

Kusengenzeka noma yini: Wakithi singayibiza ngani lendawo?

Mhlonishwa Chiliza

Student no: 2401636

Master of Arts in Fine Arts by research

Supervisor:

Rangoato Hlasane

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Fine Arts by Dissertation.

Date Submitted

2023-06-02

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Plagiarism Declaration

Name: Mhlonishwa Chiliza

Student Number: 2401636

Course: Master of Arts in Fine Arts by research

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following people that have made my study a success. This takes the form of encouragement and emotional support from my parents, Nomvula Chiliza (mother) and Mkhanyiselwa Chiliza (father), and my two sisters, Silindile and Nobukhosi. The continuous support and motivation from my former lecturer, Nkosinathi Isaac Khanyile, at the Durban University of Technology is appreciated. Support by Mr Khanyile is not only centred on my academic development; as at a later stage he was chosen by my ancestors as a guardian which enhances my spiritual growth as a future healer. I would not leave out my supportive best friend Nkosiyapha Msomi who believes in me; our true progressive friendship shows that we both gravitate towards being successful in life and also remain competitive on our chosen profession, which is in Fine Arts. Support is also from Irvin Nkwanyanya's generosity and assistance through providing a studio space, plus technical and artistic inputs in most sculpture projects that were made possible in Johannesburg province.

I am grateful to be a recipient of the following bursaries, Arts Research Africa funded by the Andrew W Mellon Foundation, Visual Arts Network of South Africa, funded by Cathssetta, and the National Art Council. Without these prestigious scholarships I would not have been able to afford tuition fees and my stay in Johannesburg. I acknowledge the efforts from the Fine Art postgraduate students and staff who contributed with their intellectual generosity in the development of my studies. Technical support and mentorship were also provided from the photography department and staff, Neo Ntsoma, working together with Reshma Chibba throughout the duration of my exhibition titled Singayibiza ngani lendawo? The exhibition inspired a generative discourse which was a building up of scholarly work and the panellists consisted of were Molaodi Wa Sekake responding through the lens of 'Meditations from the Gutter' Sibusiso Wonder Fihlani who is a theatre maker and drama therapist and Sam Mkhize from Town and Regional Planning in Johannesburg.

Lastly, I am grateful to have Rangoato Hlasane as my supervisor and a mentor; he is the best of the best! And I appreciate ways in which he broadened my horizon as a scholar. Mr Hlasane has inspired my intellectual journey throughout the Masters programme. I recall our first meeting when he introduced me to a multiple set of critical theories and frameworks that related to my envisioned ideas. Today I am celebrating and experiencing the manifestation of these big ideas in both research and practice: thank you for laying a strong foundation to my artistic practice, philosophical growth and intellectual culture in my career.

Abstract

Kusengenzeka noma yini means ‘anything can still happen’, serving as a metaphorical phrase or a saying in isiZulu, which hints at the ambiguities of life within hostels. The phrase is interpretive, and multi-layered, reflecting the beauty, complexities, and systematic violence within the spheres of black social life in South Africa. Wakithi singayibiza ngani lendawo? means ‘what should we call this place?’ This is both a question and a double-sided statement, drawn from the everyday practice of yarning inside the hostel arena. South African hostels are congested and temporal, thus allowing for progress, failure, and the crafting of practices that include exploring life opportunities, self-determination, and recreation of freedom by the dwellers.

Wakithi singayibiza ngani lendawo? is a critical question that encapsulate the feeling of yarning and provides a wide range of avenues to negotiate for a new image of hostels. For images that are real or authentic and challenge preconceived portrayal of black migrant residents in South African archives, see the exposé framework between the 1950s -1990s in the documentary series by Ernest Cole, Peter Magubane, Roger Meijntjes and Eli Weinberg. The practice of this resistance group of photographers exposed the injustices of the apartheid regime, while their approach is invasive and shows a violent gaze. It exposes the hostel residents as poor, needy, undignified, bitter and hopeless, and these negative elements overshadow the beautiful experiments that have always been practiced inside the hostel. The purpose of my praxis, through visual arts, is to explore these beautiful experiments inside the hostel by employing a wide range of mediums, such as drawing, sculpture installations, performance (video) and photography. It is a diverse approach that allows for new meanings and ideas to manifest, enabling a new image of hostels to emerge.

The work or praxis serve to address the ‘missing narrative’ to reclaim the loss dignity of hostel communities. Inside the hostel engage with intimate objects, and interpreting different types of sounds within the conceptual frame of *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019) which is drawn from the work of Saidiya Hartman. The wayward framework and a mode of close narration, influences my philosophical as I navigate hostels to find a newly informed image that is far more human and comprehensive.

Keywords: Wakithi!, kusengenzeka noma yini, ukuhlanganisa, wayward, black voices and sounds and critical fabulation

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Introduction

This research aims to interrogate missing narratives, and also to correct the misrepresentations of hostel dwellers in contemporary South African art. I am a hostel dweller, a fine artist and a researcher residing in a township hostel.

