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Conversations With My Father: On Isithakazelo, Meadowlands And Acts Of Self-Writing

by Tsholofelo Moche

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master in Arts (Fine Art)

Supervisor: Dorothee Kreutzfeldt

Date Submitted: 04 May 2020

Declaration

I declare this research report as my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Fine Arts by research in the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Tsholofelo Moche

04 May 2020

Acknowledgements:

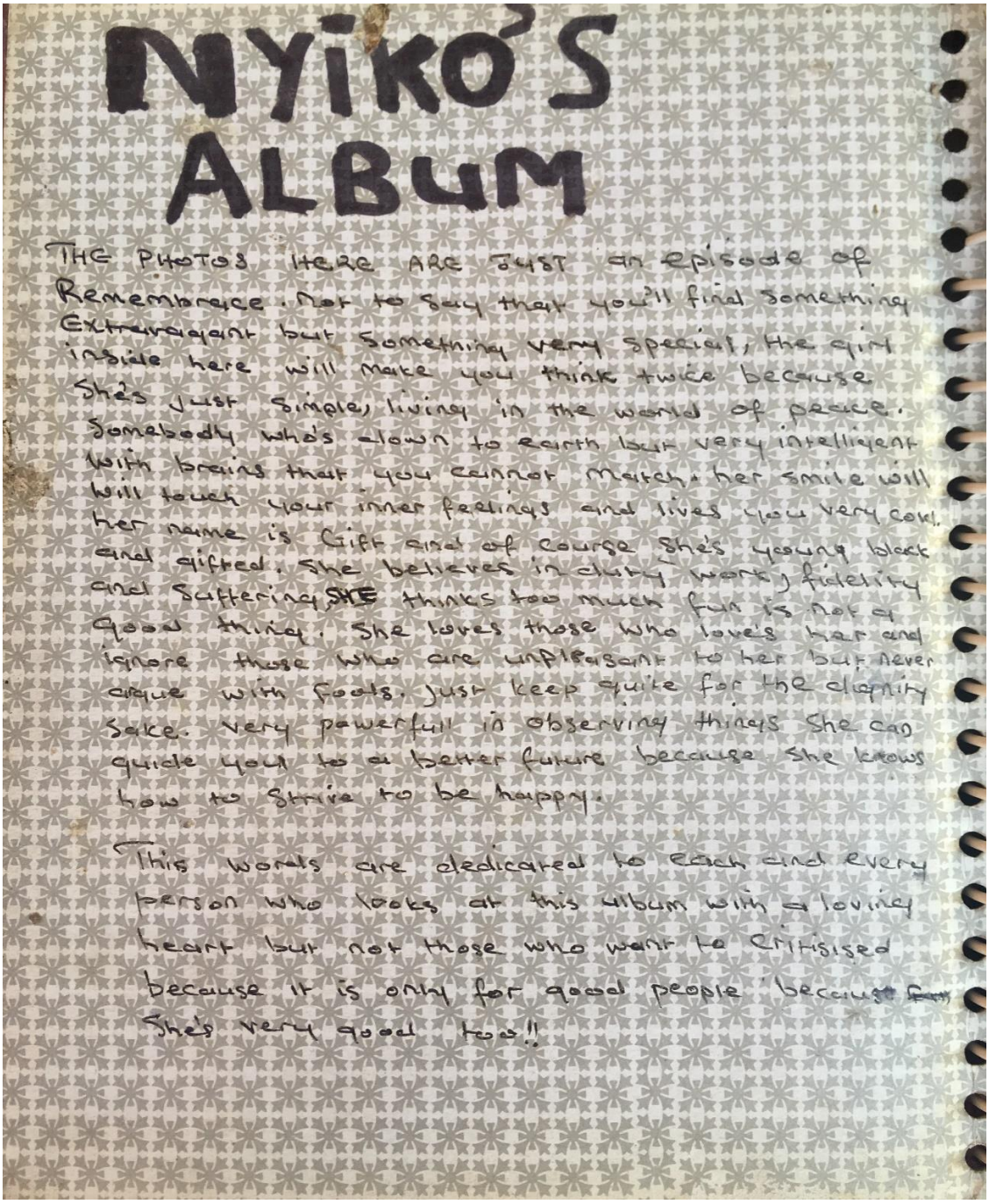
I wish to express profound gratitude to my supervisor, Dorothee Kreutzfeldt, for guiding me through the process of creating this dissertation. Ke lakatsa go fetisa ditebogo to mantja aka 4 ho nkgothatsa, mense ba dladleng whom, entleng le dithapelo, thuso, go beha pelo skotlong, dikeletso, hierso le daarso, this project would not have been completed.

This project serves as a supplement to our collective efforts to fill in the silences of our past with our own hopes, wishes and fantasies.

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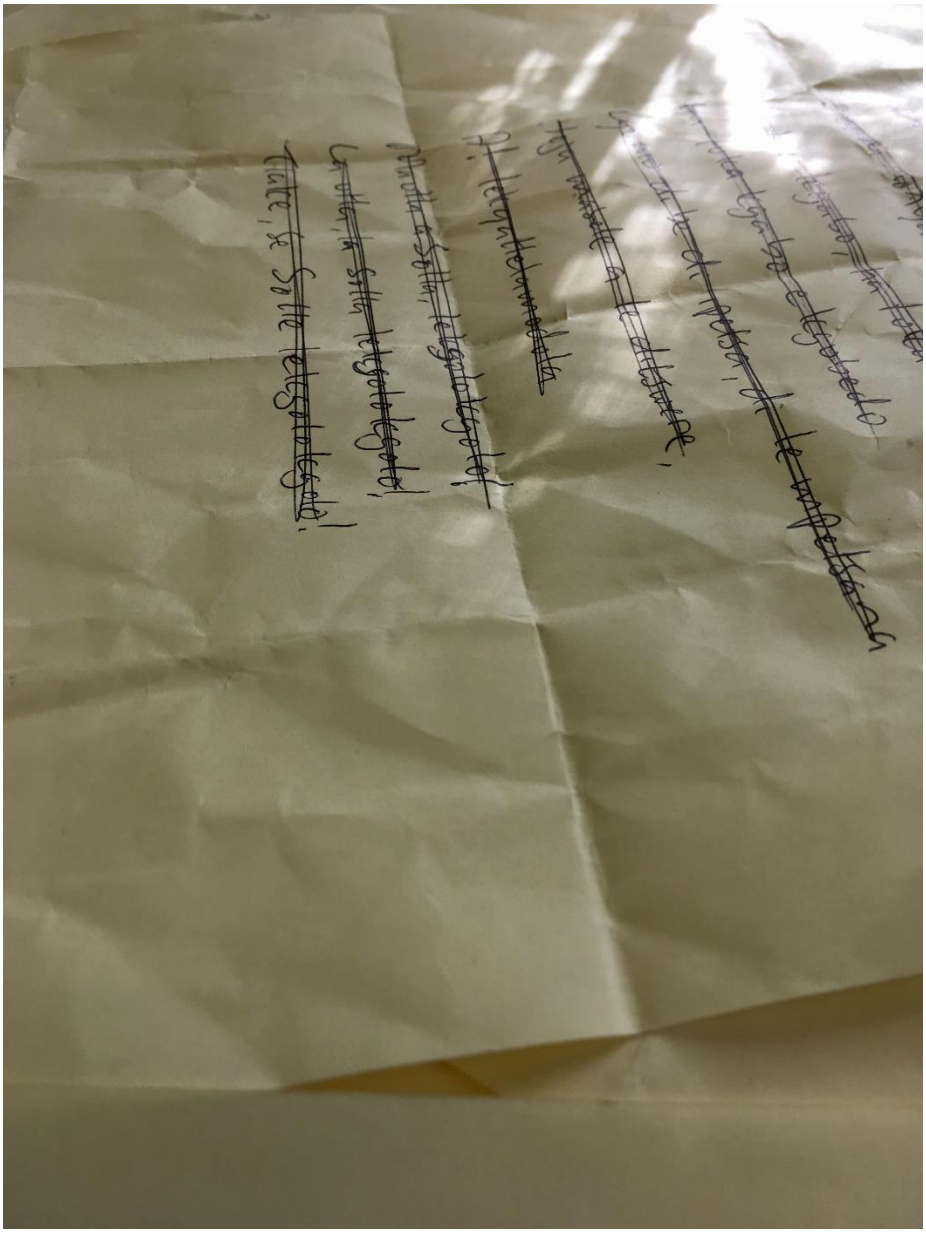
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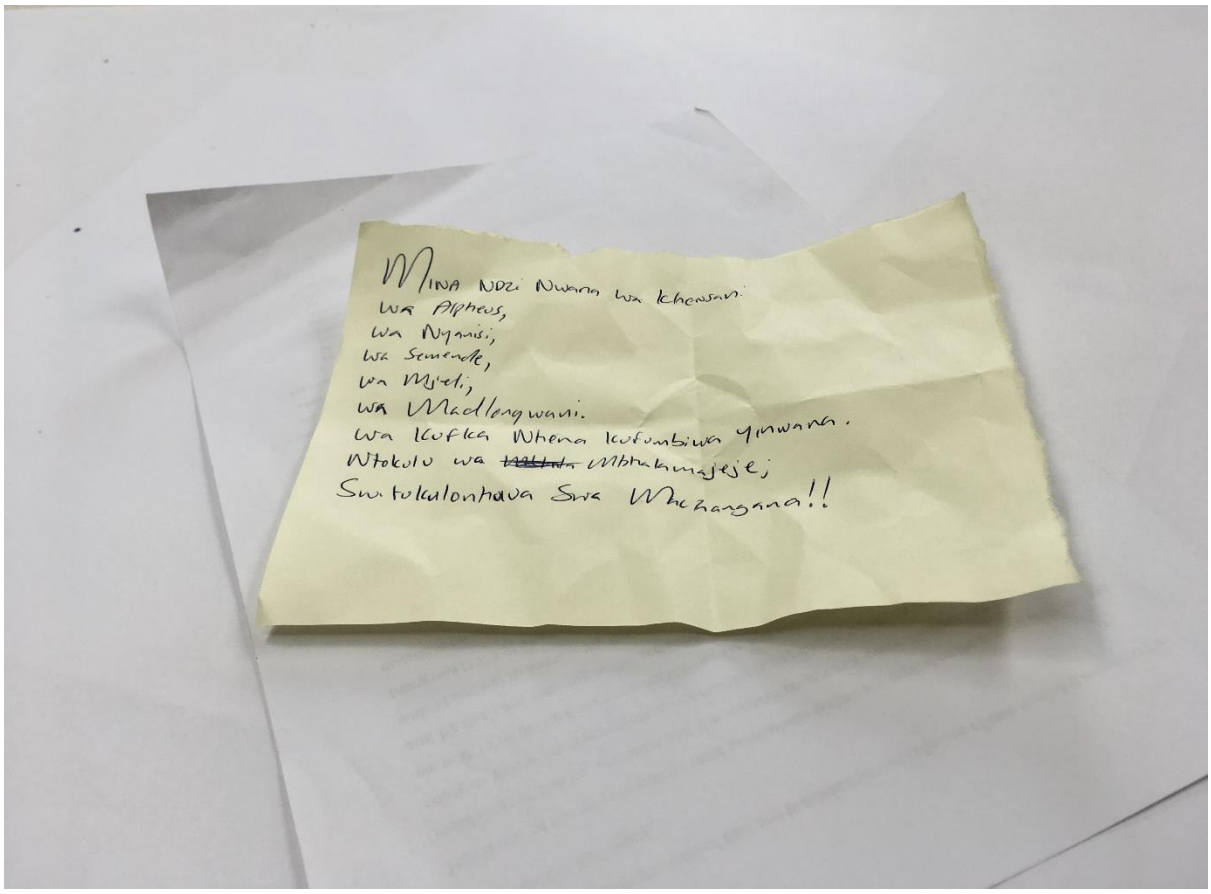
Tinyinko, 2019



Re kopa tsela (show us the way), 2020.



Deculturations, 2019.



Acculturations, 2019.

Abstract

The research reflects on an ongoing conversation between me and my father on isithakazelo, growing up in Meadowlands and how our understanding of these cultural contingencies should be negotiated as part of my self-writing.

The conversations begin with a moment when my father gave me a piece of paper with isithakazelo written on it. The purpose of this was to introduce me to a family lineage which pays homage to my ancestry as practiced and preserved from my father's side of the family. In so doing, isithakazelo becomes a proposition or a mould from which my identity should be cast and understood. As a person who was raised from my mother's side of the family, and has lived most of my life in a township that is comprised of different, and sometimes contradictory cultural practices, my father's proposition presented an outlook which resulted in me being oppositional to some of his views.

In an attempt to get a better sense of both our perspectives on identity, the research places itself at the center of the conversation; as a mediator trying to resolve conflicting views to the question: upon which narratives from our family history should we cast our identity?

As a way of facilitating interaction between our views, the research adopts Gog' Thandah Mathonsi's description of 'ukuphahla' as part of the evaluative process. This idea is further carried into the practical component of the research where it is used as a concept in creating my body of artwork.

Ere Ke Ho Behe Stasie (by way of introduction)



In Conversation, 2019.

Mina ndzi nwana wa Khensani wa Alpheus wa Nyanisi wa Semende wa Mjeli wa Mandlogwani wa kufka Nhena kufumbiwa yinwana ntokulu wa Mbhalamajeje. Switukulonhuva swa Machangana!

A few years ago, my father handed my brother and I a piece of paper with these words written on it. The intent behind my father's gesture was to introduce us to a summarized version of our *isithakazelo* and begin the process of changing my surname from Moche to Mahlaela. Despite his efforts to acquaint me with my family's history and for us to share a last name, I contemplated this process and asked the following questions: What is in a name? And if 'identity' is the readily available answer, does this mean that my identity is a given; to be born into it, to accept it and to eventually become it, from the cradle to the grave? Considering my lived experiences in Meadowlands and other socio-cultural settings, I perceived my father's propositions as not a complete representation but rather part of who I am and who I may become.

