopting something 'new' to what is considered a safe and homely space. Essentially, had one paid attention to the fact that they live in a hut with a thatched roof, they would through common sense see that fire is not desirable for the setting, much less sparking one as the home's inhabitant who will inevitably suffer from its destruction. In a sense, this is how I think about the 'character traits' that Botswana took on in the process of becoming an independent nation.



Nametsa taba: Modisa's Eucharist IV. Digital photomontage. 2020



Performance site on Kgale Hill overlooking Gaborone

Many of the stories I know and refer to in my work were told to me when I was very young by my grandmother mainly, while she cooked over the fire or on the gas stove in the house. Due to this association, how fire is represented in the stories she told and how it is spoken of biblically, I now understand fire as being threatening, destructive, cleansing and also, a transformative element. An example of this is *Modisa* standing on Kgale Hill in *Nametsa*

taba: Modisa's Eucharist IV, intentionally calling for flames to fall out from the sky whilst standing unscathed as they do. Here it is possible to see fire being summoned purposefully. The name of this series is based on the Setswana saying; '-go nametsa thaba' (to escalate an issue). '*Nametsa taba*' omits the *h* from 'thaba' and changes its meaning. The word now means 'issue' and to 'make it climb-' or 'become as big as-' a mountain'. This series emulates the ritual of a Christian eucharist or holy communion and illustrates *Modisa* (on behalf of *Ba Setlhopo*) raising a grievance to the highest point to be addressed through sanctified ritual.

Kgale Hill in the southeast of Gaborone stands at 1,287m and is the highest natural point in the city. The area around it (Kgale View) is owned by the Roman Catholic Church, and this ownership by the church has been contested by the community for many years. The hill gained much recognition as the set of *The No.1 Ladies Detective Agency* but is, more importantly, of spiritual significance to several indigenous churches. Certain parts of the hillock are considered 'holy land' and it is known as 'the sleeping giant' that overlooks the Gaborone Dam. This performance (*'Nametsa taba: Modisa's Eucharist'*) and the photomontages that followed were made with the intention of engaging with the 'sleeping' stories that could exist in this area through the people that clamour towards the hill on Saturday and Sunday mornings. In the capital, the view from the Three Dikgosi Monument, the Statehouse, the Labour and High Court, the Main Mall and the new Central Business District (seen from the inside of the iTowers³⁴, looking out over the city in *Insults of Inconsequence: Ka tlhagolela mooka ya re ogola wantlhaba*) are selected as politically loaded sites that, in their construction and use, suggest the presence of social, economic and representational inequalities.

³⁴ Built in 2015, the iTowers house government offices, a hotel and luxury apartments. They are the largest buildings in the city, and I see them and the development of the new CBD an unconsidered step towards turning Gaborone into a metropolis. I say this because, in my experience, it caters to foreign investors and wealthier demographics. The older CBD, Main Mall and African Mall, for example, still cater to everyday Batswana and various immigrant groups who commute using public transport and trade in these areas.

DESIGN, DRESS AND POWER

This section will discuss how myth can and has found opportunities for amplification through a dressed figure. It considers how the powerful ‘dress’ in Botswana and how women in Botswana have resisted circumscription in this sense, to discuss the significance of the dress design and costumed figures in *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*.

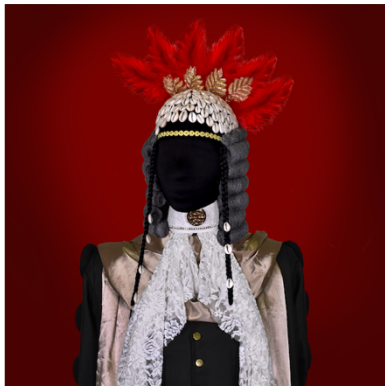
Batswana actively plays into the national myth in more ways than in just text and speech. Compromises were made on the national attire to appease the western gaze and the majority of Batswana readily adopted European dress as a symbol of education, affluence and civility. My interest in how dress and uniform became an integral myth-making tool and subsequently vital for its permanence was sparked by the experience of it and has been supported by several historical accounts regarding how the nation was formed and now operates. This can be seen in the example of Bathoen I (one of The Three Chiefs) who renewed and took advantage of the initial protectorate-ship myth in order to appeal to King Edward VII in 1947. This address was in order to ask that the country be kept as a protectorate as to avoid the incorporation of Botswana into the then ‘new South Africa’ which sought to amalgamate “the four South African provinces, Natal, Transvaal, Cape Colony and orange Free State with the Bechuanaland Protectorate, Basotholand and Swaziland”(Morton & Ramsay, 2018: 8);

Wearing the ceremonial dress of the Royal Horse Guards, and carrying a sword of such size that practically threatened to cause him to fall over, Bathoen addressed to the King on behalf of the Batswana people, assembled 25,000 strong for the occasion: We, the peoples of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, together with our Chiefs, express our gratification at Your Majesty’s presence in our country....Your great-grandmother, the noble Queen Victoria, whose memory is ever held in affectionate esteem by us. It was on that occasion that our fathers received the great benefit of the protection of the British Crown which we continue to enjoy in full.³⁵

Bathoen’s uniform, which Khama III had purchased in 1895 from a theatrical company in London, added to the occasion. Just as Bathoen I had added the rings to the inventory of gifts allegedly granted them by the Queen, now his grandson added military uniforms. After the formal ceremonies were over, Bathoen and Tshekedi had a chance to chat with their visitors: “After tea the King talked to the Chiefs for about 10 minutes. I heard him ask Tshekedi where he got his uniform and Tshekedi trotted out the old story about Queen Victoria and Chief Khama.”³⁶ Following the episode, fiction became fact, as even the official account of the King’s journey notes that Bathoen’s uniform “had been bestowed upon his grandfather by Queen Victoria in 1895. (Morton & Ramsay, 2018: 14)

Viewing this event from a theatrical perspective and with the knowledge that this was not an isolated incident, it can be said that Batswana learnt from an early stage how and when to perform. Taking place (setting/context) and dress into careful consideration, certain objects and attires have been strategically placed on the set of the national stage. The rings Bathoen I claimed he and Sebele I had been given as gifts by the late Queen Victoria effectively “played up the seemingly “indissoluble” bond” (Morton & Ramsay, 2018: 9) between the British and Batswana. The rings were not part of the gifts they received. Instead, they received Setswana bibles, shawls for the chiefs’ wives and a large portrait of Queen Victoria.

These all found their way into the Republic’s story and its identity. Bibles are still abundant in Botswana- often given out for free. The shawls, their trims and how they are draped and secured have all found their way into the contemporary traditional dress for Batswana women and portraits remain a long-standing tradition.



Above: *MmaMolao’s Official Portrait. 2020.*
 Below: Mokgweetsi Masisi’s presidential portrait

Above: *Ba Setlhopo’s 1st Cabinet Portrait. 2020.*
 Below: Botswana’s Members of the First Parliament (1965-1969)

The portrait in Botswana becomes particularly intriguing to me because most homes and businesses, even the church, display neatly framed presidential portraits in their respective spaces. The Minister for Presidential Affairs, Governance and Public Administration, Mr Kabo Morwaeng explained in parliament in 2019 that the “display of the portrait in government offices was a tradition and international practice that also served as an expression of pride and respect for the leader of the nation, adding that it was not sufficient for such portraits to be displayed in reception areas only” (Daily News, 2020). To make up for the production costs as they are the supplier of these portraits, the government has started selling them for P2 (two pula) each. Many aspects of this are of interest to me as they play into and affirm the myth, for example; that the portraits are taken against a white background, that a suit is worn for the occasion of the photograph and that for P2, one can buy ‘an expression of national pride’ that will then be valid for five to ten years. Individual and group portraits of the Three Dikgosi that

are often referred to as Botswana’s ‘poster boys’, were taken before and alongside the official cabinet portraits of the independent government in 1966. Although Bathoen I and Sebele I were not members of the first parliament, their individual and group portraits (along with Khama I who was elected president) were released and consumed as part of the independent government’s media pack. *MmaMolao, Moikemelanosi and Mokapelo’s* portraits allude to this story and *Ba Setlhopo’s 1st Cabinet Portrait* mimics ‘Botswana’s Members of the First Parliament (1965-1969)’ design and purpose. *Madi Mantle I (Good luck/ beautiful money)* references the placing of the Three Dikgosi on the P100 (which before 2009, was the currency’s highest banknote value).