The study contests the portrayal of hostel residents within the conceptual frame of *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019) which is drawn from the work of Saidiya Hartman. Hartman narrates the beautiful and authentic lives crafted by young poor black women as a way to resist against imposed violence, such as slavery and other forms of oppression. Hartman (2019, p. 7) explains that 'at the turn of the twentieth century, young black women were in an open rebellion. They struggled to create autonomous and beautiful lives, to escape the new forms of servitude awaiting them, and to live as if they were free. This book recreates the radical imagination and wayward practices of these young women by describing the world through their eyes'.

The general understanding of 'wayward' means difficult to control or predict because of wilful or perverse behaviour. Wooden (2019, p. 464) reviews Hartman's method of interrogation, writing that it 'transcends the limitations of the archive to recall and re narrate the everyday practices that young black women innovated and embodied at the turn of the twentieth century to refuse impositions on their autonomy and freedom'. These were young revolutionary African-American women who invented innovative ways to survive under oppressive conditions such as slavery and prejudice. Hartman (2019, p. 8) indicates that these poor black girls 'have been credited with nothing: they remain surplus women of no significance, girls deemed unfit for history and destined to be minor figures.

The wayward theme relates to my framework as I have also suffered from being overlooked because of my hostel dwelling status, and also being boxed into a category of 'backwardness'. Interrogating such prejudice is juxtaposed with recreating newly informed images of hostel dwellers. The image I intend to recreate interrogates the missing narratives that expose different dimensions of the hostel. And it starts by recognising that some hostel occupants can be progressive thinkers and hard workers who are creative individuals and wayward.

The wayward approach influences my philosophical framework and it also informs how I look at the hostel. 'Waywardness' as a term and concept is employed to redefine both the physical and hidden image of a hostel dweller. The representations do not intend to mask the unchanged violent nature of hostels, such as poverty, slums, overcrowding and a high unemployment rate; my approach in

which I choose to focus on a hostel dweller's dreams and aspirations is more of a social survey that aims to reconstruct and capture the unrecognised and holistic image of hostels. By 'holistic' I refer to an image that is authentic, real, and humanising.

Through my artistic practice I adopt Hartman's approaches and methods of close narration to reflect on hostel experience; this method means to tell a story from an inside circle which connects the reader with broadened insights of a hostel experience. Hartman (2019, p.7) notes how she conveys a sensory experience when capturing a rich landscape of black social life by saying that: 'To this end I employ the method of close narration, a style which places the voice of a narrator and character in inseparable relation.'

The crafting of beautiful experiments by hostel dwellers are not visible to outsiders, they are subtle and, therefore, unnoticed due to the degraded conditions of hostels. It is common that hostels are always engaged at a face value, researchers fall into a trap of focusing on popular materials and imagery that characterise the hostel.

A shallow observation of reformers or researchers is pointed out by Hartman in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments, Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (2019) because outsiders and visitors could not see the young and restless 'Mattie Jackson' and her group of friends as radical thinkers and social visionaries in the city, as she mentioned that 'sons and daughters of the rich come in search of meaning, vitality, and pleasure. The reformers and sociologists come in search of truly disadvantaged failing to see her and her friends as thinkers or planners, or notice the beautiful experiments crafted by poor black girls.' (2019, p. 17). Therefore, this conceptual framing approach is essential as I navigate to find a newly informed Image of hostels that is far more comprehensive and involves the visibility of women and their social contributions in a space that is predominantly dominated by males, and favours patriarchy.

How did I get here: is it possible to succeed in escaping a hostel?

The study is motivated by being born and raised in a working-class family. I matriculated in 2007. Later in 2008 I joined my father in a township hostel, both as a migrant worker at Fine Metals (in a scrap yard in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal) and a prospective Fine Arts student at the Durban University of Technology.

The journey of furthering my studies was a process of trying to break the linearity that is a norm to most black working-class South African families, the norm which is to remain a hard-labour employee up until retirement age. The exploitative pattern of being a hard-labour worker is

observed by looking at my father, who was also a permanent hostel resident, and from whom I inherited bed space when he returned to our rural home. Nomkhosi Xulu-Gama's book, *Hostels in South Africa, Spaces of Perplexity* (2017) looks at the Kwa-Mashu migrant hostel and elaborates on patterns of cross migration and labour, a system that allowed employers to recruit black individuals from rural regions in South Africa and also from the county, enticing them to work in urban areas for low wages (2017, p. 39).

The exposure to a hostel space for more than 12 years has taught me to perceive the township hostel experience in a more positive light. In my creative practice I intend to challenge how people look at the hostel space. The practical component is primarily informed by my insider experience as I work with drawing, sculpture, video, performance, materials (objects), and archives (photographs).

The fragmented materials that I combine serve as a search process towards finding and reconstructing a new image that could possibly show violence, beauty, hope, intellect, and aspirations within the hostel arena. The reconstruction starts by examining the photographic documentary series of hostels that was captured by artists or photographers from the 1950s to the 1990s, in relation to my hostel dwelling experience today. I argue that these representations are not the ultimate way to define hostel life. And by examining these photographs, captured in different timelines, I search for missing narratives with the aim to fill in the gaps and recreate newly informed representations.