Tsonga names and especially those preserved in the praise of isithakazelo bestow identity which is historical and cultural in their meaning. History is elucidated by the manner in which it unpacks an ancestral linage and pays homage to my forbearers, and their cultural significance is exemplified by relating my family's name with those of other families, thus locating us as part of the Mbalamajeje clan within the Tsonga indigenous group. In asserting isithakazelo, the past is not only made visible but is also rendered alive as it is woven into the present in an attempt to re-name and acculturate me with pride of who I am, the meaning of my existence, my value systems and my culture. Isithakazelo not only acculturates me as Mahlaela, it also shifts my perspectives from the socio-cultural, religious and political contexts that have informed my identity and identification thus far. To state it differently, isithakazelo abstracts me from the contexts in which meaningful accounts of my emotional experience and my identity as Tsholofelo Moche were formed, and thus subordinates them to my father's ideological accounts of how identity politics are understood and played out. In this sense, isithakazelo can be argued as a kind of stimulus response which, in varying ways, and depending on where one finds himself, forms a rhetoric signifying that my sense of self is informed by processes that are both outside of my consciousness and within the scripting of generations inside of it. In this way, the person I am exists in relation to both my ancestors as well as the contexts in which their identities were fashioned or claimed.

Initially I was hesitant of my father's perspective. I was hesitant because I felt his understanding of identity politics to be similar with what Philosopher and Cultural Analyst, Jay Ciaffia describes as 'cultural revivalism' (2008, p. 121). What I mean by this is that, in communities that prefer a patriarchal view on identity such as ooMbalamajeje, identity is derived from shared characteristics and belief systems such as race, ethnicity, gender and even religious sensibilities. However, my lived experiences in Meadowlands and similar communities gave me a more blended outlook on identity politics. Instead, I shared sentiments with literary scholar and philosopher Glen Ward's explanations of a 'Modern Identity' when suggesting that in a contemporary context, one's identity is informed by socio-cultural, religious and political allegiances that are outside of a shared race, ethnicity or gender group (2001, p. 119). This perspective made me think of my father's views as being contracted; as though they represented one aspect of a broad and unfolding narrative on how one negotiates value in his own terms. I also felt the nature of our conversation to resemble that moment when a father passes down a family lineage to his children. And as someone who was raised from my mother's side of the family, I felt his understanding overlooked the active role that her family played in raising us. I believe that if names are to form a significant part in bestowing an identity which is historical, cultural and aspirational in their meaning, then one has to acknowledge the names and naming process underwent from my mother's side of the family.

For instance, my name was given to me by my grandmother following a dream she had months before my mother gave birth to me. I have always had a back and forth relationship with the name because it is mostly synonymous with a girl child. This was not made easy by the fact that there were two girls from our street who were also named Tsholofelo. With time my curiosity in learning more on how the name came about opened me to another world. My grandmother was, as I assume elderly people in other families to be when relaying personal or sensitive information about themselves to their grandchildren, reluctant in admitting that she had a gift of communicating and receiving messages from our ancestors. Tsholofelo was the name that my ancestors bestowed upon her with the hope that she will, with time, carry forward the family lineage of divination and healing. As the name implies, Tsholofelo meant that she became their hope in restoring and reviving a legacy that could wither with the passing of time. Tsholofelo was our ancestral calling to her, and I suspect that in naming me Tsholofelo, some of her divination and healing obligations were, in a peculiar way, passed down to me as her grandson. In this way, the name denotes a process of identifying me as both an individual and a person tied to the spiritual commune of my ancestry.

Yet these are not the only conduits through which my sense of self is formed. I believe that learning institutions, communities I lived in, places of religious devotion, political affiliations or dreams shared

among friends and loved ones were also important in shaping the person that I am and becoming. In other words, the person that I am is manifesting in a way which Alice Walker once described as the active discovery of what is vital and real in this world (1997, p. 4).

These conflicting views are what brings me to *Conversations with My Father: On Isithakazelo, Meadowlands and Acts of Self-Writings.* This project places the reader at the center of a conversation between two people from separate generations. What comes out of the conversations elicits the reader to look at how South Africa's history and notions of identity politics are played out in the microcosm of the house-hold. Furthermore, this project also speaks to the broader conversation of what is at stake when young black South Africans consume and appropriate dominant cultures as part of their self-conception. Regarding the former, I perceived my father's gesture as a proposition to take on the role of other male figures (both past and present) who were expected to, and have heeded their call to manhood by preserving and continuing the family linage of obaMahlaela. To heed this call, by this I mean to cast my identity in the moulds of isithakazelo, is to continue this family tradition. To cast my identity around the nuances and transferences of culture as experienced in the streets of Meadowlands, is to run the risk of skimming the surface: of producing an identity that is without roots or a noticeable ancestry.

After the initial conversation had passed, and when speaking with my father about isithakazelo in a different context, I became more open to his point of view. My father's perspective on identity begins with a desire to reconnect us with, and for us to understand, our relationship with the past. Central to his point of view is that isithakazelo is more than just an ancestral calling. My presence in the world is a result of a distinct past, and if I am to arrive at a sincere observation about who I am and become in a post-apartheid South Africa, then it should be conceived in conversation with this past.

My father argues that the socio-cultural, spiritual and political allegiances to which I owe my identity should be viewed sincerely. That is, if I were to ask myself whose history and experiences are embedded in the character of Meadowlands as I know of it today, I may have to come to terms with the realization that this was part of apartheids endeavor to characterize and evaluate what it meant to be black and living in South Africa. As such, Meadowlands and its subsequent cultural expressions should be understood as one of those 'intermediaries' or 'contingencies' in which black people came to navigate this reality. For him, my impulses for 'self-conception', 'acts of self-writing' and 'self-actualization' should be more critical than what I posit. If I were to dig beneath the face-value of Meadowlands as I speak of it, I may leave feeling heavy-hearted upon realizing that my act of self-writing is yet another cast from the same mould. By this he means that my self-writing resembles a

contingency plan that pages itself from one generation to another; it is my story as well as his, and if I were present to witness what it was like 'back then', I may be humbled to learn that it is also my grandparents' story. When I asked what he meant by this, my father suggested that the idea of the township was not a recent creation. It had been around not long after the settlers arrived at the tip of the continent and endeavored to turn the country into a colony. I assumed this to mean that conceptions of the 'ghetto' began with a struggle over the homeland, on battles over which kingdom would shape the present and over whose values and doctrines would drive us towards this foreseeable future. I also took my father's perceptions to imply that the nuances which informed my experiences in Meadowlands were neither exclusive to the area nor the time. And if I am to posit an identity that is reflective but not critical of the circumstances which produced it, I run the risk of proverbially turning a page in a familiar yet ongoing narrative on colonialism and its aftermaths.

My father's impulse to examine the circumstances in which lives are understood brought to mind the writings of social commentators and activists like Alice Walker (1997), Chabani Manganyi (1973), Steve Biko (2017), Ama Mazama (2001), Jay Ciaffa (2008), Eric Miyeni (2014), Eusebius Mckaizer (2015) and James Baldwin (1984, 1963) amongst others. Their work has been instrumental in my thinking through the challenges to write, claim and position the story and politics of one's identity. In the essay *Stranger In The Village*, Baldwin paints an image of a small secluded town whose residents' relations with him as a black man gives a feeling that could be described as Europe's social moulding of black people (1984, pp. 159-175). Baldwin's observations were written over 50 years ago, but the perception of him as an exotic who 'needed to be saved' can also been seen in a world whose quest for a non-racial and equitable society is regularly punctuated by a past that continues to haunt us. In his article, '*When Will Anton Harber Dissect White Suburbia'?* (2014) newspaper columnist, Eric Miyeni argues how he could not bring himself to read Jacob Dlamini's 'Native Nostalgia' (2009) because of the project's inclination to romanticize the experience of growing up in the townships during Apartheid South Africa (2014, pp. 81-82). For Miyeni, Dlamini's longing for 'good ol' Katlehong' could be dismissed with the restrained observation that if given the opportunity, he, together with those who lived in Katlehong and similar townships throughout South Africa, would not consider living there again. Miyeni further elaborates his position when writing:

> Of course, human beings can have fun under stress. I guarantee you that there are Jews with lovely stories from their dark days. Even while enduring unimaginably traumatic events, humans will find reasons to laugh, other humans to love, dreams to pursue, no matter how impossible, and triumphs to celebrate. This is how humans are. To think that we are somehow unique because we did this under apartheid is farcical. The only purpose it serves is to reduce white South Africa's guilt over its past transgressions. It reduces white South Africa's desire to commit to helping alleviate poverty today. It

> reinforces the thinking among young blacks that apartheid was not bad at all, so why don't we move on (Ibid, p. 81)

A similar sentiment, although with a different provocation, was shared by journalist, author and radio host Eusebius Mckaizer in his essay, 'Biko Lied' (2015, pp. 18-34). For McKaizer, the extent and effects of white privilege have moved beyond the discomfort of public critique and filtered into the private space of black writers and artists. McKaizer argues, and this resonates with the intentions of this paper when writing:

> Black writers who have any self-awareness about the world in which they live and work cannot just let go of the race question. Because race continues to haunt us. And while it would be wonderful to write about a greater range of subjects – and, to be sure, many black writers can and do – there will never be any shortage of black writing on race and racism … our writings [are] in part a reflection of the world we live in, coupled with unique biographical facts about each writer (Ibid, p. 18).

Part 1

This research project is two-fold. It is partly auto-ethnographic, yet also reflects on my practice as an artist and art commentator. The first part, 'Looking Back at Meadowlands', reflects on my lived experiences of growing up in Meadowlands and its surrounding communities. Here I speak of Meadowlands in relation to Mary Louise Pratt's definition of a 'contact zone': "a social space where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of dominance or subordination – like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (1992, p. 4). I refer to these transactions as a sort of mould that produces a dialectic between the self and other; one which suggests acts of self-writing to be, in part, a human consciousness that invents, but is not solely responsible for the existence of being.

This part concludes with a sub-section titled 'Awumadala Wantshumu'. 'Awumadala Wantshumu' is a summation of my father responses to my views on growing up in Meadowlands. Here my father argues that contrary to my understanding of human consciousness as that which informs the self, together with the social context to which the self belongs, the resulting products are not overly different from those once fashioned by him and his peers during apartheid South Africa. In fact, the similarities between the two leads him to believe that the township and its cultures have in varying ways remained a white man's creation. My father's disaffection with what I perceive the self to be is mobilized by relating his sentiments on isithakazelo with Frantz Fanon's call to the native intellectual in his book 'The Wretched Of The Earth' (2001). For Fanon the task facing the 'native intellectual' is

that of defending their culture. This means reviving the dignity, glory and solemnity of traditional cultural practices that could "serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture" (ibid, p. 169).

Part 2

My father's reservations on how the functions of defining identity politics have not changed in a new political dispensation is carried through into the second part of the research. This part of the research leans toward my practice as both an artist and someone who evaluates, interprets and writes about art. Part 2 begins with a section titled: 'Shadows from Our Recent Past'. This section serves as a critique of the exhibition *Ngezinyawo: Migrant Journeys* which was shown at the Wits Art Museum (2014). In mobilizing my critique, I drew on my grandparents' lived experiences as migrants in Johannesburg during the mid-20th century. Here I argue that even with the exhibition's initiative to give an account of the migrant experience from 1800 to 2014, a close reading of the works reveals Chabani Manganyi's observations on how "the white experience is so existentially different from the black experience that white writers have to abstract to a very unhealthy extent in order to move beyond the level of mere description to that of analysis and understanding" (1973, p. 9). As a grandchild of people who were classified as migrants, the exhibition's characterizations and abstractions prompt propositions once raised by Molefi Kete Asante (1991) and Ama Mazama's (2001) when arguing that the time has come for black people to search for a new frame of reference, an *Afrocentric* paradigm. This is a paradigm which rests upon black people's ability and willingness to "systematically displace European ways of thinking, being, feeling … and consciously replace them with ways that are germane to our own cultural experiences" (Mazama, 2001, p. 388). For my father, isithakazelo is one of those paths that could lead us back to our own cultural outlooks. It serves as the social, cultural and ideological perspective that places my ancestry as the primary disposition of my identity.

Part 2 concludes with a section titled 'Home Truths'. A broad understanding of the expression implies these to be honest and somewhat discomforting facts shared between you and those closest to you. Here the expression is used as a gesture to open up to my father's counsel on the value of isithakazelo in negotiating my sense of becoming. This conduit, which seeks to link isithakazelo with the person I perceive myself to be, is directed by using a process that is familiar to both of us; 'ukuphahla'. Spiritual advisor, Sangoma and Blogger Gog' Thandah Mathonsi describes 'ukuphahla' as a way of communicating with one's own ancestors (2019). Over and above the prospect of communicating with one's ancestors, the project introduces 'ukuphahla' as a form of mediation in which my father and I could reconcile our perspectives on identity politics without either of our views having to exist as binaries.

The idea of finding a common place through conversations and ukuphahla form the basis of my practical submission comprising of mail-in artworks, letters, family heirlooms and music records. This choice was further annexed by safety measures which were introduced as a result of living and working during a global pandemic. The imposition of government regulations meant that installing artworks in public spaces like art galleries and museums would no longer be a possibility. In this sense, the prospect of producing work that is to be consumed in personal spaces serves the projects ambition to initiate introspective and sincere accounts into perspectives that guide people's views when speaking about their identity.

What I desire is a sense of self as much as that of the other; to accept my ancestral lineage as well as acknowledge the socio-cultural contexts that have nurtured and informed my identity thus far. As such, acts of self-writing is predicated on a constant dialectic of self and other, even if the self tends to be a privileged subject.

Part 1

Looking Back At Meadowlands

Zwakala ngik' verstanise ke mpintj' yam (ek se mpintj yaka)
Zwakala ngikutsele wena mfwethu (haa wena mfwethu)
la ekasi mawungaz'cav ungaz' speedeli (eeh siyakutshele)
uyang'verstaan (siyakutshela)
uyang'verstaan (siyakutshela) – Spikiri, 'Ndofaya' (2007)[1]

I wish to begin with making the following admission: I am still in love with the township. In spite of concessions made to remind us of the enforced social accommodations written into urban planning by the apartheid government, along with the frustrations that come as a result of living in these social spaces, the township remains home (M, Kahimbaara, 2016), (Tomlinson, R; Beauregard, R; Bremmer, L; Mangcu, 2003), (E, Miyeni, 2014). I have known no other alternative; no family in the rural parts of South Africa, and no source of recourse from those activities which have become characteristic of living in the township. Meadowlands is where my grandparents had to proceed with their lives following a number of evictions and relocations. It became home to my parents and it is in its dusty streets where I also grew up in the 1980s. Though my father's reservations of the township as a testament to Apartheid's ideals of separate development are valid, I also had pleasant memories of Meadowlands. Some of these included attending culturally themed beauty pageants at *Bapedi Hall*, a local community Hall in Zone 3, attending pop-up dance competitions which were mostly envisioned by rival dance crews, as well as going to watch and participate in our regular soccer tournaments. The popularity of these would often spill beyond the playing fields and into the never-ending debate (at the school yard) on which township was home to Soweto's finest.