Mokapelo, MmaMolao & Moikemelanosi’s Official Portraits. Digital photomontages. 2021



Front and back views of the hundred Pula bank note that is currently in circulation.

Madi Mantle. Digital photomontage. 2021

With regards to *Mokapelo’s* attire; The white shawl she wears is culturally reserved for established women, married women and elders. Same-sex marriage in Botswana was only

legalized in June of 2019. Fortunately, I was at home to witness and celebrate this change in legislature, but also present to witness the public and particularly the churches’ disapproval of the decision on the basis that queerness of any kind goes against nature, culture and God. I decided to give *MmaMolao* a wedded partner during this time. (The decision was also made in response to the scrutiny Ian Khama received for being unmarried, which led to rumours of the former president’s homosexuality). *Mokapelo’s* positioning in the imagined society and her attire was an attempt to elevate how non-male, queer bodies are seen and to present the pair as respected and ‘established’ in a cultural capacity.

Independent Botswana, that Monageng Mogalakwe calls a successful “class project” took well to the white-collar ideology³⁷ while maintaining a fractured and unresolved sense of ‘traditional’ national dress that has been carried even into the present. All of the costumes in *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* borrow from the designs of the dresses of the Catholic and Anglican churches in Gaborone. The robes and sashes are adapted from the indigenous churches and religions that operate alongside Christianity. The suits, blazers, shirts, buttons etc. are from attires that are seen as suitable for politicians and those in positions of power or influence.



Examples of *Diswaeti* attire

‘*Gender, dress and self-empowerment: Burial Societies in Botswana*’ by Professor Barbara Ntombi Ngwenya (Ngwenya, 2002: 1-27) is a detailed inquisition into *diswaeti*³⁸ in Botswana and the sense of empowerment that the process provides these groups of women. The paper acknowledges the limited agency that Botswana women are afforded and the socio-economic and cultural factors that created this restrictive circumstance but suggests that *diswaeti* can be viewed as ‘micro-practices towards social transformation’ for their ability to carve out a space for self-representation and a sense of autonomy within ‘traditional’ practices through gatherings and dress.

³⁷ That work done by people who wear white shirts to work in an office or other professional environment is more substantial than others. Assuming that the understanding is that those that wear white shirts are to be taken in higher regard than those who do not.

³⁸ Adapted from ‘society’. “An organization or club formed for a particular purpose or activity” (Oxford, 2021)

In *diswaeti* women of local communities organize themselves into groups that ultimately oversee significant burial processes that honour cultural, religious and social expectations. These women differentiate themselves from fellow community members and other institutions through a uniform attire. “In Tswana society, a dress, *seaparo* (pl. *diaparo*) has multiple social meanings. At a personal level, *seaparo* is an article of clothing, a garment and *go apara* is a verb being to dress up smartly or garnish oneself while *kapeso* is to be enrobed. A given dress code thus, either accentuates or plays down the social agency of individuals or groups in a given societal context” (Ngwenya, 2002: 1). Each *swaeti* designs their group’s attire in accordance with their collective wishes and alongside these are set regulations that have to do with public decency, gendered presentation expectations and respect for the deceased. This dress code is described by Ngwenya as a ‘ritual object of social power’ that somewhat complies with the “obligations to self, family, kin and community” (Ngwenya, 2002: 2). Of particular interest to me, is Ngwenya’s left-field approach to the perception of power, which then lends a sagacious air to the manner of evaluation, and further, interpretation of the research. “Power applied in this paper is not in terms of agency over others but, rather, power is seen as the transforming capacity of organized action.” (Ngwenya, 2002: 2). Following this line of thinking, the possibilities for avenues to deconstruct malign structures of power expand in tandem with the broadened conception of what denotes power and the spaces in which it can be forged.

Bringing forth images of the dressed *Ba Setlhopo* and their performative presences in real space can be interpreted as suggestions or contributions towards a ‘cultural reset’³, despite their arguable inconsequence as moments in time. In acknowledging the performativity of social interaction, commandeered by parochial power, Ngwenya notes that: “Social roles emerge out of specific encounters and involve situated performances” (Ngwenya, 2002:3). By viewing the research through a dramaturgical lens, Ngwenya manages to “emphasize the significance of creative performances of self-empowerment and gender display of social roles by women in burial societies” (Ngwenya, 2002:3). This then allows one to surmise that even subtle alterations to “the drama’s” dress, place or cast will invariably shift its narrative. “What appears trivial and uninteresting is fraught with societal implications. Smallness of micro practices therefore also speaks to larger processes of social transformations.” (Ngwenya, 2002: 3). I consider this both an affirmation and a way to elaborate on the significance of *Bo Mmaruri* for Batswana women.

The garments in *Bo Mmaruri* are designed to encourage a sense of power *levelling* through cross-referencing styles, colours, patterns, materials, symbols and motifs that, for Batswana, have gendered, religious and political undertones. The costumes simultaneously question the ascendancy of known uniforms and attires and siphon a sense of authority and respect from the association. “Through *seaparo*³⁹, women contest the authority of priests as sole purveyors of a moral social order. *Seaparo* gives them a moral high ground and proves women to be adept at translating and contextualising Protestant Christian and indigenous religious symbols and practices in ways that fortify a ‘newly’ marked sense of social identity and gendered role performance.” (Ngwenya, 2002: 18). *Setlhopa sa balekane* literally translates to ‘a selection of equals/ a selection from those that are equal. This is to disrupt the acceptance of hierarchal power in organised action and/or governance. *Basadi ba Kapeso* disarrange the pecking order of the assigned roles in burial processes. “As such the ritual processes of *kapeso* are not merely a reproduction of an existing order, but also the reinvention of religious and cultural beliefs in everyday life.” (Ngwenya, 2002: 19). Where the *bomme ba*

³⁹ ‘Dress’

*seaparo*⁴⁰ are seen to “juxtapose themselves as women of the garb... vis-à-vis pastors, men of the cloth”(Ngwenya, 2002: 18), *Ba Setlhopo* juxtapose themselves as women of the garb in a more generalised sense; against the dress of nation in loosely defined moments of space-time. This lax definition supports the endeavour of *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi*’s narrative to be transmutable across sub-contexts and cultures. “Dress and other cultural symbols may have many meanings, but meanings emerge out of the context in which they are used, and have both intended and unintended outcomes for those that are clothed for the occasion and those that are not”(Ngwenya, 2002: 21). In image and performance, *Ba Setlhopo* places themselves in contrast with the public, that is not privy to, and therefore not ‘dressed’, for the occasion (of the story or performance). This is to encourage an introspective questioning of identity through a (sub)conscious comparison between the ‘not dressed’ viewer and the dressed *Ba Setlhopo*.