How I see the hostel: Insider perspectives



Fig. 1: Trevor Makhoba *uMuzi Wezinsizwa*, 1995, Oil on canvas, 45 X 60cm Gencor Collection

In this study I also look at South African artists who explored similar subject matter in various disciplines such as drawing, painting, sculpture, and photography. These artists include Trevor Makhoba who depicted a hostel in his painting titled *uMuzi Wezinsizwa* oil on canvas, 1995 (see Fig. 1) and Angela Buckland, who depicted a series of beds in Jacobs men's hostel and also a photographic series of women who were residents in Thokoza Women's Hostel. My work intends to challenge the ways in which hostel dwellers are represented; mostly this is of black males and females, who appear to be poor, hopeless, needy, and undignified.

I have an assumption that artists do not go extra mile when interrogating this subject. The portrayal of hostels by artists without gaining full insight results in the recording, archiving, and exhibiting of images of hostel dwellers as being without human values, such as courage, dignity, and aspirations. These common negative representations by artists also highlight how media coverage has negatively portrayed hostel dwellers. In reviewing and analysing these works I will also be critiquing their methods of representation as outsiders.

Makhoba's *uMuzi Wezinsizwa* painting is the most striking depiction of hostel dwellers that relates to the argument I am presenting. The aesthetic intervention of his bright colours and the portrayal of the cheerfulness of people sharing meals and beer captures an essence of life and the unity of migrants. This might be influenced by his intimate knowledge of social cultures that are practiced

and performed by blacks within hostels. The image is elastic and presents boundless possibilities to predict the authentic representations that I intend to search and manifest in this research. The painting shows the interiorities or private moments that reflect the ordinary scenes that happen before a researcher arrives.



Khonzeni from Ndwedwe, sells domestic cleaning products
Resident 30 yrs



Fig. 2 (left): Angela Buckland, *Block A, Thokoza Women's Hostel*, 2011. Fig. 3 (right): Angela Buckland, *Thokoza women at the KZNSA gallery opening night*, 2011

The beautiful experiments that I refer to are the ongoing social activities and cultures that happen beyond a picture frame. Buckland's over-aestheticisation and representations of Thokoza Women's Hostel fails to address her intended framework. According to Brophy (2011) the 700 small-scale photographs that form this large-scale installation depict the intimacy of each resident's living space.

In my view there is an elementary study that exhibits how black women live their lives in their residential units, see the image in Fig. 2: *Khonzeni from Ndwedwe, sells domestic products, resident 30 years*, which portrays a sad woman who is confronted and invaded by a white female

photographer or outsider. Khonzeni is sitting on her bed near a window section with a pile of clothes behind her. The image appears as if the sitter is being swapped around by the photographer to get the effect of natural light to further enhance the image. Generally, if a person is sitting on the bed, a pillow (head rest) would be near the upper limb of the body, whereas in Khonzeni's situation, it is unnatural for a pillow to be on her feet. I take issue with the exploitative photographic patterns that contrast with Buckland's written statement where she makes a claim to 'humanise the space'. The images are regulated and directed to fulfil the photographer's mandate that matches her new encounters and discoveries of narratives about the already existing power structures amongst the dwellers. Brophy (2011) emphasises that 'there is also hierarchy; often the resident who has lived in the room the longest gets the bed near the window'.

In Nocebo Bucibo's thesis of *A just image: South African Hostels and Contemporary South African Photography* (2017) she shares a similar sentiment, as she says that, 'I am critical of her first project *Block A, Jacobs Men's Hostel* because I feel her method of "dedicating less than a minute and one film frame to each bed" (Buckland (sa), p.1) does not represent the hostels, as she never spent time engaging with the dwellers. I also sense that she might have been frightened by that environment, and would have wanted to get out as soon as she could; revealing her position as an outsider. Intentionally or not, this approach also mimics how the hostel dwellers are not given time or recognition' (Bucibo: 2017, pp.60-61).

I am interested in the images of hostel dwellers as guests in the gallery because they begin to break conversational notions of documentary. Take a look at the women on the right that are not directed and regulated by a photographer. Whereas on the left we witness a staged image that shows a sad woman sitting near the window and looking away from the camera. It is important to take note of how the Otolith group introduce the concept of opacity, I relate this to my work because it acknowledges the capacity and strength of a dweller to be able to reveal and hide information. In the Otolith three audio recording by Kodwo Eshun Angalika and Sagar unpack the meaning of opacity as a method to turn back on power by refusing to speak truth to power, because the idea of truth in representations can be shifted and twisted according to a political agency (Fonds Audio #7, 2011).

The hostel lacks privacy. It is difficult to create privacy and it is common that bedrooms are shared spaces. Inside the hostel rooms, the only spaces that a dweller owns independently is a bed space, and also a section of a built-in cupboard in the kitchen that serves as a stand for a two-plate stove. The social setting of my own hostel is not pleasing, it is stuffy and untidy.

