

# Hambo buza Unyoko

## On Future Real Conditionals



Lerato Maduna

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# **Hambo buza Unyoko**

## **On Future Real Conditionals**

In partial fulfilment of Master of Fine Art at Michaelis School of Fine Art

**Lerato Maduna**

Supervisors: A/Prof Nomusa Makhubu, Dr George Mahashe



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## **Abstract**

Drawing from the photographic archives that belonged to my mother Lizzie Maduna (née Moloji), my late grandmother Elizabeth Masesi Moloji (née Dlamini), my late great aunt, Goguse Letta Ntshangase (née Moloji), I re-envision how the women in my family performed futurity. Although these women lived through colonial and apartheid oppression, these photographic archives show how they created liberatory worlds in spite of the violence they lived through. My creative work surfaces these archives as a matriarchive, which I argue were created in resistance to the oppressive and dehumanising conditions as a performance of future real conditionals.



# Introduction: My mothers' live, long live the mothers!

Upon the resurfacing of our maternal family photographic archives, which were created at a time when the majority of black people in South Africa existed in a very oppressive and violent police state of apartheid, I realised that this archive showed no evidence of a people living in an oppressed state. Instead, these were images of tenderness and endearment. In my creative work, I hypothesise that these family archives were created in resistance to the oppressive and dehumanising conditions, as a performance of future real conditionals and an assertion of the future that was being envisioned/manifested by the people in the photographs. This vision was not only limited to the individuals in the family setting, but it also included the community at large and further extended to those not yet born, their future children.

In attending this hypothesis, I ask: how did my mothers perform the future through family photographic archives? To address this question, I will present literature and photographic material to show how women in my maternal family (and black south African women in general) used their creative imagination through photography to influence and shape the future, while simultaneously performing multiple subjectivities; as caretakers of households belonging to white families, leaders in the church and communities as well as being mothers, and wives in their homes. The multiple subjectivities that surface through black family albums and heirlooms left behind by mothers and grandmothers are rarely recognised in official histories.

As a theoretical and conceptual framework, I use what poet, mother, and black feminist theorist Audre Lorde referred to as 'biomythographies'. In my practice I take this self-reflexive approach influenced by biomythographies, a combination of herstory, biography, and collective myths, a process Lorde used manifesting *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, a book she published in 1982.

There are two additional black feminist concepts that underpin my research. The first of these concepts, the matriarchive, as articulated by Uhuru Phalafala in an interview and in part one of her monograph

*Home is Where the Music Is: A conversation with Keorapetse Kgositsile.* In it, Phalafala describes how the artists she references (including Miriam Makeba) received their gifts from their mothers and grandmothers. She presents the importance of the matriarchive in stating that:

The matriarchive is the bedrock of black revolutionary thought, illuminating our quest for the break, the liminality in which the diviner finds our medicine, and where the improviser finds true freedom. The matriarchive is the crate we dig to know and define ourselves away from western eyes. (Phalafala, 2021: 7)

Phalafala places the matriarchive as a foundation for building communities “it is reclaiming what Audre Lorde calls the erotic, breaking the hold of the isolated black body-turned machine for capitalistic exploitation and production” (Phalafala, 2021: 6). She further expands by stating that the “erotic and sensuous are the domain of our inner landscape, our interiority, where we harbour deep feelings, desires and instincts for freedom” (Phalafala, 2021: 6).

In an article titled ‘Vernaculars of the spirit’, Phalafala simplifies the concept of matriarchives by saying: ‘black women, in the context of Southern Africa, are that matriarchive’. In my interpretation, this sentiment positions black women as living heirloom, passing rituals and gifts of ancient knowledge from generation to generation. I take this useful expression a step further by devoting it to all types of materials passed from black great-grandmothers to mothers and from mothers to daughters, effectively placing black women as carriers of knowledge from past times to the present.

The second theoretical framework forms part of the title of this dissertation and is inspired by a chapter in *Listening to Images* by Tina M. Campt titled ‘Quite Soundings: The Grammar of Black Futurity’. Campt (2017: 17) defines “the tense of Black feminist future” as “a performance of a future that hasn’t happened yet but must. It is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize that aspiration. It is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not but must be.” She asks us to consider future real conditionals as more than a function of grammar, but as a state that can be embodied as an act of futurity, and this requires one to participate in what she describes as: “Politics of prefiguration that involves living the future now, as imperative rather than subjunctive, a striving for the future you want to see right now in the present” (Campt, 2017: 17).

This sentiment awakens my genetic memories. Through the assistance of our family's photographic archives, I am reminded of how my mothers and fore mothers enjoyed and constantly practised living in this real conditional future state through the means of dress, self-portraiture, and photography. In performing these future real conditionals, Omama and aboGogo had a way of encouraging one to actively circumvent their present conditions and not only imagine but consciously embody and exist in a state they desire. For example, when I was young and experiencing baby blues my mothers would bathe, dress me up and make a portrait of me, then proceed to tell me that water is medicine and clean clothes are like sweets and this combination can simultaneously heal and cheer me up. Their actions would not only chase the blues away but affected me in deep and profound ways, that at the age of seventeen I decided I was going to become a photographer owing to the fact that I got great pleasure in making portraits seeking to make the people I photographed feel seen, beautiful, and important despite their perceived/lived realities.

Photography is a powerful medium that has numerous potentials that begin when the image is made and continue to work in multiple dimensions and temporalities.<sup>1</sup> It is particularly intriguing to me how the multiple lives of vernacular photography and their private performances can impact lives for lifetimes. The continual inhabiting of the photo album by going through it regularly can be a portal/trigger for time travelling. Matriarchives and 'black feminist futures provide two anchoring and complementary frameworks that I adopt in thinking/working through this research project.

I begin section one with a narration of self. In section two I focus on spatial issues that affected my family, the setting up of home for future generations and its consequences as well as practices of healing these generational traumas. Section three delves deeper into the role of the archive as a future document linked to the performance of future real conditionals as an act of black feminist futurities. In section four, I reflect on my studio practice which comprises installation and includes the artworks, parts of the archive, video work, and sculptures. Section five discusses the potentials of portraiture as an act of subversion and the conduit for making self-affirming art.

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1. While time is related to the pass /flow of time occurring in the present, temporality is related with the concept of past, present and future



# 1 Kemang? The loud hum of awakening dreams

## 1.1. Meeting my mother(s)

In this chapter I begin with an exercise in self-reflection. This serves to ground my personal connection to this research project, while simultaneously stipulating my standpoint by answering the question of kemang/who am I? This is an introduction of self and my earliest context.

I am a child of the maternal side of my family, the Dlamini clan who hail from Eswatini, moved to Mpumalanga, later to Alexander and finally settled in the township of Soweto.



Figure 1: A family Portrait of my maternal side, taken circa 1960's. My Grandmother Masesi Elizabeth Moloji wearing a beret and holding a baby belonging to her cousin, with my Uncle Malome Mbuti Leonard Moloji standing between the elderly men, and my mother as the young girl with chubby cheeks wearing a beret.

I was born(e) and raised by my maternal mothers. I arrived in this realm on a Friday the 5<sup>th</sup> of July 1985, the time was 5am on a cold winter morning, the location was the quite community clinic in Diepkloof Zone 3 Soweto, Johannesburg. The country was on fire, going through what was described as a State of Emergency. This was ignited by the youth of this country who publicly manifested their power, asserting the urgency to live out their freedom and experience their human rights. Upon my arrival on this earth, my grandmother and mother were the first humans I encountered. I remember instantly recognising their voices as the women who nurtured me in the womb while I was crossing over from a past life. I was their first, my mother's first child and Gogo's first grandchild. Mother recalls it being an easy natural birth, she only stayed at the clinic for a few hours as we were both under the friendly nurse's observations. Around midday on that same day the newly formed trio walked home. The elders felt nervous and excited at the role they had been chosen to perform.