Culturally and politically loaded clothing and costume have been used extensively in contemporary art practices from the African continent. The connotations of, particularly western dress and the circumstances around its integration into African identities as well as the repercussions of this integration are critiqued by artists such as Mary Sibande, Kudzanai Chuirai and Athi Patra Ruga.



Left: Mary Sibande. *To everything there is a season*. 2019
 Above: Mary Sibande. *Everything is not lost*. 2011

Sibande’s work operates between history and contemporary moments to tease out paths to ‘reclaiming the black female body in post-colonial and post-apartheid South Africa’ by dressing her alter egos and avatars in what could be described as creative interventions to known attires, such as military wear, religious garb and domestic worker’s uniforms. These interventions are based on South Africa’s historical context and influenced by nationally

⁴⁰ ‘Women of ‘the dress’’

known colour symbolisms and associations (Caradonio, 2019). Sibande re- represents dressed and uniformed female bodies in image and sculpture through vibrant colours that actively disrupt the connotations and historical narratives of the attire.



Kudzanai Chiurai. *The Black President, The Minister of Enterprise & The Minister of Defence*. 2009

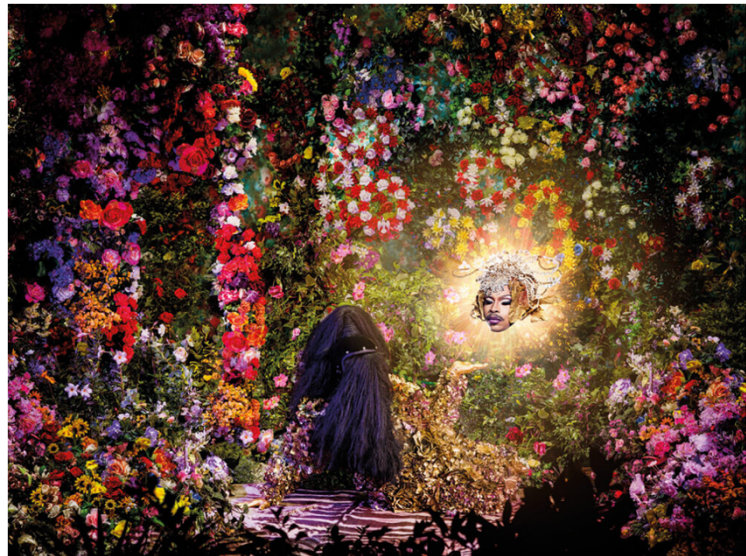


Kudzanai Chiurai. *Genesis [Je n'isi isi] II*. 2016



Kudzanai Chiurai. *Genesis [Je n'isi isi] VII*. 2016

Alternatively, there is the work of Zimbabwe-born Kudzanai Chuirai who uses dress and theatrical re-enactment to create images with a cynical undertone that simultaneously address multiple political concerns in tandem with the “psychological and physical experience of African metropolises” (Goodman Gallery, 2021). The works in *Dying to be Men* (2009) are a case in point. The body of work addresses matters of government corruption, historical representation, nationalism and post-coloniality in Zimbabwe. Chuirai re-imagines an African cabinet through a series of mock portraits of government officials that, through dress and prop, highlight both overt and underlying controversies, while works such as the *Genesis* series question patriarchal and colonial narratives as well as male leadership in Africa.



Above, left: Athi Patra Ruga. *Proposed Model for uMabele-bele*. 2018

Above, right: Athi Patra Ruga. *Over the Rainbow (Queens in Exiles series)* (video still). 2016-2018

On the other hand, Athi Patra Ruga discusses post-colonial South Africa, queerness, and nationalism through the creation of a mythological new or future nation. Costumed avatars populate Patra Ruga’s utopian Azania⁴¹. The figures are presented in vibrant and striking

colours. They appear as gender-ambiguous figures wearing stilettos, bright stockings, with upper bodies formed by balloons or clouds of wool, encrusted in rhinestones, wearing hats,

⁴¹ This is the name of Patra Ruga’s imagined reality. The name comes from “the word “Azania” which alternatively in Hebrew means “God is listening”. But also “Azania” was a word used in apartheid, and during the liberation struggle, to basically denote a (future) world that we are all creating” (Dazed, 2018).

helmets or entirely cloaked. The costumes are used across performance, photography, sculpture, video work and tapestries to support the artist's mission to visualize Azania. It can be said that the costumes constitute Azania's 'national attire' that, when inserted in real space, complicates perceptions of 'colourfulness'⁴² and notions of a rainbow⁴³ (nation)⁴⁴ while discussing the performativity and pageantry of embodying personal and national identities.

To bring the discussion back to Botswana- although specified clothing items are generally accepted as fitting for cultural and traditional processes, the country does not have a national traditional dress that reflects the practices and values of contemporary Botswana or one that shows a considered engagement with the nation's heritage. This authentication is one that P. Disele considers a natural next step in the process of cultural transformation (Disele, Tyler & Power, 2011: 21). Ngwenya notes that *Kapeso*⁶ has the ability to choreograph multiple social and cultural aspects into a "participatory social process of webs of power linked to the nation-state, the civil society and the wider world. This is to introduce the potential of this kind of socio-cultural convergence, even in a micro-practice" (Ngwenya, 2002: 22). The following paragraphs will discuss smaller elements, such as colour choices, the use of cowrie shells, masking and other adornments in *Ba Setlhopo*'s dress and their references.

In the case of *diswaeti*, colour is considered carefully as they are aware of the affiliations certain hues and patterns have to particular groups or institutions in Botswana. "Historically, black is linked to missionary inspired church denominations (such as the Anglican and Catholic churches). "It appears women choose black precisely to re-assert their relative autonomy from social, cultural and institutional constraints" (Ngwenya, 2002: 11). It is often treated as a 'base' or neutral colour for attires, along with cream or khaki colours (i.e. to be paired with a chosen colour or pattern). *Bo Mmaruri*'s dress design takes advantage of the cultural neutrality that is afforded to the colour black and layers upon it subversions of selected cultural markers, further encouraging its symbolic elusiveness. Where *Ba Setlhopo*'s attire uses familiar colour combinations such as black and red or black and ochre as models from which to work, *diswaeti* operate oppositely. The burial societies "do not envisage any contradictions in assimilating colours used by officially recognised churches... and "avoid matching black with specific colours, such as red with black, for instance, to recreate a dress code that is associated with the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (Ngwenya, 2002: 11). *Setlhopo sa Balekane*'s attire purposefully teases out these associations, namely those that speak to the ruling party and their affiliates, the dominant Catholic and Anglican churches, the National Defence Force as well as widely acknowledged traditional practices.

Botho is the Setswana equivalent of *Ubuntu* that holds in high regard the ideal of mutual respect, such that asymmetry in interpersonal relations is kept to an absolute minimum. "However, it has been pointed out that, for a Westerner, the notion that 'a person is a person through other persons' has no obvious religious connotations but rather points to a general appeal to treat others with respect" (Prinsloo, 1995, 1997). In the African context, the maxim has a deeply religious meaning and is key to understanding the Tswana sense of

⁴² Often associated with queerness

⁴³ This also alludes to the LGBTQIA+ rainbow flag.