There are also regular murders that occur in the hostel, which adds to a feeling of unease. In Mamphela Ramphele's book, *A Bed Called Home* (1993), she also points out that migrant labour hostels in South Africa are occupied by poor working class (1993, p. 1).

Hostels are cheap and affordable. I understand that they are designed as temporary spaces for migrants who come to urban sectors to seek employment and better opportunities. This means that a person has to make progress and leave the bed space vacant for new immigrants, but it is common that hostels shift from their original context as a temporary space and become a permanent home while a person is dreaming of escape.

The escape or fugitivity is not only physical, it could be what one utters like I am in a hostel because *ngifihle ikhanda*, which means sheltering the head and *ngiyadlula* which means I am in transit which adds to affirm that no one wants to spend his entire life in a hostel, it is understood as a temporary space. The value of these terms in relation to waywardness is that they can be interpreted as an everyday practice of fugitivity and refusal. The inside terms are innovative modes of archiving histories of the place, and they play a big role in characterising and individualising a hostel dweller. The terms are still used in the present to clarify a person's social and economic status in society and they go beyond to predict the future.

Theoretical framework

Autoethnography will be generative in this research journey as I grapple with creating a newly informed image of a hostel. Autoethnography is endorsed by Wall (2006, p.146) that it is a developing approach where the author employs a deeply personalised writing style, leveraging their own experiences to deepen comprehension of a societal issue or phenomenon. A creative auto-ethnography is noted by Phaswane Mpe's novel *Welcome to our Hillbrow* (2001), and it has inspired my writing as it draws a close parallel to me as a boy from the rural villages making a transition to the urban sectors for both work and study.

The rough landscape of Hillbrow painted in the work of Mpe connects with devastating realities that I have encountered in a hostel. Wall (2006, p. 149) quotes Ellis (1991, p. 30) confirming that 'the emergence of auto-ethnography as a method of inquiry moves researchers' use of self-observation as part of the situation studied to self-introspection or self-ethnography as a legitimate focus of study in and of itself'. Mpe's approach of engagement with Hillbrow captures a violent landscape in Johannesburg with its social factors that shut down life, hopes and dreams of its youth. Remembering and reflecting on my very first entry at the township hostel, I recall that the

atmosphere was chaotic, full of slums, squatter camps¹, loud Maskandi music everywhere, as well as the smell of junk due to multiple dumping areas.

This extends to witnessing daily corruption, regular attacks, gun testing, theft, traumatic events, or scenes that perpetuate violence and deaths within the hostel. One day in 2008 while walking near KwaMyandu Train Station, located within the perimeters of my hostel, I came across an exposed dead body of a man with fresh gunshot wounds. He had died on the scene, in the intersection where people pass to do their shopping and where they catch the local trains and taxis. This violent and disturbing scenario is similar to what Mpe highlights in his work, as he writes 'for formal news, there was Radio Lebowa, now Thobela FM, broadcasting snippets of car hijackings and robbers' shoot outs with the Johannesburg Murder and Robbery Squad every hour. Five men were found with their ribs ripped off by what appeared to have been butcher's knife' (Mpe, 2001, p. 5).

In Mpe's description he shows the multi-layered human experiences that include love, violence, hate, exploitation, celebration, misrepresentation, and underrepresentation. Therefore, in this note Hillbrow becomes the symbol of representation, underrepresentation, and misrepresentation, and it offers more insight and textures of black social life in the post-apartheid, which matches and connects to my lived experience in a hostel.

The creative autoethnographic framework informs my theoretical positioning in both research and practice. It also contextualises the relational methods and processes in creating a transforming image of hostels. The creative autoethnographic approach is drawn from the work of Mpe's semi-autobiographical fiction and informs my modes of narrativisation and reflections of my lived experience in a hostel.

As for my praxis I agree with Tina Campt's words in *Listening To Images* (2017) where different type of sounds are theorised and interpreted to understand black lives, as she says, 'I ended my last book, *Images Matter*, with a childhood memory of my father's quiet hum – the hum of a man mourning the loss of his wife on the night of my mother's funeral, surrounded by his entire family and all of his friends in our home, my father hummed my mother's favourite Roberta Flack song. Swaying back and forth while his eleven- and thirteen-year-old daughters sang over the record, he hummed instead of crying' (Campt, 2017, p. 3).

The translation and understanding of these different types of sounds feed into my practice as I listen to sounds of blacks in hardship, voices of deprivation, observe objects, archives (photographs) and

¹ These are the informal shelters inside the hostel that are used for trading and some were established by hostel residents as a way to extend space. My father owned one of the shacks to accommodate his family and friends. The shack was later demolished by the eThekweni municipality because it was built in an area that was marked for new shopping centre.

the cracking walls of hostels. Camp (2017, p.4) makes a critical enquiry between quiet and quotidian sounds as she explains: 'Quiet is a modality that surrounds and infuses sound with impact and affect, which create the possibility for it to register as meaningful. At the same time the quotidian must be understood as a practice rather than an act/ion. It is a practice honed by the dispossessed in the struggle to create possibility within the constraints of everyday life. For blacks in diaspora, both quiet and the quotidian are mobilised as everyday practices of refusal'.