Today the popularity of some of these activities have since declined, but I sometimes find myself feeling nostalgic whenever I realize how activities that characterized one generation have subsequently filtered into another. In their essay, *Social Differentiation And Urban Governance In Greater Soweto: A Case Study For Post-Apartheid Meadowlands*, Jo Beall, Owen Crankshaw and Susan Parnell describe Meadowlands' initial population as fairly homogenous (2003, p. 197):

> The origins and character of Meadowlands are fairly typical of African townships in greater Johannesburg. Meadowlands was built during the 1950's, a period in which most of the existing housing stock in Johannesburg's African townships was constructed. Consequently, all formal family housing

[1] These are the opening lyrics to Sprikiri's 2007 single 'Ndofaya'.

> there takes the form of the well-known "matchbox" house. Meadowlands also had a hostel for rural migrants, another typical feature of African townships built during this period (ibid, p. 198).

Even though the location and character of Meadowlands were fairly similar to most black townships in the country, the authors also remind us of a distinguishing factor which set Meadowlands apart from other townships in the greater Soweto region when noting:

> Whereas many of greater Soweto's original residents were squatters who had invaded land in South Western Johannesburg, the original residents of Meadowlands had been forcibly removed from within central Johannesburg itself… Meadowlands was established in accordance with the Native Resettlement Act of 1952 (ibid, p. 199).

In effect, this meant that Meadowlands was a subsequent product of the then State's initiative to force 'native authorities' to evict black tenants and subtenants from mixed racial groups as part of the 'Western Areas Slum Clearance'. And true to apartheid's violent nature of goring its policies into the bodies of communities that brought together a great concentration of people, Meadowlands was sliced into ethnic zones which were marked through street names as well as landmarks such as schools and neighborhood stores. Bloke Modisane described this project of homogeneity as "the vengeance of political conquest" - a lasting memorial of apartheid's 'charismatic' visionary Hendrik Verwoerd (1963, p. 6).

Sophiatown, which he grieves as being complex in how it attracted opposites like the ring of joy, the sounds of laughter, interposed with the growl and smell of insult; [where they] sang their happy songs and were carried away by [their] exotic dances, [where they] whistled and shouted, got drunk and [sometimes] killed each other, was no more (Ibid, p. 9). Meadowlands had come, and with very little success, to replace a community which was reduced to ruin. Upon completion, Sophiatown's offspring was sliced into 10 zones. The majority of people who spoke Setswana and Sepedi were allocated houses along the outskirts which formed part of Meadowlands East. These were Zone 9, Zone 7 and Zone 1. As you moved towards the west, passing Zone 2 and Zone 3, housing was mainly allocated to people who spoke Sesotho. Zone 4, Zone 5, Zone 10 and parts of Zone 7 were allocated mainly to families who spoke isiZulu. Houses in Zone 8 were offered to Venda speaking families while those in Zone 6 were occupied by Tsonga speaking families. The map on the next page shows how ethnic divisions were also reflected through street names. Street names in Zone 4 were given isiZulu names such as 'Sifikile', 'Nandi', 'Sezangakhona', and 'Umkhupane', while street names on the immediate left (zone 6) were given Tsonga names, such as 'Tshinayihen', 'Tsakani' and 'Sinthumule'. The function of street names was geared toward giving natives a false sense of territory, home and in some instances, achievement. For example, names such as 'Sesfikile', 'Nandi' or 'Senzangakhona' reminded Zulu

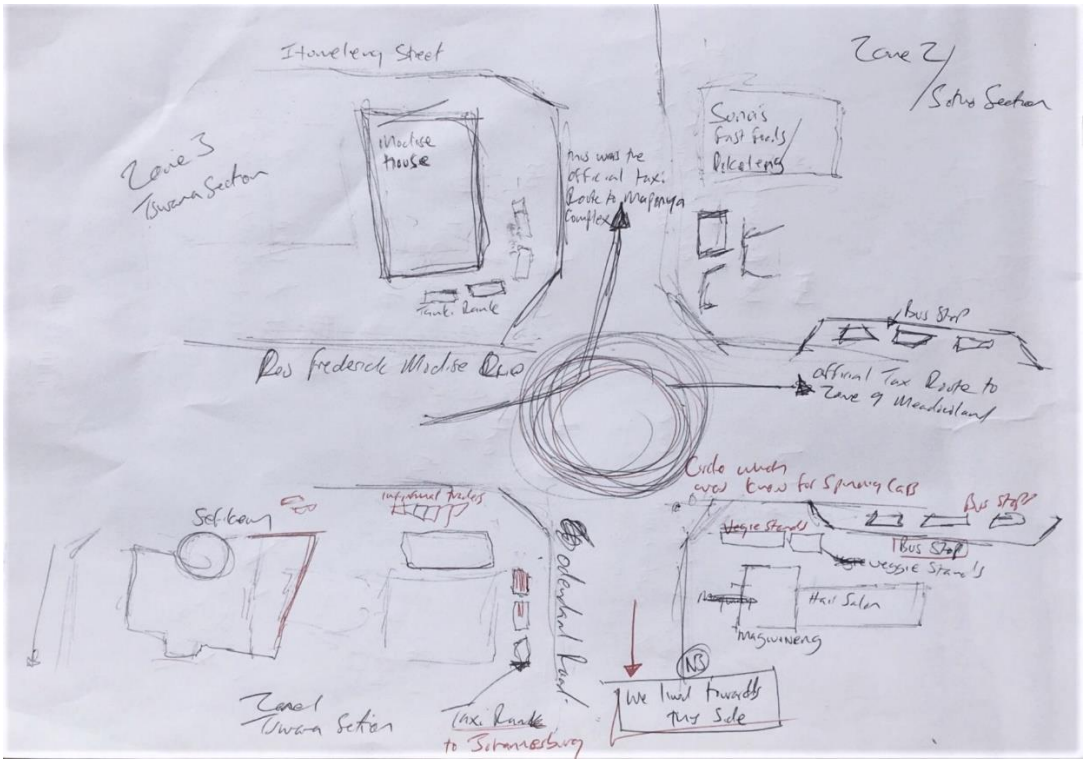
speaking people of Royalty dating back to the times of Shaka Zulu. 'Sesfikile' gave the impression that they have arrived, at the state's promise for better housing and an alternative utopia as Zulus living in urban spaces. Dhiru Soni further argues that the intention of zoning also served to reinforce tribal barriers that were prevalent in the rural areas in a bid to prevent working-class organization and mobilization in urban areas" (2005, p. 42).



Xavier Langa's. 2019. Street map of Meadowlands east, Zone 4. Available at: https://www.pinterest.cl/pin/815221970028207597/ Accessed: 09/03/2020.

In spite of these desperate attempts at ethnic divides, Meadowlands became a social space where cultures overlapped, where language evolved and sentiments around the realities of being black in Apartheid South Africa served as capital for these overlaps. Spikiri's 'Ndofaya' (2007, track, 5) is a contemporary take on how the township has continued to leverage value from this cultural capital. The song takes its title from a name which residents coined as a form of protest against the township's official name. It embodied the desire to retain or translate the bonds of communal living once shared by those from Sophiatown. 'Ndofaya' became a way of paying homage to those mounting compulsions of joy, disappointment and contradictions which brought colour to life in Sophiatown. Spikiri's opening lines are performed using an appropriation of languages which, when put together, represent the off-centeredness of the township's communal living. In the song's opening line: *Zwakala ngik' verstanise ke mpintj' yam (ek se mpintj yaka)* the musician asks audiences to lend him an ear as he tries to take the listener on a tour of his neighbourhood. Part of this tour the musician endevours to provide is a

one-line description of what he feels describes the verve of each zone in relation to Meadowlands as a whole.



A quick sketch of how I remember the surroundings close to Modise House and Sefikeng.

As a resident myself, I would like to add to Spikiri's portrait of Meadowlands by taking you to a site that does not feature in his lyrics or the music video. This spot is popularly known as Modise. I choose this spot because it holds different meanings depending on the generation you find yourself in. This site is located at one of the Meadowlands' busiest intersection, at corner Oodendaal and Rev Frederick Modise Drive. Between the 1980s and early 2000s, this intersection was the preferred spot by many small businesses, functioned as a taxi rank, a bus stop, and on the odd days occasional mugging happened here. Every morning the intersection would be filled with queues of people awaiting either a taxi or a bus to take them to work. I also remember how my friends and I would often rush here after the final whistle of the Soweto derby[2] had sounded with the expectation of seeing drivers spin their cars celebrating the victory of their favorite team. On Easter weekends members of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church would congregate by the hundreds to attend the sermons presented by their charismatic leader Rev. Frederick Modise. These sermons were held at Sefikeng. Sefikeng was the first base of the International Pentecostal Holiness Church and is situated across the

[2] The Soweto derby is a soccer match involving two of Soweto's biggest rivaling team: Orlando Pirates and Kaizer Chiefs.

road from the Modise House. As part of their tourism page on the Facebook website, the 'Meadowlands Tourism Development Board' remind us that before the house became home to Rev. Modise, it was used by the 'Native Resettlement Board' as an administrative reception office for residents arriving from the Western Areas. The church that is to me and people who grew up in Meadowlands during the 1980's, known as Sefikeng was initially conceived as a Dutch Reform Church. Under the auspices of Rev. Modise, Sefikeng soon became the go to place for political mobilisation, various student meetings, community meetings and activities such as weddings and burials services (2015).

Growing up in a family of ANC supporters who were active in Labour Unions and other forms of resistance during apartheid meant that I was exposed to home-based accounts of South Africa's political happenings. As is often the case with those who grew up spending most of their time in *kasie*[3] streets, these accounts were not without supplements. Listening to Reggae music exposed me to Rastafarism, attending school at Nur-Ul-Islam in Lenasia[4] exposed me to aspects of Islam. Watching Micheal Jackson's music videos on T.V. exposed me to the world of pop-culture, my admiration of rap music got me curious of the lives of black people in the diaspora, and living in Meadowlands meant that it was only a matter of time before I would come into contact with the tapestry of its cultural constituencies. Yes, growing up in Meadowlands exposed me to different languages along with the contexts in which these languages were carried out. It was in learning how to speak most of the languages that I could partake with how people in Meadowlands and its surrounding townships forged a subversive culture that resonated with how we saw ourselves locally and abroad.

Meadowlands was also home to footballers such as Mandla 'Metroblitz' Sithole and Marks 'Go-Man-Go' Maponyane. It nurtured musical talents some of which include Mawillies, Trompies and Alaska. One of its neighboring townships, Orlando, gave home to struggle stalwarts such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Nelson Mandela, Winne Madikizela-Mandela, along with pioneers Irvin "Iron Duke" Khoza and Kaizer "Tshintsha Guluva" Motaung. People's desire to find hope under circumstances where it would have been easy to resort to despair, made this, along with its surrounding townships, a dynamic place for contemplation, resistance and projection. The past was no longer reduced to memories gone, but it was active in how we spoke of ourselves as direct offspring to one of South Africa's more cosmopolitan and 'hippest' settlements. These are some of the conduits through which the nuances of life in Meadowlands are inscribed my self-writing.

[3] This a colloquial term for Township.

[4] Lenasia, also known as Lenz, is a township in the south of Johannesburg which was reserved mainly for Indians.

It is these layers of memory and affection to a place that I negotiate an identity which, in varying ways, reflects the social life, political ideologies, history, economic circumstances and aspirations of a community. In this, my self-concept is relative to, but not dependent upon others. It is a process of becoming aware of the 'self' that I create, as well as how I choose to form part of the world around me. It is my way of distinguishing between a 'real' and a 'fancied' identity.

On Real and Fancied Identities

My understanding of a 'real' identity comes from memories, emotional attachment and relationships developed in relation to particular environments. Doing so has led me to acknowledging the value which others bring in understanding the person that I am. In my instance, being black and living in the township meant that a significant part of my identity had been formed around apartheid's prescripts that my kinship to South Africa was that of a migrant labourer who came here as a result of industrialisation. Steve Biko has been an important voice in making me understand that this is not a genuine reflection, for even at the height of Sophiatown's cosmopolitan nature, black people did not completely loose those cultural contexts in which they defined themselves (2017, p. 44). In this sense, when advancing the notion of 'contemporary Africans' (a word whose origin and life span warrants a separate discussion altogether), one should not exclude what Biko described as a "pure African culture in the present day African" (ibid). The presence of these African cultural values could be attributed to our resilience towards colonial impositions as well as the manner in which we wish our history to form part of our present. I believe the latter to be the principle argument behind my father's proposition. For him, isithakazelo bestows an identity which is historical and liberating in the face of what seems like a relentless colonial tradition.

However, my concern with my father's point of view is that in conferring privilege to a single historical narrative, especially that which was envisioned before colonialism, we might run the risk of nostalgia which creates a kind of 'fancied identity'. I believe that a sincere account of who we are as a family, a community, and as individuals should also be cognizant of those moments when we formed part of trade unions or took part in the various liberation movements in protest against what my grandmother used to call 'the old country'. In his memoir, 'Blame Me On History', Modisane reminds us of the bonds which coloured life in Sophiatown when writing:

> "Sophiatown was like our nice-time parties or the sound of pennywhistle, a mounting compulsion of joyousness, but always a hint of pain. Sophiatown was also our week-ends, it was the reason or rather the excuse we used to stop the progress of time, to celebrate a kind of wish fulfilment; we cherished Sophiatown because it brought together such a great concentration of people, we did not live in it, we

> were Sophiatown. It was a complex paradox which attracted opposites, the ring of joy, the sound of laughter, was interposed with the growl and the smell of insult; we sang our happy songs, were carried away by our erotic dances, we whistled and shouted, got drunk and killed each other" (1963, p. 9)

By relating Meadowlands to Sophiatown I am not suggesting the former to be a kind of an alternative utopia. The reality is that after the final brick had been laid and the last family had moved in, Meadowlands functioned as a typical South African township, or what Frantz Fanon describes as a 'medina'. For Fanon, the medina is a place of ill-fame occupied by people of ill-repute: "It is a world without spaciousness; [people] live on top of each other, and their [houses] are built on top of the other" (2001, p. 30). An article titled 'The Destruction Of Sophiatown' published by South African History Online (SAHO) describes how their status as people of 'ill fame' was cemented by the then Minister of Justice who convinced parliament that those who were opposed to resettlement would go about it using "machine-guns, cars loaded with explosives, and tyres which would be filled with explosives and rolled towards the police" on the day of eviction (2011).