⁴⁴ The term that is used to describe post-apartheid South Africa as a unified, post-racial society.

spirituality that accords basic respect, human dignity, dialogue and compassion to others. On the other hand, Western humanism tends to underestimate or even deny the importance of religious beliefs (Ndaba; 1994, Brookryk, 1995). African humanism or *Botho* implies deep respect and regard for religious beliefs and practices (Teffo, 1994). The aphorism can be interpreted as both a factual description and a rule of conduct or social ethic. It describes a human being as ‘being-with others’ and prescribes what ‘being-with-others’ entails” (Ngwenya, 2002: 21). The underlying idea is an aspiration towards a state of being that does not recognize a division between self and others. The use of masking in *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* is varying but by and large, expresses a similar sentiment. The avatars in my work aim to, by concealing physical identity, present as ‘stand-ins’ for real people, as in to give the impression that any of these roles could be assumed by anyone at any time- this as an experiment in bridging the gap between the work and the people the work is ‘made for’. The masking of *Ba Setlhopo* is an almost instinctual reaction to the divisive power of Western socialisation and its influence on the widely perceived separation between (multiple) body/ bodies and spirit/ spirits and the spaces they reside in.



Left: *Letshoku* as it is sold

Right: Example of an application of the ochre

Concurrently, the use of face masks alludes to the use of different ochres (*letshoku*) by Batswana as an adornment with “ritual connotations... some of them were used as protective medicine against sickness, harm and jealousy” (Disele, Tyler & Power, 2011: 21). In religious contexts, the smearing of *letshoku* to obscure the facial skin is treated as a part of ritual attire but with heavier spiritual associations- one is said to ‘place the face of the earth over their own’ or ‘hide their face so that another can use it/be shown’. In the same way, several characters from *Ba Setlhopo* can be seen as to be placing the ‘cultural void’ over their faces (identity), in a statement that “re-assert(s) their relative autonomy from social, cultural and institutional constraints” (Ngwenya, 2002: 18) despite what the rest of the attire may suggest.

Though cowries are present in the country and can be found cultural artefacts from Botswana, they are not indigenous to the area. I use them in *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* with the understanding that though they represent beauty, femininity and wealth in other nations, the shells and what they represent are a ‘currency’ that is not valid in Botswana (I do not know of a naturally occurring *sekgabo*⁴⁵ that is indigenous to Botswana and represents similar ideas).

Lagbaja translates to ‘the unknown man’ in Yoruba. It is the name of a cowrie shell mask instinctively designed by La Falaise Dion⁴⁶. The name refers to traditional Yoruba masking practices and it is the name given to a vessel when it is masked (if the face is unseen). Cowrie shells are generally understood to be a symbol and a medium of femininity, spirituality and the histories of “African, Arab and Asian trade routes” (Mitchell, 2019). It is this interconnectedness that the cowrie represents that inspired my incorporation of them into *Ba Setlhopo*’s dress design.

In my experience, Botswana has a somewhat elitist view of itself, in comparison to other African countries. In several instances, Botswana has metaphorically paraded the gold stars bestowed upon it by its previous colonisers for the sake of superficial compliance to their ideals. In recent years, their reputation has taken multiple hits through a series of human and animal rights violations, political scandals and subsequent financial instability (Malunga, 2019). An article published by the Sunday Standard, publicly proclaimed; ‘Bye bye Botswana, Welcome Africa!’ (Sunday Standard, 2010). The piece simultaneously implies that

1. the condition of a dystopian dictatorship is an inherently ‘African’ affliction and further
2. that its previous protectorate status and postliminary assimilation, to what can now be identified as a Western dystopia, were conditions to not only take pride in but also
3. to use as praxis to justify its sense of superiority over other African nations.

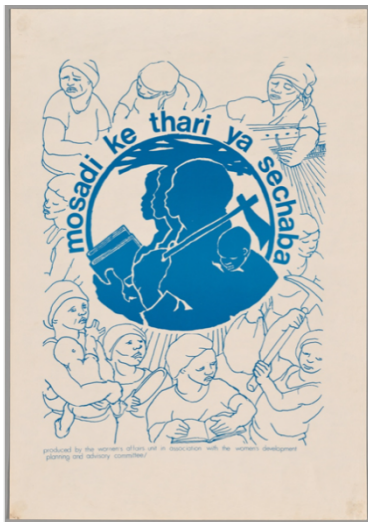
The use then, of the cowrie shells and braiding in *Bo Mmaruri* is a stretch to remedy wounded ties through enculturation. It is also an acknowledgement of the interconnected histories, shared trauma and the need for demiurgic transformation amongst people of colour throughout the continent and in the diaspora. While braiding can be viewed as a practice that spans numerous cultures and across the gender spectrum, braiding fibre specifically, speaks to black grooming practices and the translation of ancestral and visceral knowledge.

⁴⁵ Adornment

⁴⁶



Go tumula ka Medu¹: Mosadi ke thari ya Sechaba. Digital photomontage. 2021



Left: Judy Seidman. *Mosadi ke thari ya Sechaba* (A Woman Ties the Nation on Her Back). 1984

*Go tumula ka Medu*⁴⁷: *Mosadi ke thari ya Sechaba* (A woman is the bearer of the nation) is a print made in reference to Judy Seidman's poster, *Mosadi ke thari ya Sechaba* (A Woman Ties the Nation on Her Back). The piece was produced by the Women's Affairs Development Planning and advisory Committee that was founded in 1981 and based in Gaborone. The poster was made for Medu⁴⁸ which, Seidman was a part of⁴⁹. I view the Medu Arts Ensemble as an extraordinary artistic achievement that exemplifies the power of transnational artistic protest, resistance and organized action. 'Mosadi ke thari ya Sechaba' is a Setswana idiom that views and places women at the centre of society. The posters and the act of making them free to the public are inspired by Medu's poster-making

⁴⁷ A sotho proverb that means 'to get to the root of the matter'.

⁴⁸ "The Medu Art Ensemble was based in Gaborone in Botswana between 1979 and 1985. Medu (meaning "roots" in Sepedi) played a key role in shaping South Africa's culture of struggle against apartheid. The collective was formed by South African cultural activists exiled after the 1976 Soweto uprising and it worked with artists back home, Botswana citizens, and some from other countries. Medu used the creative arts – visual image, theatre, music and literature – to give voice to South Africa's liberation struggle." (Seidman, 2021).

⁴⁹ Other members of Medu included: "Thami Mnyele (exiled 1978), Miles Pelo (exiled 1981, left Botswana 1982 for Cuba, Tanzania, England), Heinz Klug (1979 - 1985 in Botswana), Gordon Metz (in Medu 1979 - 1985), Albio and Theresa Gonzales (Swedish/Spanish, in Gaborone from 1979 - 1985), Philip Segola (Botswana citizen, occasional Medu member), Lentswe Mokgatle (in Medu from 1982- 85). (Zimbabwean artist George Nene was not formally a member of the group, but was in Gaborone Central Prison during this period, where he studied in art classes run by Medu for prisoners.). Other cultural activists in Medu included: in literature and drama, Mongane Wally Serote, Mandla Langa, Pheto Serote, Bachana Mokwena, Keorapetse and Baleka Khotsitsile, Marius Schoon, Patrick Fitzgerald and Thele Moema; in photography, Mike Kahn and Tim Williams; and in music, Jonas Gwangwa, Dennis Mpale, Steve Dyer, Hugh Masekela, Livy Phahle, Tony Cedras and journalist Gwen Ansell; other members included Muff Anderson, Mike Hamlyn (SA draft resister) and Uriel Abrahamse" (South African History Online, 2021).

that created in the minds of people and the archive a repetitive presence of a counter and resistive narrative.