I remember the Soweto winter sun beaming in all its glory, mama slowly walking with me as she normally did, I was so happy to finally get a glimpse of her world, though I struggled to open my eyes and when I did it all seemed blurry, despite all this I was adamant to have a peek at the blue sky, she covered my sight with a blanket. Gogo exclaimed "Let her have some sun, ilanga ngumuthi." I heard the voice of my grandmother insisting that I get a little bit of sun. Responding with a feisty tone, mother argued on the dangers of the harsh winter sun on my fragile skin. How I loved hearing my mothers' voices so clearly, I was really looking forward to staring at them with my love-beaming eyes.

Home was a rented single backyard room in Orlando East, Soweto, Johannesburg. Our home was a four-walled dwelling that was furnished with comfort. The centre of the room was a queen-sized bed, were my mother's sat and slept. On one side, a single lemon coloured, four-door kitchen cabinet and a table; on top, a white bread tin and a two-plate primus stove fired by paraffin whose smell remains a source of nostalgia. Underneath the table was a sealed 5 litre bucket with clean water for drinking, next to the table was a steel three-tiered fruit and vegetable wreck, stacked with an assortment of fresh produce. Standing tall next to the table was the four-stand potholder with varying sized pots nestled on it. On the wall facing the door stood a shiny brown varnished clothing cupboard nestled behind it a folded ironing board. Behind the front door hung a nappy holder with new towel nappies hung slightly above the dressing table with a mirror and a slip chair. This memory is drawn from photographs that I remember seeing as a teenager but have yet to resurface.



That night as we relaxed in our bed, my mothers could not sleep, kept awake by the riotous streets of Orlando. My mothers both felt rather loquacious and prone to dreaming out loud. Drifting in and out of dream states.<sup>2</sup> I had plenty of breast milk and a lot of time to stare, learn their faces and fall asleep to the sound of their voices and in their tones, I heard and felt flashes of confusion mixed with assured determination of a future they did not know but were certain of. The sleep state can be viewed or approached as a place where we can find the radical alternatives that we seek upon waking life. When we sleep, we activate our subconscious state; therefore, sleep can be viewed as the space we rely upon to help activate and revive our consciousness a channel for unconscious/subconscious to become a conduit of sorts for our spirits. Mathibela affirms this sentiment when she writes: “We sleep to acquire knowledge; it is not only about resting the body. It is about the encounters that take place in altered consciousness.” (Gqunta, 2023: 3).

I heard my mothers’ singing of the hopes they had about the future, my future to be specific, while rebuking arising fears based on their present realities, they spoke of me as a university graduate and a mother, living a life of freedom, love, and abundance, both dabbling and practicing the law of assumption.<sup>3</sup> That very same night they discussed possible names to bestow upon the new arrival. They both settled on Lerato because God is love. By naming me Love, they were prophesying upon my life that my name shall follow me all my living days in this realm and beyond. This act was also partly a performance of the future real conditionals, by naming me love – a yearning of affection and love my mother craved but did not receive from my father during her journey of pregnancy.

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2. It is important for me to state that my/the first encounter with the archive began in the realm of dreams where messages, instructions, and/or visuals of spaces, people and materials would be relayed/showed to me. Upon waking life, I have deja vu like encounters remembered as dreams/memories.

3. The Law of assumption as a manifesting tactic created by American Author Neville Goddard, where one assumes and embodies the feelings of the desired outcomes (Greenfield, 2019). This was a Philosophy of all his teachings. This philosophy is closely related to future real conditionals.

## 2 Forced removals and internal displacements

The oral history doing the rounds at family gatherings, which usually happens after burials is that towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 1900's, my maternal ancestors fled family feuds eSwatini and found some semblance of freedom and safety in neighbouring South Africa. They – the Dlamini family and their small children – first settled in Standerton, Mpumalanga. In the 1920's, following economic necessities and personal disruptions imposed by growing racial tensions in the small farming town, the family were faced with the decision of having to move again. The following decade, the family moved again, this time making their way to Alexandra farm on the outskirts of Johannesburg. On this farm my grandmother was born, but in no time, she and her two older brothers lost both of their parents. My great-aunt MaDlamini and her husband nate Moloï adopted the young children and raised them as siblings with their own bunch. I remember listening to my grandmother recall the harsh environment on the farm, when they lived in sack houses before they could afford iron sheets. This is where they made home until circa 50's when they were forcibly removed to Diepkloof Soweto.



Figure 2: This portrait of a mother and her children appears as a jumbo sized postcard in our family archive, raising speculations and questions as to who the people in this image could be and how are we related to them? Where was this image taken?

My grandmother, though raised well by her aunt, felt the absence of her parents, and felt the difficulty of growing up in a big household gripped by the sharp claws of scarcity. Upon her coming of age and birthing her first son, she felt a deep sense of being internally displaced. Being unmarried meant she could not apply for government housing in the township. This led her to move from relative to relative and church friends who also became family to her, my grandmother worked as a seamstress in clothing factories of Johannesburg, while MaDlamini helped raise her first born son Mbuti Leonard Moloji.

On 19 November 1960, my mother was born at Baragwanath Hospital, and MaDlamini looked after her and raised her lovingly. When MaDlamini passed, her youngest child and only birth daughter Gogose Letta Moloji took over the household and ruled with an iron fist. My mother recalls her life when her grandmother passed being characterised by ill treatment, overwork and being underfed by her aunt. This treatment led her to moving out and thus began her life of displacement, perpetuating a pattern of displacement as experienced by their forefathers and mothers' decades before them.

This unstable precarious existence has had a profound impact on my mother, as she would often have to face the violence and trauma of being displaced in the place she knew as home. Growing up without her parents, my mother felt a constant sense of dis-ease. She repeatedly moved between relatives' homes and was also subject to the cruel oppressive policies by the governing state towards the black majority community. The experiences of my family bring to mind words voiced by Lungiswa Gqunta in conversation with Nombuso Mathibela. Gqunta says: "The conditions in which people have access to beaches, gardens, or dreams all collide to express the ongoing struggle for space in all its senses" (Gqunta, 2022: 4).

In a conversation with my mother, she recalls how when it was time to move houses, they would pack their photo albums and documents first and clothes last. These images were a reminder that they also belonged somewhere. These family photographs are the point of departure for this research project. I recall these narratives to emphasise the profound and sentimental value attached to these images and the resilience our family archive has displayed in its many lifetimes.

My intention to resurface and publicly stage these seemingly private archives is my way of inserting these archives into the contemporary photographic discourse and to celebrate their survival by this latest re-emergence. This work also adds to other projects that highlight black photographic albums, like Santu Mofokeng's *Black Photo Album / Look At Me, 1890-1950* (2004). In this body of work Mofokeng rigorously researches the photographic histories of the black working/middle class families, performing future real conditionals and unmaking the systematic erasure of their existence in the making of a city in Johannesburg and its surrounds. They are pictured showing love and commitment, being a family unit and as comrades organising and imagining futures. Again we are reminded of the resilience of the archive and its ability to time travel and affect the future in multiple ways.