Historical background of hostels and violence

This literature review begins by looking at the history of hostels in South Africa; historically hostels are the most feared environments due to their close association to different degrees of violence. The present nature of my hostel is still very affected by the stains of the past, these stains of violence cannot be erased, they influence the present moments, and also determine how people navigate and behave through hostels today.

South African hostels are still faced by the odd shadow of violence and backwardness. This is pointed out by Ramphela (1993, p. 1), that hostels have become globally recognised for their violence, and having been concealed and degraded by white authorities for many years, but now hostel residents resort to physical aggression and riots as a way to highlight the systemic violence of their poor living conditions, though it is important to remember that most dwellers are peace-loving individuals who have ingeniously adapted to survive in a complex environment.



Fig. 4 (left and right): Mhlonishwa Chiliza, *A photographic diary series*, diptych, 2021, Durban hostel

The diptych in Fig. 4 of colourful sjambok sticks suspended on a washing line and under an asbestos roof triggers memory of wars and protests within hostels. These fighting sticks appeared many times with spears, (see Fig. 1, a sharp spear that is placed underneath the open window) as well as in the work of Greg Marinovich, in *The Truth Elusive: Shell House Massacre, 20 Years Later* (2014). However, the sticks are not only used for fighting; they also form part of African traditional attire during important ceremonies such as traditional weddings and *Umemulo* which is a traditional coming of age ceremony for women in Zulu culture.

These materials or weapons assist in facilitating a contemplative dialogue between the past, present and future of the hostels. The aspect of waywardness is that such materiality has developed a market within the hostel and one has to appreciate its dynamic shift to being part of our tangible heritage.

The violent conditions of migrant labour hostels have negatively impacted the practice of photojournalistic artists; see how violence is translated in the black and white photographic archives or documentary series by Ernest Cole, David Goldblatt, and Roger Meintjes. The *exposé* of photojournalistic framework reproduces the violent gaze (see Fig. 5 and Fig. 6). Such practices hugely disadvantage the portrayal of hostel dwellers: they appear to be poor, needy, bitter, and hopeless.

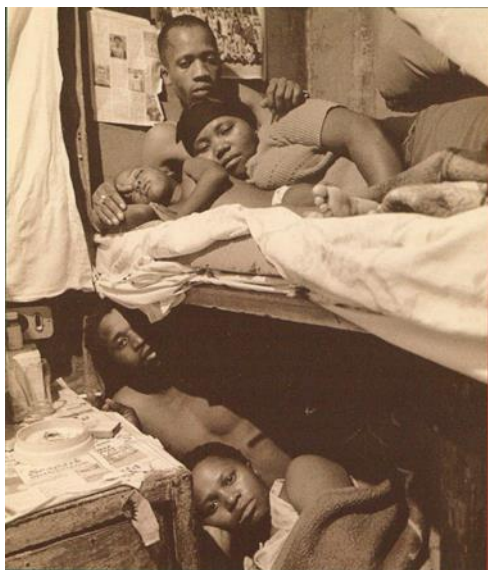


Fig.5 (left): Roger Meintjes, *Bunks often referred to rooms by inmates*, Gugulethu hostel, 1993. Fig.6 (right): David Goldblatt, *Jabulani Men's Hostel*, Soweto, 1972

The majority of hostel dwellers have decent homes in their rural homelands; and it is very rare to come across a person that overstays their time in a hostel by choice. The common excuse for overstaying is that rent is cheap and negotiable, which creates more money for dwellers to afford basic needs such as food, clothes, and transport, as well as to have financial means to uplift standards of life in their rural homes. Therefore, a common term used by hostel residents is *ngisahlanganisa*, which means 'making ends meet'. It is understandable in this context, and it is a conscious reaction to marginalisation and prejudice. Roger Meintje's photograph titled *Bunks often referred to rooms by inmates* is nostalgic and coded with sepia tones depicting hostel dwellers in a closed space. And in David Goldblatt, *Jabulani Men's Hostel*, set in an open space, the image appears to be directed by the photographer because in all the sitters hands are clamped together and placed gently on their thighs, the half-naked men at the back are anxious, which gives an idea that they are trying their best to tolerate and anticipate Goldblatt's presence and needs.

In both photographs (Fig. 5 and Fig. 6) I am pointing out a continuous thread of the violent gaze which is further stressed by Svea Josephy in an article titled *Fractured Compounds: photographing post-apartheid compounds and hostels* (2014). This article is the most insightful for my study as it gives multiple perspectives and creative ideas and ways to look at the hostels. My understanding of 'fractured compounds' in post-apartheid photography metaphorically refers to the un-healed scars of the past, violence in the mines, compounds, and hostels, and this can be traced through by observing the current conditions of many hostels. Scruffy walls, dilapidated cracked buildings and broken windows reintroduce flashbacks of past traumas, scars, and violent histories.