Perhaps what has made revolution, transformation or decolonisation an unreasonable pursuit for Botswana and others, is the historical evidence of institutional violence against revolutionaries and the condemnation of revolutionary acts as acts of terrorism or disruption. If so, the reservation is surely justified but this raises the question- if we are not able to do it in these 'known ways' (that have been seen to end in conflict or violence) will it ultimately discourage our participation entirely? "By adopting a specific dress code as a mechanism through which to carve out a niche and sustain advantage, women's burial societies pursue a less confrontational course of social action with moderate but achievable objectives. In practice, their strategy is less likely to be considered a threat to formal institutions (especially of religion and the state. The choice of balancing on the one hand, agency and autonomy and on the other hand, social change and resistance, is political. This approach makes it difficult for the ideological powers in these institutions to "co-opt or curtail their activities" (Ngwenya, 2002: 22). The basic action of dressing a group in a particular dress code begins a conversation about the perception and presentation of individual, cultural and national identity.

The absence of a considered national dress speaks to larger issues that I believe stem from an improvisatory adoption of a hastily considered national identity. "Although there is no common traditional dress in Botswana today, some ... could be regarded as traditional as they are linked to societal norms or customs (i.e. shawls, headscarves, shirts, ties, jackets etc.) and can be situational. (Disele, Tyler & Power, 2011: 40). This is not to say that there is no value in the items we have come to accept as our own or to suggest that those we know of should be disregarded as objects of material culture or ritual. It is, however, a statement in response to "Bye, bye Botswana. Welcome Africa" and in support of revisiting the basis of the country's conceptual foundation- it is a suggestion rather, to bid farewell to current conceptions in order to welcome a revisited national identity and dress. In other words, to consider a change of dress an innocuous strategy towards said transformation. The presence of *ba ba apesitweng*⁵⁰ in both the real (installation/ performative) and imagined (photomontages) spaces, is an effort to emphasize that the work is cognizant and reflective of both- contemporary and historical metanarratives while reserving a place for its consideration in the proverbial future.

⁵⁰ 'Those that are/ have been dressed'

MO KAGISONG: BOTLHALE JWA PHALA BO TSWA PHALANENG (CONCLUSION)

Mo Kagisong means ‘In (a state of) peace and it is inscribed on the banner of *Ba Setlhopo*’s Seal and Coat of Arms with the words being adapted from the line in Botswana’s national anthem (‘A le nne ka kagiso’). The inspiration for this use came from my identification that ‘peace’ and not ‘pula’ is actuality what the nation strives for. *Botlhale jwa phala bo tswa phalaneng* (‘the wisdom of the buck comes from its offspring’) is an idiom that reverses the traditional direction of tutelage and suggests that older generations learn from those younger than them without one being above the other. The buck cannot have wisdom (to grow) without the child but also the child cannot *be* without the parents because the two are interdependent. Though Botswana has for a long time been considered one of the continent’s most peaceful nations for its general lack of involvement in or instigation of violence or conflict, I have come to understand that it *is* violent. Allowing a national identity to be based on a myth that encourages acquiescence and subservience towards colonialism, classism, sexism & gender-based violence, racism, tribalism and capitalism is violent and so is allowing a nation to repeatedly call this kind of legacy to life.

In response to patriarchal dominance in Botswana and the social, political and cultural disempowerment of non-male bodies, I approach the body of work from a position that seeks to privilege women and gender non-conforming bodies by placing these bodies in power and in the form of a transformative force. Through *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* I suggest a re-representation of the country that embodies a strong sense of matriliney that is reflected in the way the society functions in cultural, spiritual and political spheres, in the hopes of creating a metaphorical space that is absolved of the subscription to a male-centred way of life. Further, *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* accepts the country’s national narrative as a myth and by using the decline of the country’s women’s movements as motivation; this work imagines an omnipotent and thriving women’s movement based on the context. I have considered Botswana’s history with its adoption of colonial and Christian ideologies (which I believe has made its people more susceptible to accepting reverence in these forms) in order to make bold declarations and prophecies towards and for an imagined alternative reality. As names often hold deep associations for Botswana, I renamed the space, people, places and positions of power in a way that reflects a national identity that puts at the forefront the livelihood and experiences of non-male bodies. Through a transposition of text and Setswana orality, I intertwined several media (works in the form of fact, fiction and folklore indiscriminately) into the work to speak to the multi-modal ways in which Botswana’s national mythology has been preserved. I designed and made *Ba Setlhopo*’s attires indirect reference to multiple sartorial references in Botswana that denote, for the wearer, a sense of authority, righteousness and influence. This was firstly to channel a perception of power from the made associations and secondly, to present *Ba Setlhopo* as a unified (uniformed) ‘body’ with an unalienable motive.

By imagining *Ba Setlhopo* I hope to create a visualization of a national political identity that is not “wedded to the idea that men needed to rule” (Kelley, 2002:14) and that embraces Ngwenya’s definition of power, not as agency over others, but rather as the “transforming capacity of organized action.” (Ngwenya, 2002: 2). Because *Ba Setlhopo* are masked, I see them less as representing themselves but more as a reflection of those that they could

represent. In my personal capacity, I hold *botho* and *mainane*⁵¹ in high regard as cultural structures and traditional Tswana and African knowledge systems that do not encourage separation, conflict or asymmetric power relations amongst people and within communities. “The quest for a referential *We* remains the prime mover of conceptual and esthetic revolutions. A *We* that, rather than locking the individual into a categorical compartment liberates and emancipates.” (Njami, 2012 :3 My intention in making *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* was not to separate Botswana or Batswana in the country, from the rest of the continent. Rather, it was to understand why and how the divide(s) had been made and the reasons why they are still maintained to date. While this is true, the project *is* directed at Batswana, as the audience that would be the most familiar with the language and the subject matter brought into the work. I aimed here, to provide evocative proposals for alternative ways of seeing and reading and to present visualisations in real and imagined space that problematize assumptions in a way that encourages imaginative engagement from the audience. Because engagement with and transformation of the people that the work is about, is a large motivating factor for me, several aspects of the work needed to be ‘tested’ in real spaces in Gaborone to gauge the effectiveness of the work as a tool that aimed to trouble or disrupts contemporary narratives and oral culture. The public’s feedback and responses reinforced my commitment to disturbing known, accepted and systemically privileged narratives and visual imagery that support a false societal and national identity.

I use storytelling and *mainane* in the work because along with the indelible marks of the colonial project, I see them as a part of the ‘cultural membership’ that African nations have in common. And while this commonality does not mean ‘sameness’, it is similar enough to be used as a transnational, unifying device. I believe that as a knowledge system, it demonstrates “non-academic” intellectuality as a “possible meeting place between orality and the written tradition in a post-colonial Botswana, as suggested by Taylor’s (2003) concepts of the ‘archive’ and the ‘repertoire’ as complementing each other. Indeed, the transition to a new kind of post-colonial world does not mean abandoning the old and its repository. Rather, it means bringing the old to meet the new, since the past gives meaning to the present as much as the present reconstitutes the nature of the past. As hooks (1990, p. 40) warns: ‘Memory need not be a passive reflection, a nostalgic longing for things; it can function as a way of knowing and learning from the past.’ (Mmila, 2012: 243). Further, because storytelling in Botswana is culturally ‘the work of women’, the work aims to use this pre-demarcated space to test an experiment in artistic insurrection that reads back to the context. “In discussing women as victims of oppressive situations, Nnaemeka (1997, p. 4) asserts that ‘what is important is not whether these agents survive their insurrection or are crushed by it; what is crucial is the fact that they choose to act.’ (Mmila, 2012: 243). I find that in this way, I have fulfilled my personal motivation which, was to act and make in response to the somewhat violent information and experiences encountered as the work was made, while rejecting the sense of passivity or acquiescence that has come to characterize not just Batswana, but specifically, Batswana women. In the same way that Ngwenya frames *diswaeti* as a micro-practice that through self-representation, has the potential to create a “sense of autonomy within ‘traditional’ practices. I would like *Bo Mmaruri: Bosadi* to be perceived as a test towards an artistic micro-practice that similarly creates a sense of autonomy and self-definition and as a space to test new “theories of reality” (Njami, 2019) for non-male Batswana.