Figure 3: Artwork from *Black Photo Album/Look at Me*, by Santu Mofokeng, 2004

## 2.1. On healing the mother wound

This work is in part a calling and a reclamation of space as a descendent of my displaced mothers, as called upon by amaphupho the dream space to continue to manifest into this present life and future conditions of safety for those that are ahead of me and still to follow. There are certain spaces of learning, such as the church, school and nature that have served my mothers as anchors when navigating life challenges. In my installation work I play with materials that invoke the memory of

such spaces. The school belt, the beret, water, and branches from trees, which I use, create a space for all these entities that speak of these different institutions, which have colonial influences but have become tools of empowerment to south African women, who constantly found ways of using the masters' tools to dismantle or uphold these institutions. These works inevitably raise questions on the effects of modernity on black life and culture, and the outcomes of attempting the merging of our cultural identity and western ideas. In 2020, months leading to Goguse's passing, my mother kept passing messages that Gog' Letta (as she was called) would like me to visit her at the old age home she had moved to in Mpumalanga. I yearned and kept promising to visit her, but, due to work commitments and the distance between Cape Town (where I am currently based) and Standerton, I could not visit. Weeks before her passing I began to have a recurring dream, where she and I would be seated at a table looking at photographs, she would tell me stories about the images and in these dreams, she instructed me to surface these images. Every morning before dawn, she would appear with instructions that lead me to the work of this project.

Years later, preceding the passing of my grandmother in 1996. Her archives had gone underground while she was caught up in the game of surviving the city life, running a feeding strategy for primary school kids, caring for children, including myself. Her archive reveals the multiple roles she played throughout her life, photographed in a play park in a suburb chilling with toddlers. Outside a factory dressed to the nines, out of the city, and deep in the ocean with other women. Images of my grandmother in the sea, inspired me to create video work titled *metsi*, where I interrogate our relationship with water and question whether it is a sight of healing and if so why, in this instance the archive acts as a trigger/nudge towards exploring certain topics. These images resurfaced in 2020 following the passing of my great aunt. The long periods of trying to remember my grandmother without the help of an archive came to an end.

Surfacing of archives at times coincides le phetlo, a death, a burial that is followed by an immediate surfacing when belongings of the late is shared amongst the living. A daughter might open a kist and find albums containing images of her mother at their age, this might assist in reconciling a difficult upbringing, confronting grief, and beginning acceptance and a healing process.



Figure 4: My grandmother, Masesi Elizabeth Moloji (L) photographed as a young mother with my Uncle Mbuti Moloji, her brother Mkhulu Manyi Moloji (R) with an unidentified woman wearing a school uniform, posing for the camera.

In *Ke Lefa Laka: Her Story*, Lebohang Kganye works with her family photographic archive. Kganye reveals that the intention behind this project was to confront the grief of losing her mother in 2010. Kganye goes to the matriarchives hoping to find healing. She works within the concept of biomythographies to place herself in a past tense that has her mother in it. Her process involves black feminist strategies to not only survive the pain of loss but to move past it and create a joyful present. The images allow her to play with temporalities, where she places herself in a past and brings her mother into the present and having those two times to exist as one in a photograph.

Photographs therefore present us not just with the thereness of the object but a having-been-there, thus possessing the ability to present a past-present-future in a single image. Kganye, in speaking of the photomontages of herself with her mother in the same frame, affirms how she used these





Figure 5: Lebohang Kganye,  
*Ke Lefa Laka* 8 & 12.  
Courtesy of the artist.

matriarchives to create a break, an opportunity however small to transform using memory, “the photomontages became a substitute for the paucity of memory, a forged identification and imagined conversation” (Kganye, 2022: 2). Through the black feminist strategies that I have mentioned, Kganye was able to also transform and mature from a child who lost a mother figure to a woman who recognised her mother in the multiple facets that she embodied, a woman with her own identity and agency. This story is very common and is similar to how I found my family archive and began the challenge to surface it.

*Our Mother* (1998) is a title of an artwork by Senzeni Marasela where she uses the seShweshwe dress, pins, police baton and photocopies. Through this work Marasela introduces the idea of the dress as the marker of black women’s positionality in the family society, most iconic among widows who have

emerged from mourning and are ready to look for employment. Marasela serves as inspiration to the practice part of this research project. In *Waiting for Gebane* (2020), the narrative/experiences of Theodorah (Marasela's alter-ego) wearing the red seShweshwe dress are a marker of a very particular lived experience. She/they represent the experiences of black women who exist in the margins.

## **2.2. Maps in the displacement of black families**

In my studio practice I work with various maps of Soweto, and I am amazed at what these maps reveal but most importantly what they conceal. These maps do not show the displacement and surrounding gold mines of the Witwatersrand, the toxic dust from the mountain-like gold mine slag heaps in Diepkloof, which we mounted as kids not knowing the pain and the riches that lay beneath that earth. Through the juxtaposition of my mother's portraits and the maps of Soweto I grapple with the tension between the beautiful and ugly and how they co-exist in an uncomfortable harmony.

Maps are therefore selective representations of a place. Maps have for a long time been used as a tool of conquest silencing the violence in the displacement of people. I utilise maps as official documents in my studio practice to interrogate and embrace place/space figuratively. While maps amplify place, they also flatten the nuance and complexities of the spaces therein, as geographer Yi-Fu Tuan has written (1977). Place is the archive that carries the vital as well as the mundane. How are humans shaped by the geographies they inhabit, how can a location form and nurture one? I am interested in how maps are dated and labelled as an organised legible archive. My practice intervenes in showing up the illegibility of the map or what it hides.

Maps are politicised documents, representing power. Cartographers like photographers play a particular role in narrating certain histories related to space and time. Cartographers were in service of colonialists: Mapping, in service of colonialists, was part of prospecting and acquisition of land. These particular maps of Soweto were used by the apartheid government as tools of appropriation and racial zoning of land, exercising power over Black people and their mobility. I question objective, especially since the cartographer's perspective is reflected and every map bears distortion and omissions.





Figure 6: Geographies of interiority (Work in process, 2023)

In *Geographies of interiority* and *Black Utopias* (see figure 6), I explore photo assemblage and collage illuminate the relationship that people have to 'locations as physical archive'. I grapple with my mothers' and my experiences with Soweto as a place and space in time. I juxtapose images of these relationships in Soweto, where I grew up, with Peter Magubane's depictions of the same place/space in a different time. Through paper cut-outs with distinct silhouettes of people, I intentionally visit past lives or rework things back into the present in order to heal not only my wounds but my mother's as well. In 'Everything Generic' Ashraf Jamal in response to Matloga's work reminds us that "to be black is to be a collage of things" (Matloga, 2020: 32), a communal worship that is continuously travelling through varying timelines to tell a story of the imagination.

# 3 Archives in rhythm with materiality: family, popular, and official archives

Archive [Noun]

*Documents or records relating to the activities of a person, family, corporation, association, community, or nation. (Dictionary.com)*

As a young kid I was always looking forward to two things: my birthday celebrations and photo shoots. Both occasions involved dressing in my finest clothes or eating cake. Days before either of these occasions, my mother and grandmother would begin preparing, asking each other what I was going to wear, whether they were baking cakes in the main house or buying from Goodluck supermarket. The anticipation of these occasions showed the prospect of joy manifesting itself in real time. Memories of such days were captured by bhut' Jabu, the family photographer, or my mother, who is one of two family archivists known to me. The other family archivist is my late great aunt Gogose Letta Moloji. Both women have a long history of engaging in photographic and archival practices.