Josephy (2014, p.445) further expresses how these spaces, with their legacy of surveillance and control, remain a constant backdrop to the images generated in the post-apartheid era. And her interpretation of 'fractured compounds', refers to a medical term. She writes of the example of 'a wound in which a bone perforates the skin. These are multiple injuries – of bone, soft tissue and skin – in which the fracture injures and perforates the body, coming into the open. In South Africa, the word compound has been used to describe the living quarters and environment of black male migrant labourers, usually on the mines. These are a site of injury that remains in the South African landscape today' (2014, p.445).

Physical violence and lack of diplomacy is a long-standing phenomenon that is associated with South African hostels. It is still a space with lot of uncertainties. In isiZulu, we say *kusengenzeka noma yini*, meaning 'anything can happen'. In 2017, I recall a night hearing gunshot and few minutes later my elder sister called me to express her concerns about my safety. That night she was part of the group of migrants leaving the 7pm train, at the Kwa-Mnyandu Railway Station near to me. This is what she said: 'I am seeing a mob here and few police vehicles that are gathered around a dead body covered in silver foil, I am too scared because you live around this area and you usually walk at night and this could happen to anybody.'

I presume my sister had sensed something because few hours later after the deadly shooting I was standing few steps away from my block/house, having a long telephonic conversation with my brother. A group of men came towards me to enquire about my identity and reasons why I was standing near their buildings. They threatened to shoot me until I offered to prove that I lived in the house that I was standing near to. One of the men asked me to confirm if I was the same man who was normally dropped off by a silver Jeep Patriot, and I said yes. They apologised, and he said, 'We thought that you were an investigating police officer because of your dress code, especially the shiny formal shoes.' He said: 'We don't want police here and we kill them too.'

The SON[I]A #280.Rags Media collective refer to the simultaneity of events, interrelationship of stories and moments as hypo textuality which means 'everything is connected to something else' or it is where 'everything is a reflection of something else', as here I was, nearly shot and killed while on a call with my brother. Those two calls from my siblings could have been their ways of sending the final goodbyes and *kusengenzeka noma yini* (anything can still happen).

Traces of physical violence

Traces of physical violence are noted by many authors writing between 1990 and 1994, the so-called 'black on black' violence which was institutionalised, instigated, and orchestrated to re-inherit apartheid legacies – the divide and rule strategy. Ramphela (1993, p.1) claims that, according to media reports on the Goldstone commissions in 1992 'there have been increasing allegations that recent violent attacks by hostel dwellers were being orchestrated as part of the contest of power between Inkatha and the ANC'.

In the context of Durban hostels and the growth of political violence before the first democratic elections I refer to a case study that Paulus Zulu (1993) developed, which focused on violence between Kwamashu and uMlazi hostels. Zulu (1993, p.1) agrees that the conflicts were perpetuated by the powerful minority, together with bigger political authorities and he unpacks in three theoretical positions. Zulu starts by discussing two main theories regarding the root causes of violence in hostels.

The first theory attributes violence to a struggle for political control, pitting those in power represented by the regime in office, against liberation movements like the African National Congress (ANC). The second theory suggests that worsening conditions, in particular high unemployment rates, drive individuals to compete for limited resources, often resulting to violence. However, he argues that neither political nor economic factors alone can fully explain the violence; instead, he proposes a third argument that combines political power struggles with access to economic resources, leading to the politicisation of conflict. This theory suggests that a 'third force', comprising security personnel and politically motivated individuals, orchestrates violence to eliminate opposition elements. Despite their political differences, he contends that these three theories share common elements, all emphasising the bipolar nature of the violence.



fig. 7 Mhlonishwa Chiliza, *South African Flag*, 2021

Since 2008, as I walk inside the hostel, my eyes are drawn by the colourful windows, they are painted in different colours of yellow, red, black, white, blue and green. These windows were painted during the times of political wars and attacks between the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) and the African National Congress (ANC). This painting strategy was a tactic to hide from the enemy because people were getting shot through the windows. I perceive these painted windows as a visual text where hostel dwellers took responsibility to write and record their own histories.

Today the old paint on hostel windows is a constant reminder that hostels are still spaces of uncertainty. Attention is largely drawn to such material because of the conversations that they recreate, i.e. the idea of privacy, refusing to be researched, self-isolation and revealing and hiding information. *The Otolith Group* (2011) referred to this aesthetic improvisation as opacity and they describe windows as a frame of representation onto the world of witnessing. The methods of engaging with the materiality of textured windows and objects within hostels are important, as I avoid reproducing violent gaze, but instead I engage hostels with an attempt of creating new,