My relating of Meadowlands with Sophiatown is driven by a desire to claim parts of a family narrative which, although it was not my personal story, its effects have trickled down to me as their grandson and an individual. In a similar way that Eusebuis McKaizer pointed to the value of seeing the township beyond its initial conception in his online review of Jacob Dlamini's 'Native Nostalgia' (2009), Sophiatown was not just a 'site' where families were evicted during state sanctioned removals. It was a 'place' to be experienced; a place that provided a narrative framing on "the existence of irreducible complexities in the details of a community's life and the lives of its individual members" (2009). Modisane put this more aptly when writing: "If we were not shaking hands or chasing after the same girl or sharing a bottle of brandy, we were sticking knives into each other's back. The land was bought with the sweat, the scrounging, [and] the doing without" (ibid, p. 15).

Like Sophiatown, Meadowlands was not just another site in the latest episode to erode 'natives' of their sense of worth, it became a place of renewed reflection - of loss and new beginnings, of despair and hope, of attraction and repulsion. Though peculiar as this may sound, these are some of the nuances that made me fall in love with the social space. In attracting opposites, it somehow forged a way for them to co-exist. If I were to define it through my artistic processes as a studio potter, I would describe Meadowlands as a kind of an articulated mould that is comprised of multiple pieces which come together to form a single mould. In this form, the sum of each part represents nuances that complexify the self that I am conceiving. And although the mould is considered to be a device that enables multiple production lines, it is worth noting that the shaping of the mould is also dependent on a prototype. That is, one can view the mould as a subject and not only as an object of the forms of knowledge that produced it. This is one of the ways in which I creatively explore moulds or the casting

process as representative of my self-writing. By nature, a mould attracts and repels; it absorbs the water from the clay into the plaster walls. When water is absorbed into the mould, the cast is subsequently released from the mould. If I were to conceive of this in a sociological context, I would argue the process of casting to symbolize the context to which complicity and resistance rely on each other for existence. What I am trying to say is that: I am not wholly or solely Tsonga. A large part of my upbringing has involved a selective collaboration with and appropriation of cultures that form part of my community and the world as I see it. This idea of self-writing is close to Jean-Paul Sartre's definition of the individual as a thinking and feeling phenomenon (in Wider, 1995, p. 92). It is a (self) consciousness that is mindful of both itself along with the social systems in which it is produced.

This idea of subjectivity is followed through in how I view moulds and the idea of moulding. Instead of viewing moulds solely as a means to producing an artwork, I propose that one could also view the same mould to get a sense of the prototype which produced it. In so doing, the mould becomes more than just a means to making art, but could also serve as an end, even an artwork within itself. As an artwork, one need not wait to see what the mould casts. Instead, one can look at its negative spaces together with the sum of its parts to get a sense of how the mould has collected, stored and will probably share its information. Another way in which I explore the concept of moulds and of moulding is through my socialisation through music, in particular those records which formed part of my uncle's music collection.

Remembering My Uncles Record Collection



Photograph of my father and uncle, date unknown.



Hugh Masekela & The Union of South Africa, 1971.



Burning Spear. Garvey's Ghost, 1976



Bob Marley and the Wailers. *Exodus*, 1977.



Count Bassie and Dizzy Gillespie. *The Gifted Ones*, 1977.



The Beaters. *Harari,* 1975.

Before I could make sense of Meadowlands and its ideological underpinnings, I was familiar with music. I had become accustomed to the rhythm of the beats, with pop music's tendency to solicit audience reaction through catch phrases, and had understood the difference between music genres. Like many who were tuning into their favourite radio channels, music had - without me even realising it - directly influenced my positioning in society. As a kid I used to grow up listening to Bob Mabena on Radio BOP and later on became a fan of D.J. Khabzela's shows on YFM. These were the radio channels which were renowned for playing RnB, Kwaito, Hip Hop and House music. These were genres whose popularity amongst young audience helped shape social and gender roles as understood in our respective spaces. If the sounds of penny whistles and the mounting compulsion of delight was effective in numbing the presence of life's pain for those in Sophiatown, then the crossover between Disco, House and Kwaito served as our gesture to liven up the ambiance of local shebeens. Shebeens and taverns served as a kind of pit stop for people who would return from a hard day's toil to reflect, unwind, connect, drink and sing. Some of the songs that played on shebeen's stereos ventured into escapism, some were romantic, and some took on the task of social commentary. To be honest, I cannot exactly point to what it was about music that seemed to amplify people's feelings. Perhaps it served as an outlet for personal anxieties, of frustrations, for love, of

society, about life, or maybe even of optimism. I suppose hope, confidence and anxieties toward the end of apartheid fuelled the creativity and messaging in records such as Stimela's 'Look, Listen, and Decide' or Bright Blue's 'The Rising Tide'.

The popularity of records like *Inhlupheko* by Winston Ngozi, *Mamani* by Letta Mbulu, *Ntyilo Ntyilo* by Louis Moholo or Strike Vilakazi's *Meadowlands* gave a sense that music had filtered into the collective subconscious and personal lives of residents. I use 'subconscious' deliberately because even with popular records by musicians like Splash, Percy Sledge, *Mahlatini And The Mahotela Queens,* Brenda Fassie or Mercy Phakela there was a kind of emotional attachment to records with a political inclination. Living opposite to *Ben's Tavern* in Zone 1 gave me a lens through which I could relate with Modisane's reflections on how these places animated people's joys and impulse to ease the weight of life.

In the late 1980's and early 1990's I also witnessed a measured publication of music. I watched and listened to how music was informally used as a kind of barometer on how young, along with older South Africans, felt about the prospect of coming out of the transition period and into a 'new' South Africa. Two songs come to mind here. The first was Bright Blue's 'Weeping' (1988, track, 2) and the other was Mango Groove's 'Another Country' (1993, track, 6). The latter seemed to enjoy more airplay on radio, television and even in my uncle's record collection, with him owning two copies of Mango Groove's album with the same title. I recall the lyrics of the song when they sang: "Another time, another place, another country, another state of grace" (ibid). Though I could not fully comprehend what was meant by the lyrics, I fondly remember my uncle insisting that we listen, find meaning and understand the perspective through which music is written and performed. When meaning was not comprehended on our side, my uncle was eager to lead us to his understanding of the song: a proposition, perhaps even a declaration, of a 'new beginning'; of renewed feelings of hope amidst cynicism created by political violence and pessimism, that negotiations for the end of Apartheid would yield a democratic and inclusive South Africa.

My uncle was a music enthusiast and a reluctant D.J. who was always in search of new sounds. His collection had a large sum of records which were prohibited in radio playlists. Some of the records contained music which told of personal frustrations and others were overtly political as I recall him singing "we gonna chase them crazy baldheads out of town"[5]. His music collection also included albums by Madonna, Harari, The Beatles, Mahlatini and the Mahotela Queens, Herbie Mann, The Union of South Africa, LL Cool J, Michael Jackson, Queen, Lionel Pillay, Run DMC, Brenda Fassie and

[5] The were the lyrics to Bob Marley and The Wailers' *Crazy Baldheads* (1976, track. 6

the Big Dudes, Letta Mbulu and Splash. If there was a mood to sum up your day, there would be a wardrobe and crates full of records to get you through the remainder of that day.

My uncle's collection, along with the records and tapes played on other people's stereos gave me a sense that music was one of the more immediate exigencies in a country characterised by side-line discourses and state censorship. My uncle had a broad palette of musical tastes. He listened to Opera, Rap, Marabi, Pop music, disco, Reggae, Jazz and RnB amongst others. Yet even with this variety, none of these had the appeal and effect which Kwaito had on me and my friends.

Kwaito as A Mould

Kwaito was to me what Hip Hop music represented to many young African Americans. In an open letter to Philanthropist and Talk Show host, Oprah Winfrey, Saul Williams speaks of how Hip Hop and rap served as one of the more enterprising aspects through which African American's explored their self-definition (2007). For Williams, music acts like The Jungle Brothers, Gangstarr, Black Starr, The Fresh Prince, Digital Underground, Jazzy Jeff, Public Enemy, Cool G. Rap, Naughty By Nature, Queen Latifa, Rakim, The Notorious B.I.G, Nas, M.C. Lyte, Niggas With Attitude (N.W.A), 2Pac, Rakim, KRS-ONE, The Wu-Tang Clan and many others chose to make music which took on the socio-economic, historical and political inequities they were confronted with daily (Ibid).

Hip Hop became important to me because its content opened me to similar struggles experienced by black people in America. For example, Hip Hop opened my lens to racial politics over and above concerns raised by Arthur Mafokate in his break-out hit 'Kaffir' (1995). Take 2Pac's debut album, '2Pacalypse Now' (1991) as an example. In the first cut of the album, 'Young Black Male' (track, 1), the musician uses a sexual euphemism which is all too familiar with conservative Americans. "Young black male [is] coming hard like and erection, [and] this aint shit to fool with". 2Pac's choice of words brings to mind a scene from David Wark Griffiths controversial silent film, 'Birth of a Nation' (1915), where a young white woman commits suicide by jumping off a cliff in order to save herself from the indignity of being sexually assaulted by an African American. Here, African Americans are depicted as unintelligent and hypersexualized, with an aggressive lust for white women. In 2Pac's song, the erection can be perceived as a metaphor which the musician uses to express the unapologetic nature in which he wishes to insert himself and his views into the burning topic of racism in America. This theme is carried into tracks like 'Words of Wisdom' where the Rapper states:

> This is for the masses the lower classes
> The ones you left out, jobs were givin', better livin'

> But we were kept out
> Made to feel inferior, but we're the superior
> Break the chains in our brains that made us fear yeah
> Pledge allegiance to a flag that neglects us
> Honor a man that who refuses to respect us
> Emancipation, proclamation, Please!
> Nigga just said that to save the nation
> These are lies that we all accepted
> Say no to drugs but the governments' keep it
> Running through our community, killing the unity
> The war on drugs is a war on you and me
> And yet they say this is the Home of The Free
> But if you ask me its all about hypocrisy
> The constitution, Yo, it don't apply to me
> Lady Liberty that stupid bitch lied to me…(track, 6)

2Pac's sentiments towards 'Lady Liberty' are not a novelty. When seeking to unpack America's conundrum pertaining what it considered to be 'the new negro' emerging during The Civil Rights Movement, author and activist James Baldwin (1963, p. 93) wrote that when white Americans spoke of a 'new negro', it was not really referring to a change in 'the negro', but rather to a new difficulty in keeping 'him' in his place, "to the fact that it encounters him [again and again] barring yet another door to its spiritual and social ease" (ibid).

Baldwin attributed this desire to guard and keep as a manifestation of people's reactions in a world of possessions:

> Most people guard and keep; they suppose that it is they themselves and what they identify with themselves that they are guarding and keeping, whereas what they are actually guarding and keeping is their system of reality and what they assume themselves to be. One can give nothing whatsoever without giving oneself – that is to say, without risking oneself. If one cannot risk oneself, then one is simply incapable of giving (Ibid, p. 94).

Similarly with Hip hop, Kwaito gave us a sense of agency in a South Africa that has been formed through racial, economic and ethnic divisions. It became a personal, collective, reflexive and creative approach on the part of those who wanted to forge an alternative identity under the restricts of Apartheid South Africa. From the perspective of someone who lived in a predominantly Tswana speaking section of Meadowlands, Kwaito enabled me to be more deliberate in how I engaged, appropriated and re-presented different voices and in thinking through my self-concepts. In other

words, Kwaito became my way of giving and risking oneself. This is close to Jean-Paul Sartre's explanations of an individual as a 'being with others in the world' (1984, p. 88). "It presupposes that my acts of self-writing should be conscious of "my existence, the existence of the other, my existence for the other and the existence of the other for me" (ibid).

Navigating these overlaps reminded me of the meaning that I derived from M'du Masilela's description of 'abomashamplane'. For me, 'Mashamplane' comes off as a colloquial phrase describing someone who feels like they have come of age, but however still has much to learn; not only of the world that he or she lives in, but also about themselves. In the song '*Y U 4 Me',* M'du uses the phrase with a sense of caution when singing: *emashamplane, so slim? emashamplane, so yaz' bona bona* (1995, track, 2). A similar tone of caution also seems to underwrite my father's proposition that I guard against manifesting a sense of self that is in tune with the euphoria of entering a new political dispensation.

Kwaito was not only a genre but was one of the more enterprising ways through which I explored the music, fashion, language, gender roles and constructs of identity as played out in the township. My affections with music became a means through which I could contribute to and expand on my uncle's conversations on music and its place in contemporary South African culture. I drew inspiration from the fashion tastes and music by acts like Trompies, Mawillies and Alaska because they too were from Meadowlands. I collected posters, used them to cover my school books and at sometimes these became a sort of catalyst that opened conversations over which artist, or which township best embodied the spirit of Kwaito music. My interest in these conversations spilled into radio shows where I often found myself recording interviews held with musicians. These recordings became part of my extended collection which I also used as currency to trade music with friends at school. *Ska ntwana ya kasi ya Alaska le Trompies*[6]*,* I understood their points of reference, and my status as a fan escalated into that of a 'stan' when I realized their currency grow in other townships such as the East Rand, the Vaal Triangle, Pretoria and other parts of South Africa. In forming part of local dance crews, in reciting and sharing the music, I oriented myself in a manner that other kwaito enthusiasts could relate to. While the inauguration of the African National Congress (ANC) into public office in 1994 gave South Africans the political leverage to re-imagine their national identity, Kwaito opened avenues in which I could proactively explore what Kwesta described as 'intwana yana yase Kasie' (in 'Sho Madjozi', 2018, track, 4).

[6] This can be translated to: As homeboy to musical acts such as Alaska and Trompies

Intwana Nyana Yase Kasie: Kwesta's Ode to His Township

'Intwana yana yase Kasi' is an informal expression used to describe people whose character is influenced by, but is not limited to life in the township. Kwesta uses the expression as a way to describe the lasting impressions left by Katlehong, its residents, its history and landscapes, on his self-conceptions. Kwesta uses these as both a source of reference and a unique sales proposition in a growing market of South African artists whose music is influenced by their American counterparts.

In 'Spirit', Kwesta collaborated with Washington born musician Wale, as well as with film director Tebogo Malope in creating a visual account of how Kwesta perceives of 'Spirit'. The music video was shot in Kwesta's hometown, Katlehong. The story is told using a narrative sprint which borrows two or more outlooks on identity and weaves them into one.