My mother kept photographs and all kinds of things ranging from receipts for appliances past their guarantee date, items of clothing that no longer fitted her but had sentimental value, birth, and death certificates of family members, to funeral programmes of loved ones. In short, she cherished and safely kept all sorts of izinto (sentimental things) that reminded her of occasions and people. I was never a fan of this archival doing and at a certain point in my young life viewed it as hoarding, its only years later that I started mildly appreciating it. There are reasons for the future that we find ourselves in the care of certain heirlooms and at times we find ourselves holding on for sentimental reasons and at other times not being able to rationalise the reasons of letting go. I argue that in these instances we are operating more on instinct than logic as our gut feeling alerts us that the object in our possession is important and plays a pivotal role in the future for those who are yet to come, this rationalising operates in the realm of biomythographies and the stories we tell / perform

to survive certain unfavourable conditions that then allows for the emergence of the next generation and the continuation of black life. This logic brings to mind words delivered by Milisuthando Bongela, as archived by Gabi Ngcobo on their Instagram page:

When thinking about the idea of care and what it might mean to apply this to artworks that span generations, themes, lived experiences, time, memories, knowledge systems and space. [...] What homework has history left us with? [...] What may our roles be as inheritors of the deeds of our ancestors? And to what end? Who will we become as a result of our endless homework? (Ngcobo, 2021: np.)

When my mom had married and gifted me a little sister and a stable home, a tv set we had watched for only a little over a year started acting up. Upon this occurrence, my mother went to the top of her wardrobe, retrieved the box with the purchase receipt inside, and packed the TV back into the well-preserved box it had arrived in. She left early the next morning with the broken appliance and returned in the evening with a newer working model.

My sister and I were both impressed and worried when she retold the story of how the box and kept receipt gave her the courage to resist when the salespeople at Joshua Doore refused to replace the appliance, unless she paid a difference to get a newer model. In a moment of defiance, she found a couch in the store and settled in, told them she would not leave until she spoke to a manager. She sat in until the store manager came out of their office, agreed she gets a new appliance at no extra charge. This encounter was a moment of learning for me and my sibling on the role of record keeping a different form of archiving. In certain instances the image by Mofokeng illustrated in figure 3 becomes a form of receipt of record keeping, when an image becomes proof of marriage in instances of women being denied inheritances when families in rural areas might dispute a marriage as Lobola wasn't paid and no customary marital rituals were observed by a couple who had met, married and remained in Johannesburg, while the wealth of the groom might be in the homelands and upon the death of the husband a wife might want to go to their marital home to retire and excess inheritances they might have also contributed towards.

Two decades later, being a mother, myself has somewhat changed my perspective, and I have come to realise that my mother, like most women in our family, simultaneously occupied a place in the

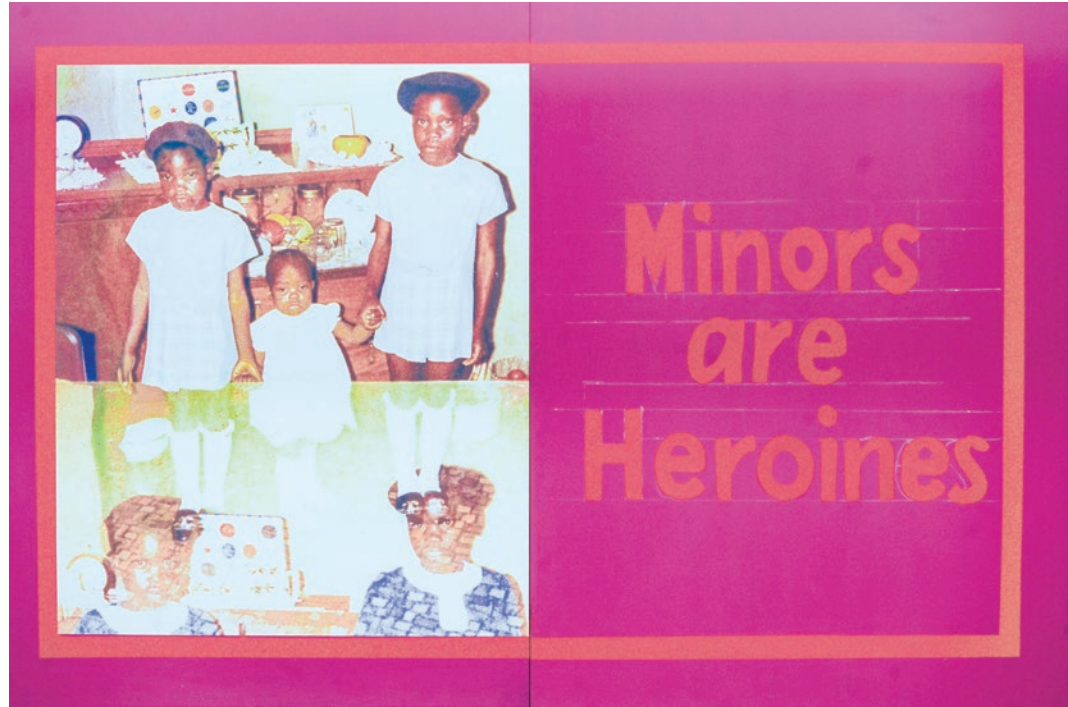


Figure 7: Portrait of ncane Puleng (R), Nobesotho (L) and Phikisile (C) Moloji.

past, present, and future. Their decision-making was informed by performing a desired future state, without being dictated to by other people's observation of present realities. In retrospect, outcomes of her caretaking rituals have become my compass to locating home through this research project. This primary research project involves working with family heirlooms and materials seen in the archive being worn from one generation to the next like the beret which is seen in the archives worn by women in my family.

The photographic archives being remixed and surfaced belonged to my mother Lizzie Maduna (née Moloji), my late grandmother Elizabeth Masesi Moloji (née Dlamini), my late great aunt, Goguse Letta Ntshangase (née Moloji). Through my practice, I continue in the established tradition sustained by my mothers, who were exceptional matriarchivists. They are the centre of this research, as Nombuso

Mathibela puts it eloquently in her response to Lungiswa Gqunta's *Sleep in Witness* exhibition: "They are the heliocentrics of this work. Everything orbits around this matriarchal lineage." Gqunta, 2023: 3)

Official/ state archives have for a long time been deemed more superior and important than family archives. Then the question we have to ask is, if history is about the future what role do these official archives play in the decolonial work so desperately yearned for in the university space? In my practice, I work with multiple archives. These archives can be categorised in three ways, as family archives, material archives and print media.

### **3.1. Family archives**

I surface and offer family archives to unsettle what has been historically offered as legitimate history that is white male-driven. I bring in images of my maternal family into the university space as a way of democratising access to these white spaces to question processes of legitimisation and to reconcile what Mbembe terms as a logic of self-affirmation and occupation which engages in the "pedagogy of presence" (Mbembe,2015). There are three private family archives which I am in conversation with. They each belonged to women in my family: my grandmother, my great aunt, and my mother. These family heirlooms come in the form of photographs, which are the point of departure for this work.

The family archive becomes a lifeboat, when the process calls for surfacing and assembling fragments of the past, amassing interior narratives of the untold as found in my family photographic archive, juxtaposed with the dynamic and published print media found in photobooks, magazines, and newspapers of yesteryears. The process that combines contrasting timescales and journeys and weaves elements from different horizons. This was a rather restless process, consisting of multiple chronologies layered in meaning.

Masesi Elizabeth Dlamini Moloji. Mma, my maternal grandmother. Mother of Lizzie Moloji née Maduna. This archive, Mma's archive, offers an opportunity for close reading and listening to the enchanting photographic world through which we view her complexities, as a care giver and a healer. My

grandmother cared for the children of our extended families and friends. These are the children whose mothers worked in the city of Johannesburg as factory workers, as domestic workers/ nannies inside large double-storey houses of the surrounding suburbs. It is said that she refused to work as a domestic worker, she preferred working temporarily at textile factories in downtown Jozi. In her photographs, she poses as a young mother with my Uncle Mbuti Moloi, her brother Mkhulu Manyi Moloi with an unidentified woman wearing a school uniform, (see figure 2), showing the multiple subjectivities that she embodied.