⁵¹ Setswana folktales or stories

Though I can understand where the temptation to read *Bo Mmaruri* Afro-Futuristically arises, I would contest this to say that *Bo Mmaruri* considers and is set in the future, past and present, equally. It regards each period as equally rich in matter and potential. As I believe Setswana oral culture cannot be separated from its national myth, how the country has been physically written about and how it understands and enacts its identity today- I work around the belief that the past, present and the future cannot be divided nor considered in a hierarchy that places manifestations of the radical black imagination and the realisation of transformation entirely in the future. I think it would be more accurate to describe the work, as I would similar pieces- as works of ‘Afro-folklore’ with black feminist motivations and as works that can be considered ‘radical’ in a sense, for the fact that they address and work from the ‘root’ of an identified issue, upwards, towards theorizing and enacting (in real or imagined spaces) self-dictated personal, national or continental identities.

I hold and express through the work, the opinion that a peaceful identity can only be formed through a stern critique and levelling of power. I also stand in agreement with Mutswanga and Chivase, who in *An Examination of the Role of Shona Folktales in Promoting Peacebuilding among Modern Communities in Zimbabwe* say that contemporary peacebuilding practices ought to “blend with indigenous ways of promoting peace if tolerance and co-existence are to be achieved”(Chivase, N & Mutswanga, P, 2014:168). They assert that modern communities should not ‘go without’ folktale culture because the narrative basis of most stories is conflict-resolution. That, even if its effects are at a micro-level, storytelling should not be disregarded as a way to influence the temperaments and actions of current and future nationals- for it operates within traditional parameters that Western peacebuilding practices do not. I would like to extend their sentiment in order to say that I think a system that revisits and revises Botswana’s founding story and the nuances of its oral culture, alongside other reconciliation and restructuring practices has the potential to bring our identity closer to that of a truly peaceful nation. For the fact that conflicts are not static and are likely to arise. I think it is valuable to invest in creating spaces of cultural preservation that experiment with dynamic ways of critically assessing and resolving conflicts (in motivation, writing, speech, architecture, monuments and interests etc.) to the benefit of unity and towards the realisation of new forms of nationhood.

While directed and informed by Botswana, I think the body of work also provides for potentially broader value. Alongside specific references to the country, the works also make references, draw parallels and borrow analogies from neighbouring countries and other parts of Africa. As one of many artists working on the continent and with this kind of specificity, I realize that the contemporary trend in artworks made by African artists that deal with folklore and ideas of nationhood present the potential to bring visibility to indigenous knowledge systems. These can serve as an alternative view to the propaganda, political narratives, generalizations, assumptions and stereotypes perpetuated through ‘outsider’ or politically motivated interpretations of a particular culture and geographical location. Further, as artists explicate stories from the continent that are “never totally similar” (ArtReview, 2019) through their artistic practices to a broader audience, it creates the potential to bring complexity and depth through visual interpretation to the understanding of formal analyses and academic research on and of the continent.

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WORKS



Gatwe e rile: News of the Third Coming. Digital photomontage. 60 x 80 cm. 2019



Kitso: Those in grass houses should not stoke fires. Digital photomontage. 59 x 84 cm. 2020



Noga ga e latelwe mosimeng. Digital photomontage. 105 x 140 cm. 2019



Baitshireletsi II (kgoro). Digital photomontage. 100 x 100 cm. 2019



Baitshireletsi I. Digital photomontage. 100 x 100 cm. 2019



O o tlatseng grasia, rapelela bleofi. Digital photomontage. 60 x 60 cm. 2021



Pula ga e ke na a e sa komakoma. Digital photomontage. 59 x 84 cm. 2021



Moikemelanosi official portrait. Digital photomontage. 100 x 80 cm. 2021



Mokapelo official portrait. Digital photomontage. 100 x 80 cm. 2021



MmaMolao official portrait. Digital photomontage. 100 x 80 cm. 2020



Madi Mantle. Digital photomontage. 59 x 84 cm. 2021



First Cabinet of Bo Mmaruri Bosadi. Digital photomontage. 100 x 140 cm. 2021



Insults of Inconsequence: Ka tthagolela mooka ya re o gola wantlhaba. Digital photomontage. 59 x 84 cm. 2020



Le tshepa mang go le bolelela nnete: The Third Address. Digital photomontage. 59 x 84 cm. 2020



Nametsa Taba: Modisa's Eurachrist III. Digital photomontage. 84 x 59 cm. 2019



Nametsa Taba: Modisa's Eurachrist IV. Digital photomontage. 84 x 59 cm. 2019



Go kopaka ga go tshedise pitsa I. Digital photomontage. 84 x 59 cm. 2021



Go kopaka ga go tshedise pitsa II. Digital photomontage. 59 x 84 cm. 2021



Bosigo jo bo itshepileng: Returning Okavango Blue I. Digital photomontage. 84 x 59 cm. 2021



Bosigo jo bo itshepileng: Returning Okavango Blue II. Digital photomontage. 59 x 84 cm. 2021



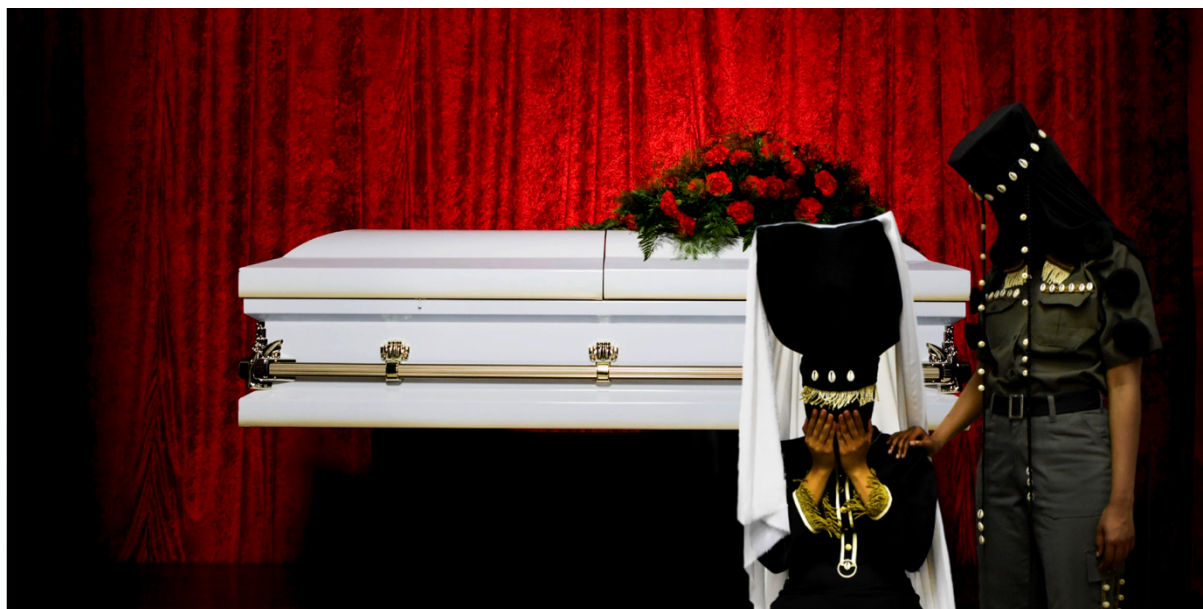
Ineeleng: Le batlang nokeng. Digital photomontage. 59 x 84 cm. 2021