Take for example the video's explorations on religion, faith and youthful nonchalance. Here the director went for images which resonate with religious devotees and entwined them with images that embody the neighborhood's popular pass-time. In one of the scenes we see a storyline which begins with religious devotees chanting in a circle. This is then followed through with a man pumping a clenched fist while spinning a car at a drag race. In another sequence, the director juxtaposes a man being baptized in a flowing river with images of children pouring buckets of water on each other. The perspective of spirit as understood within a religious context, along with spirit as interpreted through childhood nonchalance is carried through in the next scene which shows children jumping on a living room sofa intercut with religious devotees in chant. This mediation between two unrelated social activities are the artist's way of appropriating and re-imagining memories, landscapes, people and idiosyncratic expressions of a community which is crucial to Kwesta's music and acts of self-writing.

Those who are drawn to the song's compositions will be forgiven if they were to drag this track into the Kwaito folder of their current play list. Kwesta's theme, choice of beats and use of language remind me of Mandoza's affections with his hometown in the single 'Tsotsi Yase Zola' (2007), or go further back to his debut album '9-II-5 Zola South' *(1999)* – an album that is punctuated with themes of memory and belonging as he reflects on personal struggles and aspirations as a musician and young man living in Zola. By the same token in which Mandoza gave us 9-II-5 Zola South*,* Spirit serves as a proverbial mirror which the artist holds for us to see parts of ourselves in his self-conception.

Having grown up within the structures of the Methodist Church, I can relate with his representation of religious devotees through church regalia, of congregants in song, and of a woman partaking in holy communion. I could also relate with his gesture to pay homage to the late Emmanuel 'Scara' Ngobese by way of a custom-printed-T-Shirt because of a sentiment I once had for my replica of a Kaizer Chiefs

jersey with the name and number of Thabo Mooki printed on the back. Ngobese is Kwesta's hometown idol and former footballer who I feel garnered fanfare by playing football with the kind of flair and bravado of how amateur football is consumed in the dusty fields of Katlehong.

In an interview with music journalist Helen Herimbe the music video's director, Tebogo Malope, describes the concept of the video as "kasi musings in three-part harmony" when stating:

> The first harmony is about where we come from. [This] is represented by the spirit in a religious and cultural context. The second bit [is] the spirit of the hood hustle, in the sense that there's a guy who rolls and spins his car to entertain people or the guy who washes the taxi on the side of the road for an extra buck. The third one, which is the aspiration one, is primarily represented by the hip hop iconography: the super cars, the popping of champagne and making it rain with money, the girls, the fancy clothes at the club, the smoking of the hubbly. I wanted to use very typical hip-hop iconography to represent that (2017).

Added to these musings are rolling images of the township's landscape, of people going about their daily activities, of Kwesta rapping while seated in his grandmother's dining room, of curios decorating the room divider, or the sight of Kwesta greeting fans and on-lookers between the neighbor's fence and over the walls. These images are significant in the artist's and the director's description of Katlehong as a character, and not only a backdrop for the video. This perspective of Katlehong is similar to how I view my relations with Meadowlands. It is a social space characterized by interconnections and contradictions, by loss and new beginnings, by complicity and resistance. I believe that if isithakazelo is to exist as a key constituent in my self-conception as my father proposes, then, like a multi-piece mould, it should be understood in relation to other pieces which tie it together as a single unit. Such is what I mean by *intwana yana yase Kasi'*. It is a being which Kwesta evokes in the third verse of Spirit when rapping:

> Lenti' iphekwe la elok'shini
> Say'gibeleli taxi jo
> Say'gcwalis' ema surburbs-ini
> A re mo states mo
> Len' eyama gents e'stoksini
> Abanghas'qedi jo
> Bathi skrr sathi hey ningas'khenyi
> A re mo States mo
> Uzong'thol' ekas lam'

Awumadala Wantshumu – Thoughts and Responses From My Father



The Conversation Continues, 2020.

> "I too was fond of the township. I shared a similar kind of affection with the environment. I also thought the world of it" (Khensani Mahlaela, personal conversation, 26 October, 2019).

Admittedly, my father was not mistaken when making this point. Like me, he is, if not more familiar, with the township set up than I am. He grew up in Orlando West, attended school in Tzaneen, Limpopo and has worked at a community college in Mofolo South where he retired. So, when he mentioned how he thought of the township, I took it with a pinch of restrained acceptance. Apart from the rural areas, the townships were the only world which a majority of black people were expected to be acquainted with. It was our only world; one in which we pursued fond, looked for comfort, exerted our frustrations, and fell out of love. In fact, there were times when I felt his stirring of isithakazelo to be the effect of him falling out of love with the world he was familiar with the most.

However, this, as my father asserts, was not the case. "You should instead think of what a moulding such as isithakazelo offers you in a broader context of how identity politics are negotiated in a space such as Meadowlands or any other metropole" (ibid).

For my father, the township is not a neutral space. It is a place that has been informed by apartheid's ideals of what is appropriate for black people under its principles of separate development. Such ideals have a direct or indirect influence on how we as residents come to terms with hegemonic, racist and unequal systems of reality. My memory of music, social transactions, nostalgia and the self-writing I put forth as a result of this, are, in part, a reaction to the shadow that our recent history has cast on our understanding of being black in South Africa. This is how I perceived his view of the township, as being predetermined. So, instead of abstracting cultural expressions solely as the result of the community's activity, I should also consider the circumstances which determined its existence and forms of knowledge. Put differently, and in line with my earlier discussion on how I drew similarity between Meadowlands' cultural diversity with the function of an multipiece mould, my father suggests that I consider looking at the prototype along with the materials used in creating the mould. It is in realising that which informs the mould that one begins to make sense of the negative spaces which characterize it. As a by-product of the people who created it (culture), isithakazelo initiates me to a range of material and immaterial forms of creative reproductions, and of life as understood within the practices of Tsonga people. Casting my identity from such a mould stands to produce forms that can be viewed in relation to Fanon's counsels to the 'native intellectual' in his book 'The Wretched of The Earth' (2001). Here Fanon advises that:

> Perhaps we have not sufficiently demonstrated that colonialism is not simply content to impose its rule upon the present and the future of a dominated country. Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native brain of all form and content. By a perverted logic, it tuns to the past of its people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it (ibid, p. 169).

Fanon's observations were written during the height of the Algerian war for independence in 1963, but his views on the colonial project are useful in helping me understand the effects of some of those mechanisms which were deployed by the apartheid government. Let us, for a brief moment, take Sophiatown as an example. As a community was reduced to a heap of rubble with its residents relocated elsewhere, whoever stood to rebuild it had the opportunity to do so according to their image or perspective. Therefore, it need not surprise us when Modisane reminds of the 'native's' fate at the clutch of the colonial master when writing:

> The public image of South Africa is white, and white is the standard of civilization; what is not white is black, and black is the badge of ignorance and savagery, and the (South) African searching for acceptance surrounds himself with the symbols and values of white civilization; thus, the successful African is immediately identified with white[ness] (1963, p. 59).

For my father, it was within the public image of South Africa that the township was created, and it is in coming to terms with the ripple effects of this imagination in our current situation, that I begin to explore what Meadowlands has to offer when thinking and carrying out my acts of self-writing.

The title of this section is taken from my father's slap-like critique of self-concepts which show a binding yet uncritical affiliation with the township. 'Awumadala wantshumu' is a popular phrase used by many in Meadowlands to dismiss claims which are often made without valid historical or cultural referencing. In our discussion, my father uses the phrase to critique what he suspects are self-writings that directly or indirectly sustain the historical trappings in which the former government sought to regulate blackness.

For him, the legacies left by Kwaito, Hip Hop and similar forms of cultural expressions seem to have diluted struggles once fashioned by previous generations in trying to liberate young people in the township from the visible effects of oppression. In explicating his point of view, my father points to the closing remarks of Kwesta's 'Spirit' as quoted in recent pages. "Here, the musician's preoccupation with 'ukugcwalisela, nokwethola imuve yase masuburbs'[7] shows a duplicity which on one hand has an affection with the township, while on the other hand seeks to surround oneself with symbols familiar

[7] Kwesta uses the expression to argue against the premise that music and creative productions from peripheral spaces like the townships do not warrant the mass appeal as shown by their counterparts in 'the centre'.

with suburbia", my father remarked (ibid). Yet again, I have to concede that my father has a point in this. Kwesta's flirtations with representing the township along with aspiring for life in suburbia is also reflected in his previous hit single 'Ngud', featuring Cassper Nyovest and D.J. Maphorisa.

According to Killakam, in 'Ngud' the producer, D.J. Maphorisa slowed down Joakim's remix of' Camino Del Sol', a 1982 house track from the French-Belgian group Anthena, into an old school kwaito tempo, thus "making it into a woozy beer anthem for the shebeens" (2017). Unlike in 'Spirit', where the music video's allegory uses seemingly opposing views on identity to document processes which have invested Kwesta's self-writing, 'Ngud' is literal in narrating familiar themes of carefree binging in the company of female companions. The narrative begins with Kwesta and Nyovest partying at a local shebeen before the celebrations are taken elsewhere to a suburban estate. Kwesta explains this storyline of the video when stating:

> "We were pretty much telling a story of coming from a small township and ending up in a [bourgeoisie] suburb somewhere. We reversed [the video] so that we started off at the suburban area and then we [kind of] go back so that you can see where it all began. It's good and dandy that we are here, but telling a story of where we come from is something that would reflect what the song is doing: appealing to all sort of areas" (ibid).

Even with my father's point regarding the shortcomings that come with the aspiration of ending up in a bourgeois suburb, I also wish to say that socio-political redress is perhaps not the context in which Kwesta wishes his music to be consumed and understood. But listening to my father's views gave me a sense that as musicians, artists and people who find themselves at the harsh end of structural injustices, perhaps it should become our obligation to not only accept, but also reconsider the forms of knowledge that our work or identities puts forth. Put differently, as a product of our culture, music is moulded by a collective DNA, and as individuals who are conscious of the world we live in, music becomes privy to our visions of how we wish to accept or alter what already exists.

Isithakazelo is one of the cultural lenses through which my father pulls the rag underneath my feet to extricate an existence once summed by 2Pac when stating that "happiness living in the streets is a delusion" (1991, track, 2). Even with Malope's incentives of 'Spirit' as 'Kasi Musings' in three-part harmony, the video does very little to critique the social, historical and ideological circumstances which have invested the township's body politic. Yes, 'Spirit' is humanizing in light of narrow perceptions of the township as a medina, yet sadly the director uses circumstances that people seek to escape as a means to romanticize the township as art.

In introducing me to an ancestral lineage, my father confronts me with what he describes as a 'home truth' or a 'home remedy'. A home truth is a form of personal moulding the effects of which are

shared and understood within the microcosm of the home. Home truths open up conversations and further enquiries into those parts of our history which remain dormant in our personal lives, and it is with insights from these conversations that I begin to look at myself and the world around me.

Part 2

Shadows from Our Recent Past

My father's critique got me thinking. As a black person living in the township I have seen the lasting effects of apartheid on our lives, but had not considered my self-concept as complicit in sustaining apartheid South Africa's racist divisions and dominance. My father's views reminded me of two authors who wrote extensively on how society perceived and defined blackness. In her essay "The Only Reason Anyone Wants To Go To Heaven Is That They Have Been Driven Of Their Land (Out Of The Hands Of Their Loved Ones)", Alice Walker notes how "there is a special grief felt by the children and grandchildren for those who were forbidden to read, forbidden to explore, forbidden to question or to know" (1997, p. 3). For Walker, the colonial experience in America had seen her at pains when realizing that her ancestors were "forever correcting a 'flaw' – that of being black, female, [and] human" (ibid). Curious of how her ancestors treated the wounds brought on by slavery and its aftermaths, Walker's body of work, including her novel 'The Colour Purple' (1982) and a collection of writings titled 'Anything We Loved Can Be Saved' (1997), enabled her to conceive conversations in which she could speak to both her closest and more distant ancestors about what "she has found as an earthling growing naturally out of the universe" (1997, p. 3).

I also looked at my father's rebuttal in relation to the writings of Steve Biko, especially his 1971 conference proceeding titled 'Some African Cultural Concepts' (2017, p. 44). In explaining the necessity of such an account, Biko argues that some African cultural concepts have been poorly defined not only by casual non-African readers, but also Africans themselves (ibid). For Biko, these concepts have resulted in the misleading premise that black people are readily available objects of inquiry, especially in fields such as anthropology where researchers are not expected to have a deep understanding of culture, least of all their own culture or even of themselves" (ibid). Biko's concerns were voiced 49 years ago, but such definitions of the African experience can be also seen in projects as recent as 2014. Take the exhibition *Ngezinyawo: Migrant Journeys* as an example.

Ngezinyawo: Migrant Journeys

If you happen to have walked along Jorissen Street between the months of April and July 2014, you might have come across a historical black and white photograph of two men posing in worn-out clothes and walking barefoot. If you were curious enough to enter the Wits Art Museum (WAM) and learn more about the photograph, you would have spotted a similar historic image comprising of nine men[8]. These striking images served as the draw card to the exhibition *Ngezinyawo – Migrant Journeys*. *Ngezinyawo*[9] sought to bring insights into the tapestry of what informed South Africa's economy through early migrant life. This was surveyed through the eyes of curators and artists working in multiple disciplines, ranging from art, photography, film, music, fashion, sculpture, archival documents and found objects. And although the exhibition was comprised of visual documentation that spanned a period of over 120 years of migration, curators Fiona Rankin-Smith, Peter Delius and Laura Phillips also used the show as a conduit to encourage conversations on the complexities of migrancy and mining two years after the Marikana Massacre in 2012. This undertaking was teased out through a series of photographs which documented sites of illegal mining, and further carried through in the form of a panel discussion on 'Marikana And Migrancy' with historians and sociologists Noor Nieftagodien, Kelly Forrest and Dunbar Moodie.

Personally, I was enticed by the exhibition's prospect to broaden the lens on migrancy to create relations between the lives of migrants in the 19th century and our current social and economic circumstances. As someone who grew up in Meadowlands at a time marred by political violence during the 1980s and 1990s, and as someone who has come to value sentiment attached to items that migrants brought along as part of their journeys, I was interested in the exhibition's prospect to use these objects as a conduit for conversations on the complexities of memory, ownership, culture and politics. Objects such as necklaces, earrings, jackets or knobkerries do not only speak of their intended use, but also have an intrinsic cultural and personal value. By this I mean that items carried with as part of their journeys are useful in creating critical conversations in which we can speak about migrants as people with creative verve and a sense of attachment to their cultures in spite of frustrations brought on by dislocation, displacement, and in most cases poor living conditions.