My grandmother was a city and township dweller in Johannesburg all her life, but she curated her time towards having profound encounters with the sea. In Figure 8 she is photographed at sea with her church family. Given the expired analogue film, the ocean appears red in colour. While the colour may be incidental, one can make inferences on the symbolism of leisure in the context of a 'bloody' and violent apartheid South Africa which is being defied by the women portrayed. I find this photo to be sublime, breath-taking, and wondrously compelling. In this image, Mma is seen as a liberated woman enjoying her freedom with loved ones.

There is a connection between water and the ethics of care. Access to water helps us partake in the rituals of self-care; from washing of self, cleaning our homes, as well as accessing leisure in bodies of water. Something interesting and otherworldly happens when water becomes a conduit for encounters with the ancestral realm. For example, when umuntu ephahla, they perform a ritual of establishing contact with those whom they share DNA with but have passed. This process which requires metsi which is water, molelo which is fire elements invoked in my artworks is also a performance of the future real conditionals enacted, centring belief in the unseen, thanks for blessings that are yet to arrive, and communication with audiences not seen.

My grandmother remains the embodiment of love and care epitomised. She took care of me from day one until her passing. She inspired me to live, encouraged me to work with my hands, taught me to grow vegetables and give back to the Earth. In her late 50s she owned her first piece of land in Snake Park, Block 8, Dobsonville, Soweto. The two of us lived happily, joined from time to time on rotation by a relative or two. It was a very peaceful phase of my life. Mma passed from this realm in 1996.





Figure 8: Masesi Moloji photographed at sea with her church family



Figure 9: A still image from the film *Metsi*

The second archive I work with belonged to Goguse Letta Moloi, my maternal great-aunt, the dream whisperer and catalyst of this research project. Her photographic archive includes studio and non-studio portraiture, dating from the 1950s to the 1990s. Her photographs come from a particular world/space/time that existed in the intersections of land struggles, exploited black labour, and urban migrations, while the creation of apartheid as a continuation of the colonial white supremacy was gaining momentum and power.

Through the archive of Goguse, I have become aware of the complexities of these intersections. Born in Alexander and having worked as a maid in Johannesburg most of her adult life, she was friends with all kinds of people in that city. Through collaborations, including with the photographer Sam Nzima, she documented herself and her friends in a dignified, uncoerced stylish manner.

Goguse's archive keeps testing my mental health and spiritual stamina, as it insists on steering me "to places where reality freely blends with unreality" – a sentiment expressed by photographer Santu Mofokeng when writing on a body of work titled *Chasing Shadows* (Mofokeng, 1997).

Some of these images have a stamp verification at the back, which I assume was used by photographers to either market their services or copyright their photos. Encountering these images became a turning point in my preliminary research and made me believe that there could be some fact to dreams. In her death, Goguse became my *idlozi elisebenzayo*, an ancestor who works and serves the living.

This further affirmed the importance and role of biomythographies as a legitimate and useful tool when engaging in research that requires decolonial approaches. Wanelisa Xaba (2022: 85) writes that "Archives are multifaceted and a dynamic inheritance from the ancestors that can be found in all spheres of life." She argues: "I am clear that when we invoke the archive a) we invoke our ancestors b) we as Africans belong to a spiritual reality regarding ancestry that predates colonialism c) this means that our academic work cannot dismiss ancestors as the living entities" (Xaba, 2022: 85-86). While Goguse lived and worked in the city of Johannesburg during racist apartheid, she found creative ways of subverting systems of white supremacy oppression. Despite the props, setting and clothing that might suggest these archives are a work of fiction, Goguse and her community of city workers and





Figure 10: Gogose Letta Moloji with friend at the makeshift studio at the Savoy Hotel, Hillbrow. Photos: Sam Nzima

slickers followed a tradition of “lounge photography,” resolute in creating their own dignified imagery outside an oppressive political narrative.

In surfacing the archives belonging to the women in my family, I hope to engage in the process of “honouring the powerful stories that lay beneath the violence” (Xaba, 2022: 85). I am also of the belief that as a creative I am accountable to my ancestors as well as my children and their children who are yet to be born. It is my duty to create work consonant with biomythographies and does not negate me as a complete being who exists not only in the physical, intellectual but as well as an emotional and spiritual being. In surfacing my family archive I become intentional in the undoing of the epistemic erasure of our ancestors.

### 3.2. Dress as material archive: from gymslip to gymdress

The third (of these three) family archives is that of Lizzie Moloji nee Maduna, my mother and grandmother's lastborn child, raised by Goguse, who inherited many more of her traits than she would like to believe. My mother's photographic archive was created in Orlando East Soweto (circa 1974-1980). In these images, my mother is wearing her school uniform and poses in a variety of locations, including inside Orlando Stadium, which is literally next to Selelekela Secondary the high school she attended in Orlando East, Soweto.

In a reflective conversation with my mother, it is evident that the level of violence that was a daily occurrence in their lives as students in the townships of South Africa has had a major impact on them, and still has a profound effect on them as adults and parents. Wearing the gym dress meant that one became a target of the security police who were always roaming the township in the yellow mellow or the hippo formally known as the casspir. However, through photography my mother subverted the reality of the dress and made it a symbol of pride, of acquiring education, and of a better future for generations to come. In the work *Bana ba sikolo baraloka meropa*, I work with a mixture of biomythographies and the grammar of black futurities, where I envision spaces of education as inclusive, where everyone's voice matters and contributes towards knowledge production.

I encountered the gym-dress, very early on in my life, in grade one to be specific. It is important to note how over the years this dress made from a blend of wool and polyester, continuously evolved from a symbol of education as a tool for liberation in the 1950's, representing an era of self-determination as a direct outcome of the consciousness raising work being run by education activists and labour unions located and working within black communities across south Africa, to the student led revolt of students of 1976 and the decade that followed.

I also quickly learnt that how I looked in that dress reflected my family status and the state of mind of my parents. Dress stories offer autobiographical opportunities for narratives in which an item of clothing becomes a key organising feature for a detailed account of life events (Weber & Mitchell, 2004: 256). It is more than just a dress, but rather a representation of an organising feature for womxn's oral and written stories, artworks, workshops, and theory development.



Figure 11: My mother in the act of performing future real conditionals and subverting an oppressive bantu education system.



Figure 12: Installation shot of *Gymslip blues*, Lerato Maduna 2023, size: variable.

The gym dress, which was formerly known as the gymslip, has a long colonial history, with its origins in Britain where it was worn as sportswear for girls, later was uniform, and eventually found its way to south African township schools. This uniform was used as a marker of class and a determinant for future class positioning. In township schools, young black kids were trained to be servants of white capitalism, cheap obedient labour to clean, cook, garden and care for white babies. Wherever you may be in south Africa that black gym-dress immediately locates the wearer to the margins. The black dress code with multi coloured belts as bonds that tie us to a reality prechosen for us.

An internet deep dive reveals that gym slips were worn by gymnasts, track, and field athletes from the 1880s to the 1920s, as they were more mobile than traditional female attire, but still modest enough to keep the underwear hidden during sporting activity. However, this modest attire, gymslips were worn strictly out of public view. The introduction of the gymslip as female athletic wear is credited to Mary Tait, a student of Martina Bergman-Österberg, a pioneer of women's physical education in Britain (Wikipedia,2023)

In 1988 the same dress and its narratives were co-opted and exploited by Mbongeni Ngema in the musical stage play titled *Sarafina*. The concept and script for the stage play is alleged to have been created by artist Tu Nokwe. Ngema has neither confirmed nor denied the allegations. In 1992 Ngema teamed up with William Nicholson and adapted the play into a screenplay and Hollywood blockbuster directed by Darrell Roodt.