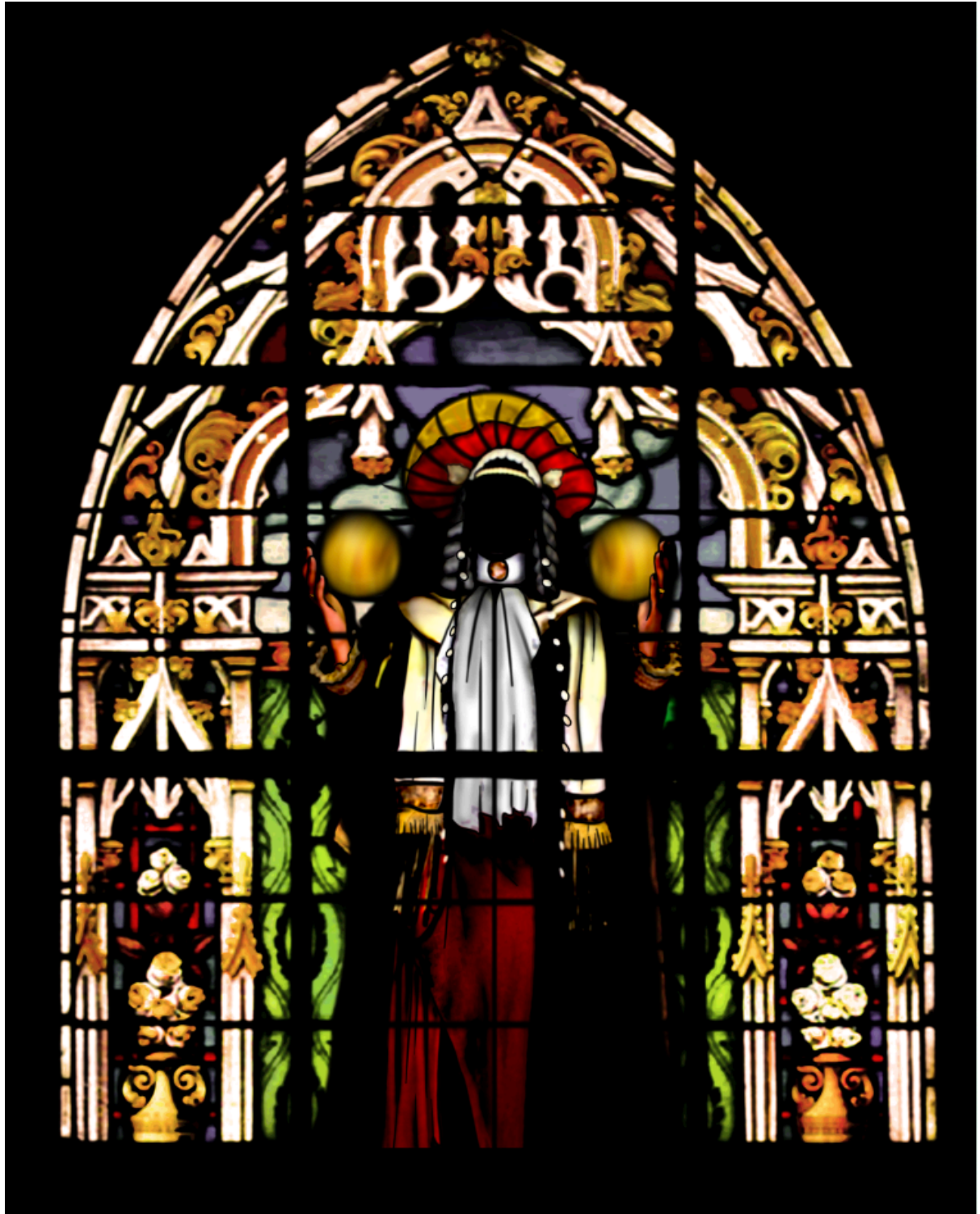
Tladi e iteile gararo. Digital photomontage. 59 x 84 cm. 2021



Le bipa dimpa ka mabele. Digital photomontage. 59 x 84 cm. 2021



The Last Mourners: Lentswe la moswi ga letlolwe. Digital photomontage. 42 x 82 cm. 2021



Di tlhoka babelegi. Digital photomontage. 80 x 100 cm. 2021



Go tumula ka medu: Mosadi ke thari ya Sechaba. Digital photomontage. 60 x 60 cm. 2021

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Tlhopa Ba Sethopo! (Join MmaMolao Today!). Digital photomontage. 60 x 60 cm. 2020



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Tlhopa Ba Setlhopo! (Join MmaMolao). Digital photomontage. 60 x 60 cm. 2020

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Tlhopa Ba Setlhopo! (Baitshireletsi). Digital photomontage. 60 x 60 cm. 2020



**“The future is written by
the hand of today. Your
entitlements deserve to
be committed to paper. If
you cannot do it for
yourself, Ba Setlhopo, as
blessed by MmaMolao,
will do it for you and
for all of us”**

- Mokwaledi



Tlhopa Ba Setlhopo! (Mokwaledi). Digital photomontage. 60 x 60 cm. 2020







Tlhopa Ba Setlhopo! (E e belang). Digital photomontage. 60 x 60 cm. 2020



Tlhopa Ba Setlhopo! (Feelang dikgoro!). Digital photomontage. 60 x 60 cm. 2020

ARTWORK DETAILS

Thumbnail	Title	Year	Medium	Dimensions (cm)
	<p><i>Gatwe e rile: News of the Third Coming</i></p> <p>(It was once said. Once upon a time)</p>	2019	Digital photomontage	60 x 80
	<p><i>Kitso: Those in grass houses should not stoke fires</i></p> <p>(Warning)</p>	2020	Digital photomontage	59 x 84
	<p><i>Baitshireletsi I</i></p>	2019	Digital photomontage, mixed media	80 x 100
	<p><i>Baitshireletsi II (Kgoro)</i></p>	2019	Digital photomontage, mixed media	100 x 100
	<p><i>Noga ga e latelwe mosimeng</i></p> <p>(A snake should not be followed to its hole. Do not give an opponent home ground advantage)</p>	2019	Digital photomontage, mixed media	105 x 140
	<p><i>Nametsa taba: Modisa's Eucharist III</i></p> <p>(Take a problem up a hill. Escalate an issue)</p>	2019	Digital photomontage, mixed media and performance	84 x 59
	<p><i>Nametsa taba: Modisa's Eucharist IV</i></p>	2019	Digital photomontage, mixed media and performance	84 x 59