In her blogpost, 'Ngezinyawo: Migrancy Through A Thoughtful Loupe At WAM', art commentator Robyn Sassen reflected on the overall exhibition as yielding "an impeccable reflection on migrancy which informs without being didactic, moves without being maudlin and so deeply effecting that your

[8] This image was captioned as: 'Migrants Arriving on the Diamond Fields in Search of Work, 1886. Artist unrecorded.').
[9] Which could be translated to "on foot'.

heart sings" (2014). I believe that part of Sassen's commendations were also brought on by the manner in which the exhibition was comprised of multiple segments and installations which were accompanied by wall-texts to provide a lens through which the curators thought about the featured works. The wall-text titled 'Women and Migrancy' contextualised the feature when stating:

> While in the early 20th century most African women stayed home to look after their land, livestock and children, a significant number did leave for employment in the cities. Finding themselves abandoned by their migrant husbands and lovers, some rural women left for the cities in search of informal employment, mainly as domestic workers. With the growth of industry and the development of a public healthcare system, women took on other roles such as nursing. While domestic workers looked after their employer's children, their own children lived and were raised by relatives in rural areas, great distances away. Accommodations in 'back rooms' and control of women's social lives were the norm. The employment of domestic workers continues to be a feature of middle class South African life.

Another wall-text titled *Urban Migrant Life* stated:

> Even though they were subject to extreme hardship, physical and emotional control with death an everyday prospect, many migrant workers drew on their cultural heritages to create rich and evolving objects, music and dance forms.



Ibantshi (Jacket), (110×83.5 cm). Standard Bank Art Collection. Wits Art Museum (WAM). https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/00020184.2014.962874. Accessed: 15/03/2020.

I came to understand the latter to imply that migrants' cultural heritage served as companions through a lengthy journey into the unknown, wherein laid an inward negotiation involving memories of what was left behind with the expectancy of a better life. *Ibhantshi* is one of those evolving objects that the curators used to exemplify their thesis of how migrants drew value from their cultural heritages. Here traditional artistic practices such as bead making were used to alter the aesthetic qualities of a formal jacket (associated with urban, western attire) to possibly be re-presented in a different context, or to reflect the inherent character of the owner. The aesthetic quality embedded within this and similar forms of art led me to think that upon arriving, attachments to their heritage enabled migrants to share personal stories which, in the absence of written documentation such as letters or other forms of writing, could provide a lens through which we might understand individual and collective experiences of being a migrant in the 19th and 20th century. In other words, *Ngezinyawo* endeavoured to curate forms of art that could open accounts in which we see how migrants not only came as workers but as people who interacted, traded, shared stories, and more importantly, stayed. These were the possibilities presented by the idea of exhibiting 'rich' and 'evolving' objects. Embedded within their artistic registers are forms of knowledge and self-insertions that could disclose new accounts in a registry of South Africa's long standing and one-sided history.

So, as I made my way to the first floor of the museum, I was also looking forward to seeing parts of my history as a descendant of people who were migrants. To my disappointment, the exhibition did not yield such nuanced dynamics, neither could I agree to it being heartfelt or deeply affecting. And the problem was not the curators' abilities to put together an exhibition of that scale[10], but rather on what I perceived to be generalisations and stereotypes which were reflected in the photographs and other forms of art as documentary evidence. Take for example Gideon Mendel's body of work which was taken at the Nancefield Hostels[11] in 1991. Although the photographs on show were not titled, each photograph had a similar caption with only the verb changing with each paragraph. One of these statements read:

> A Zulu migrant worker washes at the communal showers at Nancefield Hostels in Soweto, South Africa. Migrant workers spend most of their time working in Johannesburg, returning home to Zululand for only a few weeks out of the year. Zulu migrant workers, often supporters of the Inkatha Freedom Party, have been involved in recent attacks on African National Congress supporters who also stay at the same hostels.

[10] In this exhibition Fiona Rankin-Smith collaborated with professor of history and widely published author Peter Delius, as well as with researcher at the Public Affairs Research Institute (PARI) Laura Phillips. She previously contributed to exhibitions *Figuring Faith: Images of Belief in Africa* (2005) and *Halakasha*, a soccer exhibition mounted to coincide with the 2010 World Cup (Preller, 2010).

[11] Nancefiled hostels are located between Orlando and Pimville (formerly known as Klipspruit) in Soweto.

Another photograph with a revised clause read: “A Zulu migrant sleeping in the hostels”. Mendel’s photographs and the curatorial team’s oversight to think deeply about the resulting implications of such photographs are, to me, an example of what Biko argued against when saying that some African cultural concepts have been poorly defined by casual non-African readers (2017, p. 44).

Biko was not alone in his view. Psychologist, Author and Activist Chabani Manganyi also shared a similar concern in his book, ‘Being Black in The World’ (1973). For Manganyi, the white experience is so existentially different from the black experience that “white writers have to abstract to a very unhealthy extent in order to move beyond the level of mere description to that of analysis and understanding” (1973, p. 9). The impression created by the photographs, and in the exhibition as a whole, seem to be carefully created in portraying hostel residents (and in effect black people) as a kind of antiquity, as picturesque, or a classic case of the trope: ‘Jimmy comes to Joburg’[12]. The curators’ speculations of home and belonging solicited visitors of the exhibition into drawing one sided speculations about who the migrants were, how they should be understood and what narratives about their journeys into urban areas should be noted and remembered. In light of public discussion on land ownership and land expropriation, the curators’ exclusion of white people’s narratives out of the migrant experience gave the feeling that re-affirmed Manganyi’s observations, that studies on Africans by white South Africans were considered valuable to the extent that they offered “clues relevant to the possible harnessing of the black labour force for the benefit of industry and commerce” (ibid). I find the exclusion of white people’s migrant journeys as part of the exhibition to affirm a narrative formed by apartheid’s prescripts that determined one race to be the working class, while the other was reserved to own the means of production. Such an undertaking reminds me of Hendrik Verwoerd sentiments in response to Harold Macmillan’s ‘Winds of Change’ when stating:

> [There] are people, not only in the Union but throughout major portions of Africa, who brought civilisation here, who made possible the present development of black nationalism by bringing the natives education, by showing them the Western way of life, by bringing to Africa industry and development, by inspiring them with the ideals which Western civilisation has developed for itself (“Politicsweb”, 2016).

Verwoerd’s remarks were an attempt to dissolve Macmillan’s counsels to the South African parliament on 3 February 1960. For Macmillan, while it was worth congratulating the South African government on their endeavours to build a strong economy through sectors such as mining and agriculture, it was also worth reminding the union that ever since the end of the roman empire, one of the facts which have been consistent in Europe has been the emergence of independent nations. These nations have

[12] Jimmy comes to Joburg is a trope that has been loosely used to describe encounters by people from the rural parts of South Africa with what Stephen Gray (1985; p. 60) calls the white industrialized city.

come into existence over the centuries in different forms and with different kinds of governance, but all have been inspired by a deep feeling of nationalism which has grown as the nations have grown. I quote his submission to the Union at length when stating:

> In the 20th century, and especially since the end of the war, the processes which have given birth to the states of Europe have been repeated all over the world. We have seen the awakening of national consciousness in people who have for long centuries lived in dependence upon some other power. 15 years ago, this movement spread throughout Asia. Many countries there, of different races and civilisation, pressed the claim to an independent national life. Today, the same thing is happening in Africa, and the most striking impression I have formed in South Africa since I left London over a month ago, is the strength of this 'African national consciousness'. In different places it takes [on] a different form, but it is happening everywhere. The winds of change are blowing through this continent and whether we like it or not, this growth of national consciousness is a political fact, and we all must accept it as a fact and our national policies must take account of it.
>
> You will understand this better than anyone … [because Afrikaner nationalists], have also created a free nation, a new nation, and indeed in the history of our time you will be recorded as the first of the African nationalism (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c07MiYfpOMw&t=935s).

Macmillan's submission gives us a context in which ideologies were already at contest. Therefore, one would assume that a historical account of migration in South Africa would consider curating works that reflected this state of affairs; of attraction and repulsion, of acceptance and rejection, of nationalism and counter nationalisms. Instead the exhibitions curation of Mendel's photographs took me back to the concerns raised by art critics Gerhard Schoeman (2013) and Athi Joja (2014). In his review of Mikhael Subotzky's exhibition, *Stuff Barta* (2013), Schoeman notes how the artist's recent work embodied the art industry's growing peculiarity in which the rich have shown an appetite for the poor, the marginal, "and never more so when the poor and the marginal are turned into art" (ibid, p. 91). When writing on the representation of black bodies in Brett Baily's *Exhibition B* at the Barbican Centre in London, Joja argues that Bailey's penchant for black bodies is, in part, a reflection of how white people tend to focus on black suffering to "calibrate their humanity" (ibid, p. 86). In the book, "Covering Islam: How Media and The Experts Determine How We See The Rest Of The World", Edward Said expressed concerns over related issues when noting that anthropologists, educators and media houses who have taken to Islam often endeavour to 'portray', 'characterise', 'analyse', or give 'instant courses' on the religion and its people. This, with the purpose of making it known as news without intimating that "a great deal in this energetic coverage is based on far from objective material" (1997, p. xi).

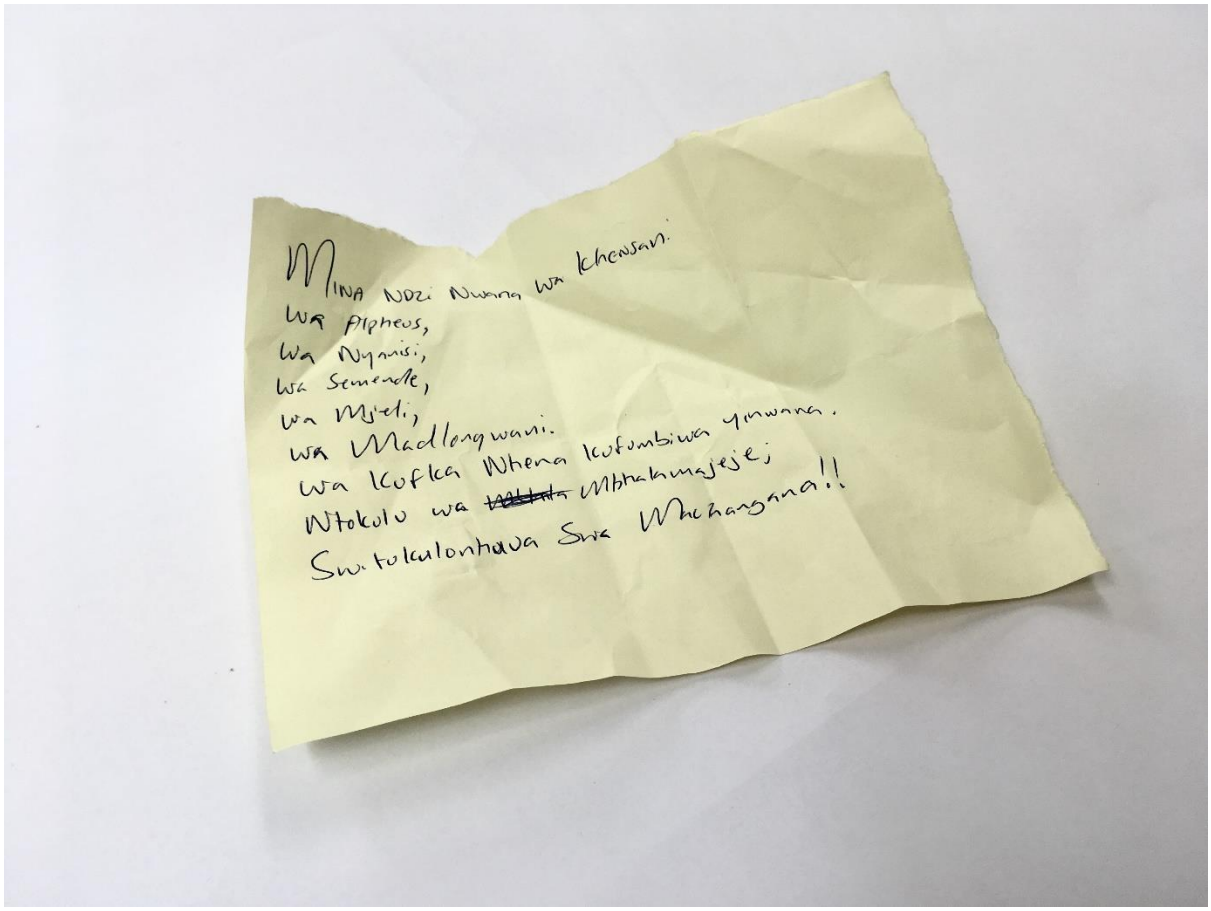
In this exhibition, the curators seemed to have laboured at collecting, displaying and interpreting this one-sided account of the migrant experience in South Africa. At first, I thought that maybe a broader and more inclusive account of migrancy would have enriched the exhibition's objective of using rich and evolving objects and artworks to broaden an understanding of the topic, but then again there might be a possibility that perhaps Fiona Rankin-Smith, Peter Delius and Laura Phillips are still to feel the breeze from these 'winds of change'. By this I mean that the curator's inclusion of white people's journeys as part of the migrant experience might run the risk of contesting the grand narrative of ownership and forms of labour in the country. One might even go as far as contending that the curators did not need to mount visuals or narratives of white people's journeys to South Africa as part of the exhibition for they could not, at least without widespread contestation, claim to be alien anywhere in the world. It continued the notion that the world was built around them; around their ideologies, around their versions of history and their perceptions of others in the world. Verwoerd's confidence in reminding the likes of Macmillan that white people brought civilisation to Africa was an example of these ideologies at play: to arrive at the tip of a continent, to take over a country and to submit 'natives' into a form of labour capital for economic or personal gains.

It is within this context, and because of efforts to push back at such ideals, that my father takes comfort in tracing the ideological, historical and cultural foundations once envisioned by ooMbalamajeje. At first viewing one may have been convinced of the curators' endeavours to bring insights into the conflicted trajectory of what informed South Africa's economy through early migrant life, but a close reading of the exhibition reveals just how much of the information is a reconstruction of migrancy as it interested them. Such interests do not attempt to contest the reoccurring and dubious narrative on migrancy in South Africa; a narrative which former Democratic Alliance leader Hellen Zille reminded us of when labelling learners from the Eastern Cape, who had moved to the Western Cape in search of a better education, as "education refugees" (https://mg.co.za/article/2012-04-20-comment-about-refugees-haunts-zille/). As a politician and a public figure, Zille's remarks have received the widespread response that it warranted, but projects such as *Ngezinyawo* seem to exist between the cracks of public dialogue or scrutiny, in spite of the prestigious platform of an exhibition at a reputable museum. The team involved in curating the exhibition did not have to deal with the public discourse and critique of sustaining a one-side account or flat representation of the migrant experience in South Africa.