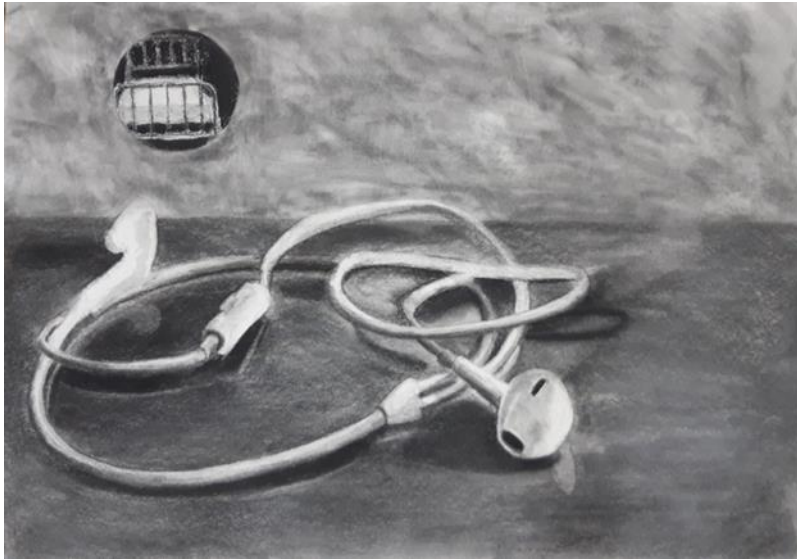


Fig. 8: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, *Uxolo kancane wakithi*, 2020, charcoal and pastel on paper, 70cm x100cm

The pragmatic component of my research process begins by studying objects that are placed near the bed spaces. I look at the narrative content which these objects carry, and also how they contribute to shifting the image of hostel dwellers. Devices such as a radio, earphones, and cell phones enable a person to communicate and to tune into different parts of the world, and such tools open up a space for introspection and also reimagining.

In a setting of shared spaces within the rooms, earphones and a simple activity as reading a book or a newspaper could signal a demand for peaceful moments and privacy. My generic method of engagement with the spaces is using these items and this predicts their role and function and their connection to the daily practice of waywardness. The archived content of images captured by photographers such as Buckland, for example, seem to exhibit uniform aesthetics and narratives, images slightly connected to the black-and-white documentary series by Enerst Cole, David Goldblat, and Roger Meintjes. In my opinion the images represent the hostel at a surface level only, and they seem to be representing just one truth. In my work I am searching for the hidden image, and a multi-layered content that captures the multiplicity of truths within the hostel dwelling experience. This method of practice is intuitive, as I use text, photographs, process drawings and sculpture installations as a process to allow new ideas and images to manifest. And to be a hostel dweller is not a desirable experience, therefore it becomes natural to refuse derogatory labels such as *impohlwa* (bachelor), *iqaba* (uncultured and uneducated) and *inkabi* (hitmen).

The South African socioeconomic and political landscape has conditioned blacks to be multi-rooted, and this is done through acknowledging my multiple identities, as a fine artist, a researcher and a mentor for developing artists. The generative activities that I perform play an essential role in the regaining of respect and dignity for hostel dwellers.

Approach to methods

I have deployed mixed research methods when collecting data, informed by Linda Tihuwai Smiths' book titled *Decolonizing Methodologies Research and Indigenous people* (1999). It is also explained that this book is a counter story to Western ideas about the benefits of the pursuit of knowledge (Smith, 1999).

In my position as a researcher and an art practitioner within the hostel community, the process of collecting data intends to capture content that is not distorted and also creates archives of new narratives about black humanity. Smith introduced twenty-five indigenous projects. Research and process inside the hostel allowed me to draw from the two key projects, 'representing', and 'negotiating'. The 'representing' project spans the notion of representation as a political concept and form of voice, and the 'negotiations' project is about respect to others, self-respect, and respect for the opposition. Indigenous rules of negotiating usually contain both rituals of respect and protocol for discussion (Smith, 1999, pp.142-169).

These are drawn into focus with the aim of not misrepresenting people and their culture, but instead embracing a true sense of humanity within the hostel. I am interested in this way of working as it helps me to do counter representations of the hostel experience. These interrelated concepts or projects allow transparency, freedom, and trust between spaces. They allow for unplanned conversations and yarning. There is an existing study on yarning, which encourages conversations about particular subjects. This was introduced by Professor Dawn Bessarab and Doctor Bridget Ng'andu, who is a specialist in the field of social work, in an article they collaborated on titled *Yarning about Yarning as a Legitimate Method in Indigenous* (2010). The work of these female scholars is now that of indigenous researchers working primarily with disadvantaged communities.

'Yarning' in my language speaks to the daily exchange of ideas within the hostel, and the value of yarning within the social sphere of black lives means that this practice has unlimited potential to heal traumas and contribute meaningfully to the socio-political transformation of humankind. This practice offers a reflection on the narratives of hardships faced by working-class migrants, and this is a way of healing from oppression and exploitative labour conditions. It is an intergenerational venting process between the youth and elders to reflect on social histories, politics, values of life and heritage. And for black people to yarn is a versatile practice, it could be private one or a louder, more public one as it applies significantly during protests and marches. In the abstract of the article above, it is indicated that 'Yarning was employed not only to collect information during the research interview but to establish a relationship with Indigenous participants prior to gathering their stories through storytelling, also known as narrative' (2010, p. 37).