This release exposed the 1990's youth to the invisible oppressions they felt but could never articulate, issues of a curriculum they could not relate to and the side-lining of their mother tongues as a language of knowledge. The Sarafina spirit took over townships with kids performing the dances and songs from the movie. I believe that this pop culture commercialising of real struggles inadvertently (or maybe by design) killed momentum for improving the quality of education in township schools. Financially able families (the haves) took their children to former whites-only school (known as Model-C) whereas the have notes were stuck with deteriorating schools in the townships.





Figure 13: The Hyde Grammar School netball team, 1949, wearing gymslips (Manchester, U.K.). Photo: Wikipedia



Figure 14: Scenes from Sarafina! a 1992 musical drama film based on Mbongeni Ngema's 1987 musical of the same name. The film was directed by Darrell Roodt and written by Ngema and William Nicholson. Photo: Times Live.

The children could feel and see that something was not right at school, but they could not identify with the struggles their parents faced as they felt they were liberated; they wore a different uniform and therefore could not easily identify the structural inequalities that remained in place, revealing the complexities of the contested semiotics of this specific dress.

This dress, which was always attached to athletics, might have begun with white girls running in the sports fields of Britain but it ended with black girls running away from bullets in the dusty townships of south Africa.

In conversations with my daughter I am constantly working on helping her make the link between bantu education system and the struggles she faces today in the classroom. In 2020 we struggled to find a high school which did not have Afrikaans compulsory 2<sup>nd</sup> language. Throughout her primary school she was forced to engage in a language she was not familiar with and struggle with a policy that allowed schools to fail students who did not pass Afrikaans. I was heartbroken watching my daughter face the same struggles in the classroom faced my mother and myself. As a parent I was amazed at how the curriculum had not evolved in more that 50 years, and how we had inherited a system that did not deem black children as more than just bodies being prepared for white servitude and cheap labour to racist capitalist institutions.

This exploitation is seen by many as an early warning sign of the transformational failures that continue to haunt the ANC led administration that began in the 1990's. It is remarkable how this dress has survived systematic erasure since it evolved to embody both the historical and the contemporary challenges faced by institutions of basic and higher education, with the majority of rural and urban township children from low-income households being the most affected.

The powerful meaning of the gym dress acquired decades before had been diffused, but the target on the backs of black children never left. Township schools became even less funded, and the ones that survived the system had to come from homes that gave the support, many families took their children to former whites only schools and private schools termed model C schools and all that remained was the Sarafina narrative.





Figure 15: A portrait of my daughter who represents the despondence of Gen Z. Lerato Maduna, 2022, size 200cm x 120cm

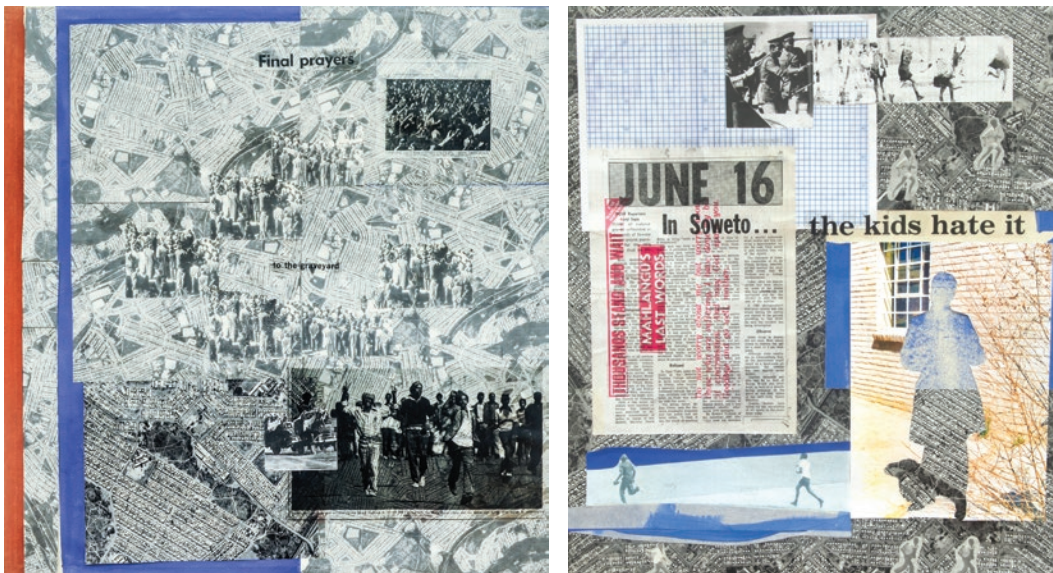


Figure 16: *Soweto blues*, size 80x80cm (each), Lerato Maduna, 2023.

*Gymslip blues*, speaks to how south Africa in its varied facets of life , has adopted western culture and has tried to justify its place in our daily life. The symbol of the gymslip has for long been viewed as a marker of black womanhood and education, this can be extended to our religious systems as well. In my installation work I work with these markers, which can also be found in my family archive such as the gymslip and gymdress and the beret as Bherethe. I utilise these material to invoke conversations around institutions that we as black people have come to place our faith in, like the church and schools, asking whether we have transformed these spaces or if they have colonised us and our identities to victims of modernisation.

### 3.3. Print Media archives

In contrast my mother's archive leads me to a popular body of work that I find myself thinking through it in my research and studio practice. The book *Soweto* with text by Marshall Lee and photographs by Peter Magubane, which first appeared in the Daily Mail newspaper and was later published in this book.

The cover of *Soweto* (Figure 17) is a black-and-white portrait of many children in their school uniform looking up as if the photographer was flying above them as they gathered in the collective spirit of defiance. I have seen this image many times, and for the first time during this research upon close study, I see on the foreground towards the bottom right of the image an old woman amongst the kids, wearing a



Figure 17: Cover of the Peter Magubane book *Soweto*, 1978.



black hat looking straight into the camera and standing directly behind a young girl wearing a gymdress, it looks as if this image of the old lady was photoshopped onto this black and white image, her presence ethereal as if from another realm only present as an ancestor, a guide protecting this young women from what lay ahead. This is the work of Peter Zwelibanzi Magubane, who is described in the author’s biography as “a township folk hero, an extraordinary black cavalier of photography.” (Magubane and Lee, 1978).

The first image one sees as they open the book is a portrait of Magubane on the dust jacket sleeve. This is followed by a double page spread showing an aerial view of Soweto, this image, and the thought of the place itself evokes a quote by Michael Sheringham, cited by Ric Kasini Kadour in a webinar titled ‘Artists in the Archive: Collage and Place as Archive’:

Most of us live fragmented lives and are part of many mini communities, no one knows us as a whole, the incomplete self longs for the fragments to be bought together, and this cannot be done without a context, a place. (Henry Sheldon Museum, 2023)

The effects of bantu education and capitalism has taught black people to not show up fully as themselves, but to always have facades that help them survive violent institutions of prayer, education, and commerce.<sup>4</sup> As a result, there is a bipolar we are living through as a country aided and encouraged by social media. This fragmentation makes it even harder for communities to confront and deal with their precarious lives. The soil and the rivers of Soweto have witnessed and tasted too much blood, the land as archive and witness holds the history of the people and keeps the score of their scars. The land of Soweto can be compared to an old person that death will not visit, who has felt and seen too much unjustified deaths to last many lifetimes. Magubane dedicates the book to his parents Wilhelmina and Isaac, who sadly never lived long to witness his “photographic escapades” (Magubane and Lee, 1978: 4). He further dedicates it to Nomzamo and her family, who we know to be uMama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.<sup>5</sup>

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4. Bantu education was the apartheid state’s system for schooling black children to try make black children feel inferior to a minority white population and to only develop skills for particular types of labour. It came into effect with the Bantu Education Act 1953 (South Africa History Archive, 2023).