One would then, as I assume the thought to have crossed my father's mind, ask oneself the following questions: upon which mould or narratives in our history shall one find a more rounded history of who one is? What is to be said about this mould? What could be said of the prototype used to form it? What should one make of the product cast from this mould?

For my father, isithakazelo becomes our (family's) manifestation of what Ama Mazama (2001), Molefi Asante (1991), Mangus Bassey (2007), Robert Sobukwe (1959), Steve Biko (2017), Thandiswa Mazwai (2006) and Herbie Tsoaeli (2012) described as " a social and ideological lens that contends and rests upon our ability to systematically displace European ways of thinking, being, feeling, and so forth and consciously replace them with ways that are germane to our own African cultural experience" (Mazama, 2001, p. 388). Asante described this as an Afrocentric gesture. "It is Africa asserting itself intellectually and psychologically, breaking the bonds of Western domination in the mind as an analogue for breaking those bonds in every other field". (1991, p. 172). It is a sentiment which reminds me of Thandiswa Mazwai rhetorical questions when singing: *nizilibele ukuba nizalwa ngobani?* (2006, track, 2).

Home Truths



Acculturation II, 2020.

A few weeks after the initial conversation, I came across the same piece of paper. This time the paper had been folded and placed between the pages of my grandfather's bible, as though it has been used to mark a page or highlight a text in one of the passages. Once again, I read it, but this time I caught myself trying to memorise, thinking of questions to ask, and of the context in which meaning is derived. *Mina ndzi nwana wa Khensani, wa Alpheus, wa Nyanisi, wa Semende, wa Mjeli, wa Mandlogwani; wa kufka Nhena kufumbiwa yinwana ntokulu wa Mbhalamajeje? Switukulonhuva swa Machangana?* Even with my father's plea to know or engage with the historical and cultural contexts of his side of the family, I was not content with the attrition of social interactions, memories, forms of knowledge or aspirations gathered through my lived experiences in Meadowlands and other cultural contexts. By this I mean that I was not content with the wearing out of emotional attachments that I developed while living in Meadowlands. I was not yet ready to erode the spiritual teachings gathered while a student at Nur-ul-Islam, could not erase the memories spent as a member of the Methodist church, or block out childhood aspirations shared with friends. Perhaps the most contentious of these

is the possible relinquishing of isithakazelo as understood and preserved from my mother's side of the family.

Before my father had introduced me to my paternal side of isithakazelo, the more fundamental aspects of paying homage to my ancestry has always been through *diboko tsa ga Moche*[13]: *…bo Kgabo, Mokgatla. Moananong wa Mankwe. Moana Nonyana e godimu; ngodikgodi. Ya reng ha a tuka, o tuka kgabo; ya reng ha a tuka oba lelakabe. Kgabo e kgubedu; Lekagtlamodula!* Added to *diboko tsa ga* Moche were conversations with my grandmother on her times living between townships in the former Transvaal. Growing up listening to her life stories and her teachings gave me a sense that conferring relevance to my lived experiences in Meadowlands is, in a way, a continuation of a family narrative as well as a shared account of how residents sought to turn townships from a site of displacement into places for living. Modisane puts this sentiments more eloquently in his grief for Sophiatown when writing:

> Whatever Sophiatown was, it was home; we made the desert blossom; made alterations, converted half-verandas into kitchens, decorated houses and filled them with music. We were house-proud. We took the ugliness of life in the slum and wove a kind of beauty; we established bonds of human relationships which set a pattern of communal living, far richer and more satisfying – materially and spiritually – than any housing model could substitute (ibid, p. 16).

When I spoke of Kwaito as a conduit through which I would understand and adopt the tapestry of South Africa's then beckoning democracy, I was not implying that the past could or should be isolated in its pastness. I understand that the person that I am has been conceived in relation to and through ongoing conversations with those who came before me. In this understanding, a sense of who my forebearers were is an indirect account of the person I was in the past. In 'Being and Nothingness'. Jean-Paul Sartre described this concept as 'the phenomenology of the temporal' when writing: "[M]y past is first of all mine, it exists as the function of a certain being that I am. The past is not a nothing; neither is it the present; but at its very source, it is bound to a certain present and to a certain future, to both of which it belongs" (1984, p. 163). It is within these ideas of transcendence, of taking ownership of my grandparent's lived experiences as my past, that I begin to conceptualise and create my artworks as a form of self-writing. On one hand, the body of work produced as part of this research represents my sentiments for our family heirlooms. On the other hand, this body of work also seeks to reflect conversations that me and my father are currently having. These are what I go on to describe as 'Home Truths'.

[13] This is a Tswana rendition of Moche's isithakazelo.



104b MMutlwa street, photographer unknown.



Remembering Kokwane, 2020

Home truths are unpleasant yet true details about yourself. These are mostly disclosed in a nurturing manner within a safe space like home or among friends. Using this form of truth telling also enables my father and I to look at our views on identity in relation to the lives we lead both as individuals as well as a family. So far, our conversations on the subject has seen us cast our identity from separate mouldings. In spite of this difference we also concur on sentiments suggesting that an understanding of our past is integral to how we view ourselves today. It is with this in mind that I then asked myself the question: which aspect of our past should be considered as a mould for my self-writing? This exploration serves as a concept for my artistic explorations. Put differently, as a body of work, *Home Truths* creatively seeks to reconcile both me and my father's views on which aspect of our family's history necessitates my self-writing.

For my father, history has proven the township to be a colonial imposition, and thus most of what comes from the township could be attributed to how apartheid conceived of black people in South Africa. Therefore, in foregrounding my experiences in Meadowlands and other cultural contexts, I run the risk of losing the traditions and customs which link me to the communal culture of my ancestors. this means that I lose out on rites of passage, on ceremonial practices, on forms of knowledge and the collective conscience of what it means to be Mbalamajeje. To put it differently, I forego the cultural practice in which a meaningful account as uMahlaela is understood.

This positioning got me thinking about him, about my grandparents and how they went about negotiating their self-concepts. My grandfather (his father) did not have the privilege of being raised by his biological parents. Instead, he was raised in a missionary orphanage in Northern Transvaal. Living in an orphanage meant that my grandfather was neither exposed to anecdotes, nor to customs which would shed light on his immediate history or closest ancestry. All that he managed to gather about his paternal linage were names gathered from the orphanage's file along with written reports on how he became part of their extended family. Besides his times living in Soweto, much about his history and in effect our family narrative remains a grey area; no memory of family customs that tie us to the spiritual community of our immediate ancestry, no tombstones to remember them by, just names and broken narratives which relate us as part of the Mbalamajeje clan within the Tsonga indigenous group. This disconnect was further perpetuated by circumstances which saw him working in Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Gauteng. My feeling is that growing up in an orphanage, and having to move between cities and provinces produces a sense of identity which is familiar with English scholar and critical theorist, Homi Bhabha's concept of the *Unhomely* (1992, p. 141). For Bhabha, to be 'unhomed' is to realise that you are part of a social structure that displaces your understanding of the home and the world. He further argues:

> In the stirring of the unhomely, another world becomes visible. It has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations. The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home or the-home-in-the-world (ibid).

His life, our family history, and our ancestry arise as a piecing together of fragments from his past (what I come to perceive as 'home') along with the history of migration in Johannesburg (what I come to perceive as 'the world'). As I begin to engage with these fragments, I encounter a complex mix of 'attraction and repulsion'; of how Johannesburg's emerging economy attracted a labor force from various parts of Southern Africa, and how laborers had to arrange themselves under the confines once prescribed to them by an oppressive regime. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin describe this mixture of

attraction and repulsion to reflect a post-colonial condition of 'ambivalence' wherein the colonizer and colonized are never simply opposed to each other (2002, p. 12). Ambivalence implies that a close reading of our family history reveals parts which were on one hand complicit with, while on the other hand resisted the confines brought on by colonialism and apartheid. In speaking with my father, I cannot help but get the feeling that it is within aspects of resistance that he cautions against my acts of self-writing. His reservation suggests if relevance is conferred upon my lived experiences in a township at a particular point in time, then much of what has produced a sense of the 'unhomely' will remain.

My mother's side of the family, a moulding to which my names and a feeling of home have thus far been attributed, also has a similar account. Her father passed on while my mother was still young. In his absence, our point of reference became our grandmother (my mother's mother), my mother as well as her siblings. Being a victim of multiple forced evictions in the Transvaal, my grandmother would often relay accounts of how the state structured social accommodations in a way that disrupted their conceptions of home. Some of these included reflections on her childhood experiences growing in Grasmere and how her parents were subsequently evicted to live in Evaton, a township in Sedibeng (formerly known as the Vaal triangle). I also remember her speaking of how she and her siblings had to move to Johannesburg in search of employment wherein they ended up living in Alexandra township. As Alexandra swelled towards suburbia, the government decided to group them together with those from Sophiatown and Atteridgeville when relocating them to Meadowlands. My grandmother used to tell of how she initially resented Meadowlands for not only existing as the physical manifestation of her latest dislocations, but also because of how the township became a protest site with many of them risking the possibility of arrest or the prospect of another eviction when refusing to pay for their accumulated rates and taxes.[14]

Writing up these stories also reminded me of a conversation with a close friend over how she and her family ended up living in Boipatong, another township in Sedibeng. For Refiloe, life in Boipatong meant she and her family of 5 were expected to make do with squeezing themselves into a one-bedroom house. Having to sleep on the floor on a daily basis meant that she and her sisters would occasionally fall asleep looking at shoes, suitcases and bags of clothes stored beneath a bed that was suspended with paint cans. This storage method, coupled with the memory of previous evictions, led her to believe that peoples bags were always packed; that her parents' minds were always on alert; watching

[14] My grandmother used to speak of how my grandfather, his peers and the majority of people in Zone 1 Meadowlands used to band together in protest exclaiming: *Ons pataal nie ons phola.* Loosely meaning that 'we won't pay, we are not moving, in fact we are chilling'. The phrase was an adaptation of the phrase used by residents in Sophiatown to protest state sanctioned evictions. The original phrase was *ons dak nie ons phola*, loosely translated to: 'We are going nowhere, we are chilling'.

over their backs, sensitive to the sound of loud screams, their ear to the ground listening out for whispers that something was lurking out there, and probably destined towards them.

Circumstances resulting in a feeling of unhomeliness are both a personal and collective account. As a collective, a feeling of being 'unhomed' is brought on by the realization that the past continues to haunt us from its shallow grave. My feeling is that a sense of being with others in the world, by this I mean a sense of self that is in conversation with a shared experience, should also be cognizant of the context which brought us here. To speak of identity politics, bearing in mind our recent history, is not a matter of being polemical. Being black brings with it a social and historical reference like no other. It manifests itself in where we live, it is reflected in our economic structure with the majority of black people living in poverty, we listen and watch as race forms part of political campaigns, and more often we care to admit, black people have had to bare the menace of being black in the world.

Even with my father's proposition to discover a past wherein our sense of being was not determined by our melanin, my reservation is that in trying to revitalize and reclaim customs and practices that were part of ooMbalamajeje's self-conceptions, colonialism has, as Jay Ciaffa alluded in his essay, *Tradition And Modernity In Postcolonial African Philosophy*, "violently disrupted African cultural traditions and imposed, with varying degrees of success, European forms of thought and social organisation upon colonized peoples" (2008, p. 121). Thus, a contemporary sense of who we are as black people, is in varying ways a navigation of such disruptions. If I was to dismiss the memories and emotional attachments associated with how my grandparents negotiated value under those trying times, I believe that I run the risk of conceiving acts of self-writing which are detached from the reality of what it means to be black and living in the township in these present times. Meadowlands is home to me in the same way that others have developed an emotional attachment to their respective environments. Isithakazelo is much a part of my identity in the same way I conceived of Meadowlands and its cultural expressions. In this way, concessions raised both with regards to Meadowlands and of isithakazelo are already complicit in my acts of self-writing.



Untitled, 2020



The Conversation Continues II, 2020



Diphatso, 2020

Thoughts on Ukuphahla

In an attempt to get a clearer sense of these implications, my artistic body of work adopts 'Ukuphahla' as a theme. Ukuphahla is widely understood as a process of communicating with or seeking guidance from your ancestors. As a gesture of adding to this understanding, I also wish to incorporate my father's propositions around home truths as another way of seeking guidance. As a practice that both of us are already familiar with, ukuphahla opens up a window in which our ancestry can form part of the conversations by allowing us to enter a consciousness (through trances, throwing cowries, the beating of drum, singing, burning of incense etc..) that allows us to see and understand things which cannot easily be articulated into language. Access to these form of truth telling allows us to access the spiritual moulding in which the self is also cast. In so doing, the self is not only realised in the physical and material sense, but is also formulated in conversation with spiritual community wherein our ancestors reside.



Tebellong, 2020

The most common place in which ukuphahla takes place is in an 'Indumba' or Emsamu. Indumba is a Nguni word meaning a sacred space or place for divination, consultations, diagnosis and healing practices. People who grew up in a home that has an indumba often use this as a special place where they communicate with their ancestors. For those who do not have a demarcated place in their homes, spaces for ancestral consultations are often forged somewhere in the corner of a chosen room. There are others who prefer to consult with a Sangoma who would, upon request, intercede the physical and the metaphysical world of an ancestor in order to make restitution. There are also others who prefer the open landscape as a means to connect with their ancestry and other forms of spirituality.

An example of the latter is Tebellong. Situated along Welgewonden Road, not far from Residentia train station at Zone 6 in Sebokeng, a local resident and Sangoma, Tebogo has marked this as his preferred space for divination, consultation and healing practices. For Tebogo, there is a unique relation with ukuhahla in open spaces, which is different from the one he has at home. "This space has, with time, come to mean a lot to me as a healer. As much as people answer to their spiritual calling as healers, spaces can also offer a sense of meditation and healing, even an unassuming space such as this", Tebogo explains. (Tebogo, personal communication, 19 November 2019). Tebello is marked using the familiar symbols of coloured flags with religious symbols of a cross and an eclipsed moon mounted to a pole. The ground surface in which ukuphahla takes place is demarcated by continued maintenance and trimming of the grass. As someone who walks past the site regularly and is familiar with the

implied meaning of the mounted coloured flags, Tebellong becomes a kind of intervention amidst the busyness of life as people rush home from work or take to their daily errands.

Being familiar with forging spaces at home or in open landscapes, I became intrinsically drawn to the prospect of using certain spaces in our yard a sites for conversing and ukuphahla. As an artist and someone who values heirlooms as tangible objects in which identity, relationships and memories can be traced, I became drawn to the prospect of revisiting, re-imagining and re-presenting parts of my heirloom as artworks. This is how Dipatlisiso and Keabetswe have been realised.