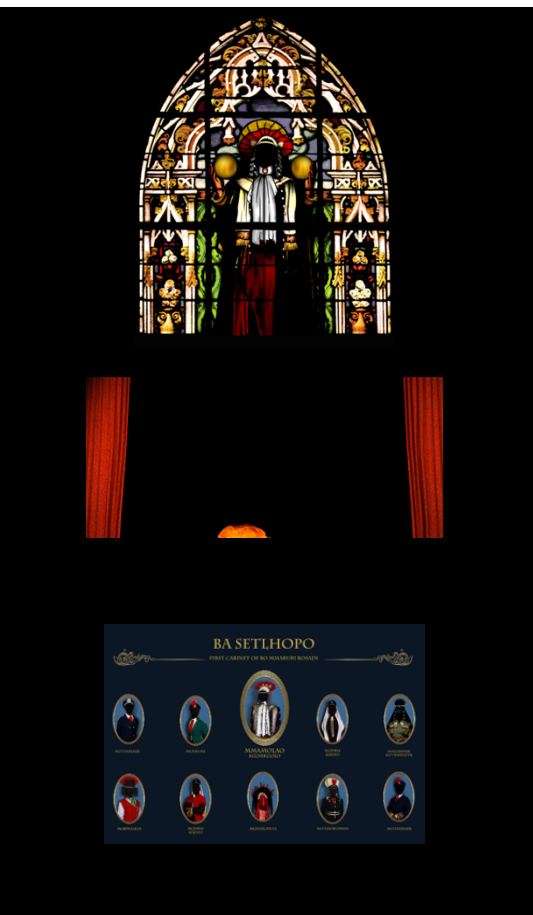
<p><i>Tladi e iteile gararo</i></p> <p>(Lighting struck thrice)</p> <p><i>Le bipa dimpa ka mabele</i></p>	2021	Digital photomontage, mixed media	59 x 84
<p>(You are hiding your stomachs with breasts. To conceal a secret)</p> <p><i>Le tshepa mang go le bolelela nnete: The Third Address</i></p>	2021	Digital photomontage	59 x 84
<p>(Who do you trust to tell you the truth?)</p> <p><i>Insults of Inconsequence:Ka ithagolela mooka ya re o gola wantlhaba</i></p>	2020	Digital photomontage, mixed media	59 x 84
<p>(I raise a tree and it grows (thorns) to prick me. Refers to a rebellious or disobedient child)</p> <p><i>Ineeleng:Le batlang nokeng</i></p>	2021	Digital photomontage, mixed media	59 x 84
<p>(Surrender. What do you want by the water)</p> <p><i>Pula ga e ke e na e sa komakoma</i></p>	2020	Digital photomontage, mixed media	59 x 84
<p>(It doesn't rain without drizzling first. Good fortune sometimes comes after great hardship)</p>	2020	Digital photomontage, mixed media	59 x 84



<p><i>O o tletseng grasia. rapelele baleofi</i></p> <p>(The one who is full of grace, pray for the sinners. Adapted from <i>Dumela Maria</i> (Hail Mary))</p>	2021	Digital photomontage, mixed media	60 x 60
<p><i>Bosigo jo bo itshepileng: Returning Okavango Blue</i></p> <p>(A night that has been entrusted. Silent Night)</p>	2021	Digital photomontage, mixed media	84 x 59
<p><i>Bosigo jo bo itshepileng: Returning Okavango Blue II</i></p>	2021	Digital photomontage, mixed media	59 x 84
<p><i>Go kopaka ga go tshedise pitsa I</i></p> <p>(Begging does not console the pot. Begging does not fulfil people's needs)</p>	2020	Digital photomontage, mixed media	84 x 59
<p><i>Go kopaka ga go tshedise pitsa II</i></p>	2021	Digital photomontage, mixed media	59 x 84



<p><i>Madi Mantle I & II</i></p> <p>(With good blood/spirits Opposite of 'madi mabe', 'with bad blood/spirits'. Beautiful money)</p>	2021	Digital photomontage, mixed media	52.2 x 26/ 52.2 x 52
<p><i>Go tumula ka medu</i></p> <p>(To remove from the root. To solve an issue or dispute from its root)</p>	2021	Digital photomontage	60 x 60
<p><i>Moikemelanosi (official portrait)</i></p>	2020	Digital photomontage, mixed media	100 x 80
<p><i>MmaMolao (official portrait)</i></p>	2020	Digital photomontage, mixed media	100 x 80
<p><i>Mokapelo (official portrait)</i></p>	2021	Digital photomontage, mixed media	100 x 80
<p><i>The Last Mourners: Lentswe la moswi ga le tlole</i></p> <p>(The word of the deceased shall not be transgressed)</p>	2021	Digital photomontage, mixed media	42 x 82



Di tlhoka babelegi

(They need carriers. From 'Dithebe tsa baswi ditlhoka babelegi' - 'The dead's shields need carriers. Good leaders need good replacements')

2021

Digital photomontage, mixed media

80 x 100

E ile fela jalo

(That is the way that it went)

2021

Video

3min 30 sec

First Cabinet of Bo Mmaruri Bosadi. Digital photomontage. 100 x 140 cm. 2021

2021

Digital photomontage, mixed media

100 x 140

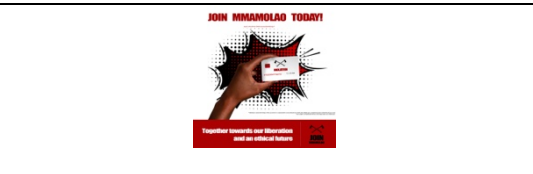


Tlhopa ba Setlhopo! (Join MmaMolao)

2020

Digital photomontage

70 x 50

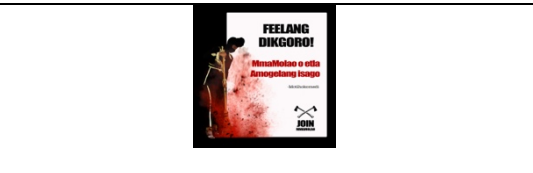


Tlhopa ba Setlhopo! (Join MmaMolao Today!)

2020

Digital photomontage

60 x 60

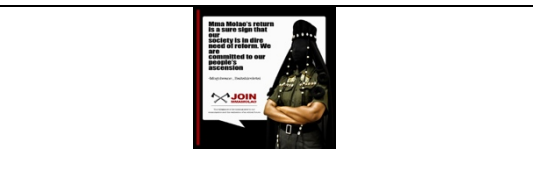


Tlhopa ba Setlhopo! (Feelang Kgoro!)

2020

Digital photomontage, mixed media

60 x 60



Tlhopa ba Setlhopo! (Baitshireletsi)

2020

Digital photomontage, mixed media

60 x 60




Tlhopa ba Setlhopo! (Mokwaledi)

2020

Digital photomontage, mixed media

60 x 60

	<p><i>Tlhopa ba Sathopo! (E e belang)</i></p>	<p>2020</p>	<p>Digital photomontage, mixed media</p>	<p>60 x 60</p>
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APPENDIX



The Three Dikgosi Monument in Gaborone's central business district, unveiled in September 2005. Photographed here in 2019.



The Marian altar at Christ the King Cathedral. It is the mother church of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Gaborone and the church that my family attends. 2019.



Botswana's High Court in Gaborone. Photographed here in 2019.



Botswana's labour court in Gaborone. Photographed here in 2019.



The iTowers that now mark Gaborone's new central business district. Image source: <https://www.kille.bw/index.php/itowers-development-in-cbd>



A commercial space inside the iTowers looking over Gaborone. Image source: <https://newmanrealestate.co.bw/property/itowers-25th-floor-upmarket-luxury-office-space/>



The Gaborone Dam. Image source: <https://maps.prodafrica.com/places/botswana/south-east-district/gaborone/tourism/gaborone-dam/>



Buckingham Palace interiors. Image sources: <https://www.houseandgarden.co.uk/gallery/buckingham-palace-interiors> (left). <https://www.1stdibs.com/introspective-magazine/buckingham-palace/> (right).



The Okavango Blue diamond, a famous 'fancy blue' diamond found in the Orapa mine in 2018. Watch the promotional video here: <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/video/news/video-1908940/Video-Diamond-company-unveils-stunning-Okavango-Blue.html>



Promotional image for the Okavango Blue diamond. 2019. Image by Letso Leipego. Image source: <https://www.vogue.com/article/how-the-okavango-blue-diamond-is-celebrating-botswanas-creative-talent>



Examples of the BDP's campaign imagery



Images of the BDP and its supporters during the campaign season of 2019. Images by Monirul Bhuiyan for Getty Images



Stills from Mokgweetsi Masisi's presidential inauguration. 2019. Footage source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Sx0haNyHQI>