5. There are least five photos of uMama Winnie made by Magubane that feature in the book: with family, at a funeral (with fist raised), singing at church, and at work at a desk with typewriter and a book.

As one turns the page, the second image one witnesses depicts wrinkly hands holding thread and needle, hands that like the land have protected the eyes from seeing the unforgettable and traumatising. Hands that have held and comforted, sewed together an existence in dire situations. This image echoes the true popular adage that refers to the body as a living archive that carries memory and trauma as well as the proof of the resilience that is the human spirit. These hands that are in sharp focus on the foreground and the image protected in its out-of-focus presence remind me of the knowledge carried by the vessels of history that are the township elders who pass our history orally as they pass on heirlooms to their grandchildren to treasure for the next generations.

The work of Magubane comes to us as material culture that holds the collective stories of the past and offers me an opportunity to unpack these fragments of the past to build narratives. Even though I remain critical of this documentary photographer, who had access to both the margins and the centre, I am sceptical of how he was embraced by the apartheid white media and given awards, at a time when his peers had to go into exile or publish under pseudonyms. Magubane, who owned shops and properties in my neighbourhood of Orlando East, was part of an elite and according to my mother many people in the township grew weary of his presence and operations, as they believed he benefited from their collective misery.

### **3.4. Self-portraiture: Collage as a continuous subversive sequence**

For more than two years of my practice I avoided collage, instead I was occupied with the process of carving out a new context for the reimagined fragments of the material worlds of these matriarchives. Instead I ended with faceless figures that came with the heavy baggage of izinto as in more things. When I finally embraced collage I became aware of the possibilities of introspection that came with this medium. It allowed me to retrospectively represent my mother and her audacious self-possession, where she used biomythographies to participate in the performance of future real conditionals, through her creative endeavours I am able to be in dialogue with my ancestors and my children's children.

The moment I realised the gift of collage that went in tandem with the surfacing of these matriarchives, I began to experience an unusual kind of freedom and assurance that I have never felt before in this

art-making process. These archival materials have the patience of grazers, they have patiently waited and survived decades of neglect and of not being seen. The urgency/necessity of coming face-to-face with myself was the work that was required.

Luyanda Mpangele responding to the artworks of Neo Matloga's offering titled *Back of the Moon* which speaks of the process of collage painting as an opportunity for restorative nostalgia (Matloga, 2020:13), for us to look back with the intention of healing wounds of the past.<sup>6</sup> Mpangele offers 'front of the eye' as a tool to experience the result of collage as a perfect future conditional state as presented by Campt's who gives the tools for articulating the power of remembering the art of living the envisioned future now. These two concepts together, side by side, offer a compass of navigating the process of making and writing in the context of academia.

Collage requires an obsession with the preoccupation of forming new narratives by cutting and building a "tense of anteriority" (Matloga, 2020:13) a world occupied by Neo Matloga's *Back of the Moon* and Nathaniel Mary Quinn's *This Is Life* who share this universe with Lebohang Kganye's *Lefa Laka* and Frida Orupabo's *I've been here for days*. A space that insists on manifesting life despite the socio political make-up of the exterior world.

This reiterates the importance of working with other bodies of archives and in my practice I do so with Magubane's photographs as well as statistical information and graphs on the community of Soweto in the 1970s. In *Black Utopias* (Figure 18) I explore 'restorative nostalgia' to balance the pull and push factors between untamed memory, wild imagination and fantasy. These figures own their blackness by sheer will and their existence in imagined scenes. They are a protest against erasure and exist in the real and the imagined. In a conversation with Sisipho Ngodwana and Dineo Diphofa, Matloga outlines the levels a collage can go in, to embody what I assert (after Campt) is the perfect future conditional state. Matloga is "reminiscing about an imagined place and time, a past that becomes present behind the moon." (Matloga, 2020: 35).

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6. The going back into the imagined past to fill in gaps, build bridges and pave the way for the perfect future conditional state as collage: Neo Matloga on *Back of the Moon* (2020).



Figure 18: *Black Utopias* (work in Process 2023)

Collage can be utilised as a cathartic process concerned with the reflective and restorative forms of nostalgia that should not be erased or forgotten. I hope through my art to do this by acknowledging the past and by remixing and presenting it through a different lens.

Through *Geographies of Interiority* and *Black Utopias* I present ongoing records of previous attempts, acknowledging the tenacity required in trying and failing, grasping the lessons that are in those failures, finding the spirit to continue foraging both the familiar and foreign archival forests, on a quest to deal and build. These fragments of a series are recognised by Jamal quoting Michael Ondaatje in *Divisadero*, (2007) saying "Everything is collage, even in genetics. There is a hidden and overt presence of others in us, even those we have known briefly." (Matloga, 2020: 60). When life converges, parts of our members regroup and everything reflects upon the other. The process allows for a catalyst of embracing the perfect future conditional state by remembering that everything occurs in the present.



# 4 The performance of future real conditionals

## 4.1. Mixed media and installations:

There are hanging sculpture works that include sticks that are covered in school belts, which are an element of the school uniform that is worn in township schools. These belts are the only differentiating marker which then help locate the school one attends. I have mostly worked with the sky blue and yellow belt from Selelekela High School.

A second sculptural work is a figure wearing berets and a hand-beaded tailcoat which alludes to the colonial influence in our lives and cultures, as well as a multi-collar school shirt. The berets are multicoloured, linking them to a range of different institutions that black women subscribe to, such churches, stokvel, schools, and political parties. This figure also wears a skirt made from the gym dress.

This figure stands in a home environment with the checkered floor. There are elements in this space that depict the various cultural markers of living in a black township and sentimental objects that speak to memories and fantasies of the universes of my childhood. The envisioned set-up is that the gallery space will be converted into a collaged and juxtaposed image of influences from the past, present, and imagined future homes. Mixed media is a thread that runs through every attempt at manifesting art.

Installation plays a unifying and intersectional component of the world of these artworks, which have elements of home, archive, earth, water, trees, comfort and terror, threads connecting materials like dress, history, and sound.

## 4.2. Feeling through Samson Kambalu's Nyau Cinema with emphasis on rule number 4

In my art making process, I have also included motion picture as a medium to express some of the ideas I am attempting to communicate or birth. This process in its nature is a team exercise.

In my film-making practice I have attempted to create films that speak to elements of nature in relation to humans. I learned while producing these video works the importance of working in rhythm with nature, to anticipate favourable conditions but never to have expectations. And in my film making process I took the same approach with the natural elements in spaces like Soweto, where there is this notion of a township that has very little of nature to offer, but just an extension of a concrete jungle. I have created four video works provisionally titled *Moya*, *Molelo*, *Mobo*, and *Metsi* utilising film-making techniques offered by Kambalu.

During the production phase of making these films, I was inspired by the 10 rules Kambalu offers as guided meditation to practice when navigating the film making process so I decided to devise my own (Kambalu, 2015: 3). Nyau cinema as devised by Kambalu offers space for play in and with community; “film becomes a way of taking refuge from the limitations and covenants of everyday life.” (Kambalu, 2015) The rules or guidelines I devised are:

1. In the spirit of excess, if you must, multiply the minute in rule 1, four times. So, each film must be no longer than four minutes.
2. Look for moments in the environment that echo the techniques of chiaroscuro filmmaking. i.e., high contrast.
3. The importance of collaborative approaches throughout the filmmaking process cannot be over emphasised. As this allows for as many people to receive the gift of being playfully reconceived as part of the larger scheme of things.
4. Have fun devising scenes and actions that blur memory and fantasy.