Dipatlisiso



Dipatlisiso I, 2020



Dipatlisiso II, 2020



Dipatlisiso III, 2020



Dipatlisiso IV, 2020



Dipatlisiso V, 2020

The series titled *Dipatlisiso* is conceived as, but not limited to, a reimagined version of me and father's ongoing conversation. *Dipatlisiso* presents a sequence and variation to the space of *In Conversation* (page 10).

The series begins with an image of a chair placed beneath the outstretched shadow of the morning sun. Besides the chair is a bowl holding ashes of burnt incense commonly known as 'impepho'. Impepho is mostly burnt as a means to either cleanse a space of harmful spirits or in communication with our ancestors when undergoing the process of ukuphahla. As much as the familiarity of chair could be perceived to represent either me or my father, the process of ukuphahla also invites our ancestors to form part of the conversation. The effects thereof are implied in the footprints in front of the chair. On the other side of the chair is one half of a two-piece mould. The mould or the forms implied by the design of the mould, serves as both a vessel that holds and reciprocate. And in the context of me and my fathers' conversations on what necessitates my acts of self-writing, the forms which have been reciprocated as a result of pressing into mould could serve as a symbolic representation of our ancestors' diagnosis, and answers to questions that arose as part of our conversations. In the third image from the series, the foot prints are replaced by shoe imprints. For my father, the visual representation of the shoes can be perceived as the presence of another person from our ancestry (personal communication, 26 April 2020). On top of the chair is a straw mat that is commonly used for kneeling in the process of ukuphahla. Building on my father's suggestion, the straw mat on the chair is to signify counsels of continued consultations, which are carried through in the fourth and fifth instalments. The fourth photograph features an image of the straw mat placed behind the mould besides a sealed bag of clay. The proposition for further consultations is carried through in the fifth variation which shows the image of clay pressed into the mould.

As a process, *Dipatlisiso* mediates our concerns through gestures that are familiar and comfortable to both of us. As a space, *Dipatlisiso* invites us back to a site where most of our afternoon conversations unfolded. And as an artwork, *Dipatlisiso* provides the viewer with a visual text, which relates the physical processes of press casting to 'ukuphahla', with the aim at looking into prospects in which the two can relate.

Keabetswe



Kefiloe I, 2020.



Kefiloe I, 2020.

Keabetswe is a Tswana word meaning I have been given, or I am endowed with. Owing to the name of the work, Keabetswe is inspired by a selection of items from my personal heirloom. Part of this selection includes my grandfather's collection of beads, bangles and walking sticks that I have inherited after his passing. In their book 'The Meaning Of Things: The Domestic Symbol And The Self' (1981), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Eugene Rochberg-Halton argue that objects don't only point to their immediate use, but also reflect the intrinsic character of the owner. As part of their discussion on *People and Things*, the authors argue that:

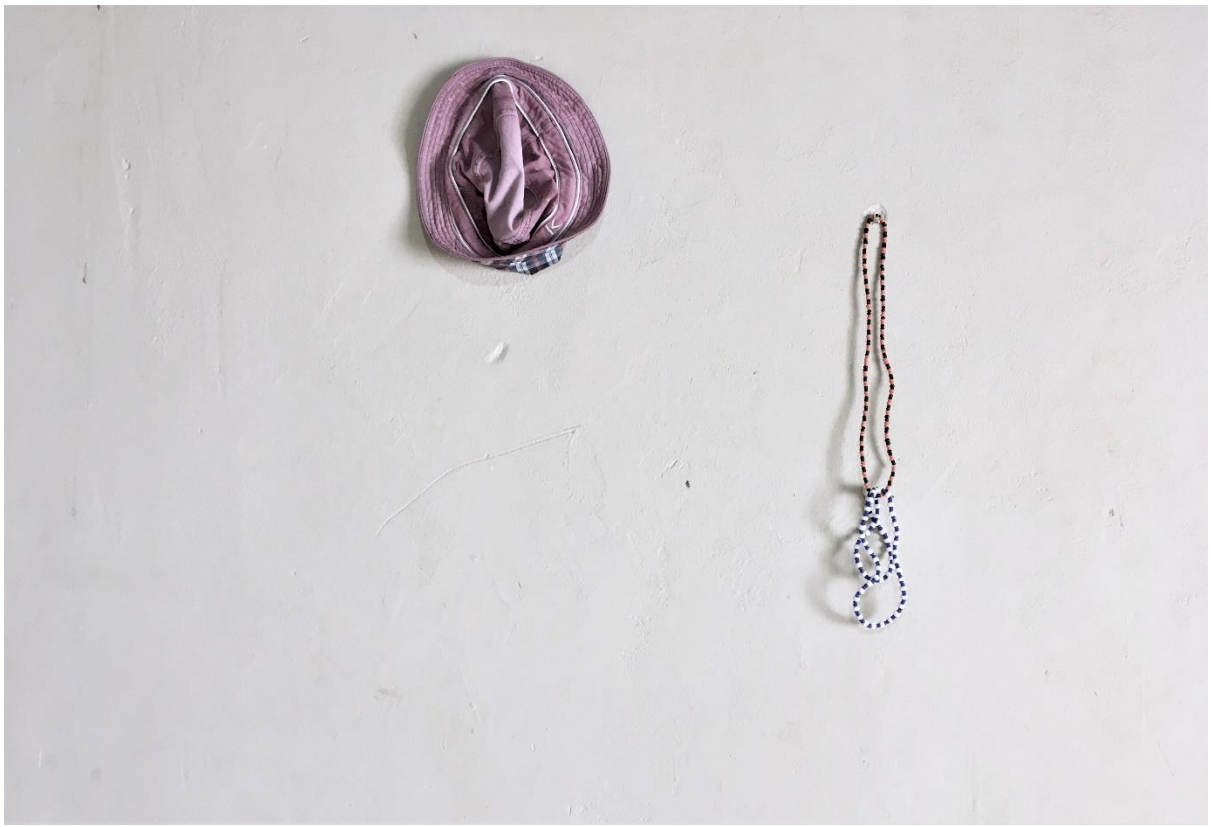
> Humans display the intriguing characteristic of making and using objects. The things with which people interact are not simply tools for survival, or for the making of life easier and more comfortable. Things embody goals, make skills manifest, and shape the identities of their users. Man is not only *homo sapiens* or *homo ludens*, [they] are also *homo faber*, the maker and user of objects. [in so doing, their sense of self is,] to a large extent a reflection of things with which [they] interact. Thus [,] objects also make and use their makers and users (ibid, p. 1).

Socially and culturally beadworks are interpreted differently depending on context. For example, the meaning behind the use and wearing of traditional beadwork at the Msinga area in Northern Kwa-Zulu Natal, historian Bonisile Zungu states how beads formed an integral part of a 'material culture' in which people and social roles were identified (2000, p. 1). When writing about the valorisation of beadwork in the lives of women, in clothing, as well as part of tradition, art historian Anitra Nettleton states:

> Beads were strung and sewn by women, not only for themselves, but also, importantly, for men who were absent from the homestead for long periods. 28 Beaded dress items were mostly worn for ceremonies that had to be performed at home, because the ancestral community's presence and participation was essential to their success… Some items were specifically linked to rites of passage such as initiation, courtship and marriage, many of which required periods of seclusion, separation and abstinence prior to the principal participants' reintegration into communities (2014, pp. 348-349).

For Zungu, as societies and communities became increasingly exposed to the Western customs, the value of beadwork as a place holder for identity began to lose its popularity among locals at Msinga (Ibid). In her essay, *In Pursuit of Virtuosity: Gendering "Master" Pieces of 19th Century South African Indigenous Arts,* Anitra Nettleton mentions that from the 1840s, beads were made for sale to 'white outsiders' (2012, p. 346). In places like Makhanda, Ethekwini and Cape Town, photographers often endeavoured to use beads as props to dress and photograph black people as part of a colonial gaze "while others collected beadwork to be exhibited at museums at the heart of the mother country" (ibid).

However, it is not within this context that I wish to appropriate my grandfather's set of beads. Rather, what interests me is the sentimental value that I have since developed for items that were once personal to him. As part of relaying an affection that I have developed for my grandfather's beads, I worked on re-imagining and redesigning some of the beads he wore as necklaces as well as those which he used to proudly strap across his torso. As a ceramist, I am intimately drawn to a different aesthetic quality and processes of making beads - mainly the way in which people used to make beads from clay, reeds and animal skins; a quality which, unlike the glass or plastic beads that are sold at most of our local stores, have a more rudimentary and stone-like finish.



Iintsimbi I, 2020.



Iintsimbi II, 2020.

IIntsimbi II is one of the necklaces that I produced when initially engaging with parts of my collection. The beads that were used in the necklace were formed using two types of clay, mainly porcelain and clay that I scoured from the nearby river banks. These beads were formed individually using my fingers and subsequently fired to a range of 1160 - 1200 degrees Celsius. Over and above the use of different clays (with one being white and the other being black), the changing of firing temperatures contributed the colour variations on the beads. The tooth that forms the centre piece of the necklace was part of the items which I inherited as part of the heirlooms. During the process of ukuphahla, the tooth revealed itself as part of an animal that is our family totem. The stone-like appearance of the necklace, together with process of pressing clay in the mould as shown in *Dipatlisiso* resulted in me exploring the possibilities of redesigning and upscaling the beads as a sculptural piece. As a sculptural piece, the beads, the necklace and the process of assembling them into a wall piece, gave the work a different feel, now as a reflection of personal memory and a desire to fill in the silences of our past with my curiosities, wishes and fantasies.

For me, upscaling, altering and re-presenting items which I have become attached to becomes one of the ways in which I memorialise a person whom I remember as having a quiet sense of authority, and whose absence as part of this conversation is greatly missed. I realise that as history proves itself to be significant in determining what necessitates my acts of self-writing, so too does my desire to recover those meaningful narratives that run the risk of being erased by the urgency to deal with life's matters as they occur in the present.



Iintsimbi III, 2019

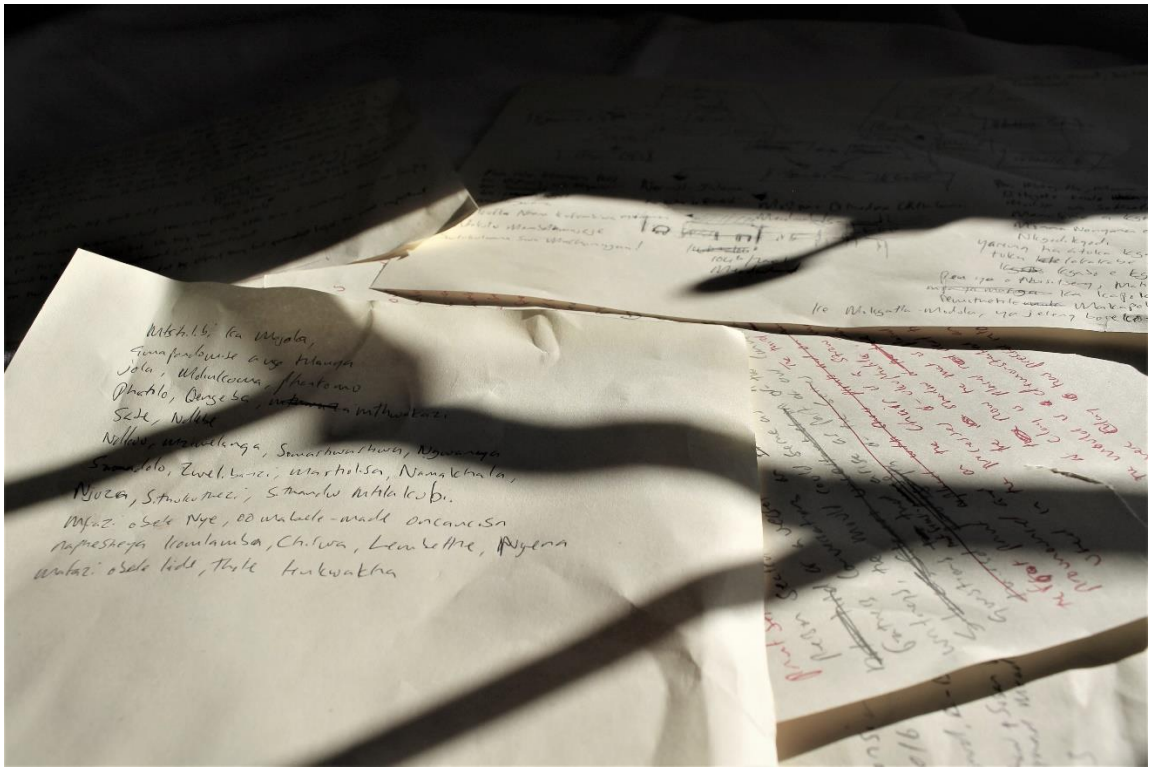
Keabetswe is not only an artistic re-imaging of personal belongings, but as part of coming to terms with our family history, this, together with the artworks that emerge as a part of the research, uses memories of my grandparents as a point of entry into the world of our ancestry.

Makwadiso (by way of closing, and expanding)

My efforts of looking into the past is driven by a feeling of hope; to get a sense of who is missing, how we got estranged, and how we can forge a stronger bond now and moving forward. To borrow from Es'kia Mphahlele's counsels on how to find an African humanism, artistic and conceptual processes relating to ukuphahla are, in part, a gesture to "scratch the surface of an African, and beneath the trappings of a Western civilisation is their own personality that has come from centuries of civilisation - a civilisation built upon the firm foundations of behavioural patterns, social relationships and spiritual values" (2002, p. 323).

However, in this (re)discovery, in journeying into our family history, I realised that the past has always been a part of us, so much that it has transcended the premise of its existing in a historical sense to form part of a present through conversations on identity, memory and acts of self-writings.

So instead of viewing identity as a given that does not stray too far from the confines of isithakazelo, I think that a more enticing way of looking into my acts of self-writing is through documenting processes which invested my sense of reality and use those to determine the forms of knowledge to which it was subjected. In documenting, we realise that cultural, social and political ideologies not only contest with each other (as the conversations revealed along the process) but are also bound by the human condition (the extent to which an individual is consenting of these ideologies). With the prospects of both enriching isithakazelo as a third generation of uMahlaela, and honing in on my acts of self-writing as Tsholofelo Moche, I have begun jotting, blending and interpreting people, events and places which have become important in my life's journey. This, with the idea of presenting this research as an act of self-writing that is not only cognizant of paying homage to those who came before me, but is also open to analysing, interpreting and evaluating life experiences as they unfold in the present.



Transculturation, 2020

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