I created performance movement for these films based on stretch, breath, and play and workshopped them with the performers with the assistance of Chuma Sopotela. Adhering and engaging the ten rules of Nyau Cinema, we collaborated with students from the Sakhile Music and Dance Academy, a dance crew from Diepkloof who helped in the process of breathing narratives, and representations of the geography onto film. The wardrobe operates as a continuing motif that connects the worlds of my studio practise, as the uniform worn by characters and performers adheres to Rule 5 of Nyau’s “costume from everyday life” (Kambalu, 2015: 3).

The first film is provisionally titled *Moya*. It refers to air and the sky above, but on a deeper level it also speaks to the mechanisms of the spirit world that affect the human in the physical world. In this video work, the characters are reaching for the sky with a motion which speaks to moments of otherworldly, transgressive playfulness that can possess one.

Through playing mbamparo, the trampoline, a game that I was obsessed with as a teenager one jumps into the sky, this act requires courage to face one's anxieties associated with falling. Through mbamparo all these fears are temporarily suspended and replaced with the bliss of flight, the poetry of equally embracing ascension and freefall. The music for this film is a song called African Songbird by Sathima Bea Benjamin mixed with an excerpt from a live performance by Don Cherry, Johnny Dyani, Abdullah Ibrahim, and Nana Vasconcelos.

The beautiful sight of these super humans rigorously taking off and effortlessly flying across the blue sky becomes an act of maximising their potential. This work alludes to the possibility of surviving the oppressions in which we have been systematically placed. I splice this footage, filmed in Soweto with a 1975 film by Hugh Miles titled *Flight for survival: the migration of birds*. This documentary film shows how birds travel continents for their survival, how they can be trapped, tagged and released under surveillance for scientific research. Nonetheless this does not stop these global citizens from crossing our imaginary borders, following the sun in the quest for survival.



Figure 19: Scenes from *Moya*, the film process



The second film is provisionally titled *Mobu*, a video work that speaks of the earth, filmed on the land located between Orlando East and Diepkloof Zone 2, both my childhood homes. This playground connects two neighbourhoods that represent home, early childhood and teenage childhood memories of play, fights, and flights. Late evenings running across this short path to Obakeng's house, my high school best friend. We used to walk across these fields high as kites, paranoid from the weed we loved to smoke at the back of her house, while her mom worked the night shift at Baragwanath hospital.

The underlying tone of *Mobu* hums in harmony with experiences of the characters and motifs found in Buhlebezwe Siwani's work titled *Amahubo*. Although there are visual similarities between these two films, such as the use of drone footage to show people performing choreographed movement on red soil, there are clear differences that speak to the black female experience. In my work I utilise the homogeneous township school uniform, a motif that runs across all the films and the archives I work with. In contrast Siwani's *Amahubo* leans on the church uniform of amazayoni. Both these works speak to the institutional spaces where black women may find or lose their power.

I reference these grounds as I have a lifelong relationship to the space where this film was shot; my mothers walked this exact piece of earth longer than I have, and when I speak of home in its complex and layered meaning, I refer to this earth. I returned home to remember how to inhale familiar communal breath. I went home to remember the rush and tales from continuous time, carried in the veins of this land that has felt



Figure 20: Scenes from *Mobu*, the film process

the heartbeats of aspiring and experienced soccer players, runners, lovers, families, and friendships walking miles while firmly rooted to these burnt umber lands.

*Metsi* as a video work echoes in part what Koleka Putuma speaks to in her poem titled water when she writes:

The elders forbid us as if the ocean has food poisoning.  
I often wonder why I feel as if I am drowning every time, I look out into the sea,  
this and feeling incredibly small.  
[...] They mock us  
for not being able to throw ourselves into something that was instrumental in  
trying to execute our extinction. (Putuma, 2017: 96-97)

We go to the water for cleansing and healing, the waters have become muddy and tainted as many people flock to the water to cleanse their sins. This piece is a critique of the exploitation of black bodies in the name of religion. Women of all ages go to these waters seeking healing from the daily traumas they face, but instead of renewing and quenching their thirsts, this is where they meet their deaths.

*Molelo*, on the other hand, is a film that speaks of how we can renew our faith in the future to keep our inner ambers dancing in believing the unseen, a call on practicing the grammar of future real conditionals. Both these films are spliced with archival footage of Soweto. My film making process included spending time at western cape archives in Cape Town looking for relevant material. The films I worked with are *Soweto, Johannesburg* directed by Sven Persson and *A place called Soweto* directed by David Oostuizen, this 16mm film footage had to be digitised. Scenes from two films shot in Soweto about the daily life and characters living in the townships. A young Credo Mutwa is filmed in his home in Diepkloof zone 3 speaking on spirituality and healing faith.

The soundtracks for *Mobu*, *Metsi* and *Molelo* feature remixes of music composed by Malcolm Jiyane and a band comprising of Ariel Zamonsky on bass, Gontse Makene on Percussion, Amokelani on vocals. I worked with this music as it is full of spirit and space. The original music was composed as a score for *Uprize!* a documentary film by Sifiso Khanyile (2017) which critiques the system of bantu education and is dedicated to the Soweto youth of 1976.



Figure 21: Screen shots from *Molelo*



Figure 22: Installation view of *Induku*, size: various, Lerato Maduna, 2023.



# Conclusion

I come to the end of this research project acutely aware of the endless struggles black women face for their human rights and dignity. I personally feel an endless exhaustion oozing out of my bones. Despite all this, I am encouraged to continue in the quest of devising and finding strategies for a dignified life; even after all the suffering, I am resolute in this mission. Nkule Mabaso, in the curator's note of the exhibition titled *Tell Freedom*, writes of these continuing spectacles of aggressions targeted towards black women that never cease, the:

onslaught of an unequal economic system in South Africa, black women do not enjoy their constitutional rights, including the rights to land, housing, health, education, water, and safety and security to their fullest possible extent, socioeconomic indicators of inequality evidence this. (Mabaso, 2018: 10)

Because my mothers knew that the fight for our survival was an ongoing spiritual warfare, they knew in the 1940s already that this war was in its infancy. With their forward thinking, they developed this plan of planting hope that can be reaped and re-sown by their future daughters. Apartheid was just a glimpse of what was to come in the future, and the only hope for our survival was not embedded exclusively in our intelligence but in our creativity, finding artistic ways we could keep the machines of hope production churning for survival.

Creativity and art are some of the ways in which we can continue to subvert the institutions of oppression. I now know that I have the power to influence my reality with thought, as delusional as that sounds, I truly believe thought is creative. This body of work I have created is a seed that will meet its audience in the future. I capsule and bury this seed with the belief that it will reach the future having flowered and ready to be reaped by the intended/anticipated audience.

I am not certain of a peaceful and prosperous future for all, based on the continuous experiences based on the positionality I share with Mabaso of being women and black finding oneself living in a space she describes as being between a list of:

disclaimers and dissatisfactions, lies the accumulation of seemingly petty experiences of disrespect, humiliations, rejections, and hostilities that I must fight on a daily basis without respite. It is a constant assault, an unbaiting falling through the cracks of social and legal protections through intersecting negative constructs and phenomena, the individual agents of racism, a continuous walking into concrete institutional walls and frankly I, collectively, am tired. (Mabaso, 2018: 11)

With this in mind, I know my children will need me when I am gone. Therefore, I am intentionally participating in this ritual of future real conditionals to immortalise myself and my mother's in these archives. I marvel at the vision of my children's children reading the contents, receiving the tools and proceed in cultivating and understanding the assignment.



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