The chosen research methods inform my art practice, as I intuitively produce drawings and images that are inspired by the yarning within T 17 Durban hostel. In the process I am fascinated by materiality (posters on the walls) and wayward activities that reflect progress, hopes and dreams of hostel residents. Interestingly, the daily practices of yarning inside the hostel inspire my creative research and practice output.

The output captures the unseen images that contest the negative portrayal and marginalisation of black migrants. Instead, produced work or images intend to show that hostel residents are progressive, relevant, and generative members of society. In hostels there could be artists, scholars, hard workers, go-getters, and thinkers that are visible and invisible within hostels.

As an insider researcher it is important to observe, acknowledge, and share elements that significantly integrate hostels with the outside communities. Bessarab and Ng'andu state that 'It is well known that Indigenous people world-wide have been over researched (Smith, 1999) with little thought given to culturally safe methods of engagement' (2010, p. 37). This is further cautioned by Smith (1999, p.137) as she critically urges that 'research back and disrupting the rules of research game toward practices that are more respectful, ethical, sympathetic, and useful vs racist practices of attitudes, ethnocentric assumptions and exploitative research'.

Ethical considerations: A preamble on outsider/ insider research

In the book *Decolonising Methodologies Research and indigenous people* Smith (1999, p.137) outlines the following: 'The critical issue with insider research is the constant use of reflexivity. At a general level insider researcher has to have ways of thinking critically about their processes, their relationships and the quality and of their data and analysis.' Yarning becomes an essential method or feature to be interwoven in this research process.

Authors Bessarab and Ng'andu's take on yarning is that 'Conversation is a major form of communication between people and can take place in different forms such as oral conversation or written conversations where people converse through letters, memos and/or email. Formal or informal conversation is involved in the production of knowledge' (2010, p.37). They endorse yarning as a method of gathering information and say that 'Story telling is a feature of indigenous societies where oral traditions were the main form of transmitting and sharing knowledge with individuals and between groups. Through oral traditions information was passed down through the generations in the form of stories and songs' (2010, p. 37).

To yarn is part of our everyday; it is an informal practice by hostel dwellers that does not require structured talks or interviews. There would be moments where I would listen to the sounds and voices of dwellers telling social stories that are touching on events that define and place the hostel image from a particular space and time.

The privileges of being a researcher and a professional artist exclude me from certain groups within a hostel, and so I automatically also become an outsider. The framework of searching for an image that is humanistic and far more comprehensive involves a set of random topics that allows for an integrative yarn that is intergenerational and inclusive. The autoethnographic approach is essential as a researcher from an inside circle because it involves self-observation and reflections on how I gained access in a hostel, and readapting to social cultures that connect to my rural upbringing such as self-respect and respecting others. The practice of inhlonipho (respect) and the spirit of ubuntu play a big role in transforming a hostel into a welcoming space that can almost feel like a second home.

In the introduction of this thesis it is indicated that I gained access inside the hostel through my father. The idea of staying with my father was supported by my mother, who was a frequent visitor to the hostel. My mother painted an imaginary picture of a hostel, for example telling me which side of the room my father's bed was located, and the type of people I was going to meet. Before my departure, my mother offered an extensive orientation on how I should conduct myself once I arrive at the Durban hostel. The orientation unpacked the ethical standards of living that apply in most shared spaces, i.e. verbal agreements in the sharing of kitchen resources because you do not touch anyone's items without asking.

Hostels today are spaces of extraordinary contrast, regardless of their poor living conditions. They still allow for humans to progress or fail, explore life opportunities, self-determination, and also to reclaim freedom. These practices are happening parallel with the dangers inside the hostel that involves gun-testing, hate and endless murders since my arrival in 2008. They are spaces of uncertainty, where a person fears for their life. And as an insider visual artist and a researcher I have learned to understand my limitations, such as not crossing the line in trying to interview people or asking for any kind of information of the hostel residents and authorities.

To a certain extent, moving around asking people questions can be interpreted wrongly or otherwise and one can be reported as a snitch and be executed. This is also stressed by Segal in the article titled *Human Face of Violence: Hostel Dwellers Speak* (1992). This article focuses on interviewing hostel dwellers and the set of questions generated by the researchers aims to find answers as to the causes of violence within the hostels. The authors attest that the interviewing process posed several

challenges even though they had transparent negotiations with the Hostel-Dweller Committee prior to the interviews. This was a period of political tension between the IFP and ANC.

Segal (1992, p.196) indicates that hostel dwellers expressed their suspicions about the researchers thinking that they were collecting information to give to their enemies. The doubts were evoked by the presence of a white woman, as well as the pulling out of a recording tape device. My outsider position and privileges of being a citizen who is slowly moving towards being a middle-class citizen may influence how I am perceived in that space, and such dynamics of class distinction may lead to conflicting interactions.

In the process of engaging with the hostel, I study the interior and exterior spaces, archives (photographs) and material objects inside the hostel. This method or approach is referred to as critical fabulation and this term was coined by Saidiya Hartman (2019) referring to a mode of historical writing that is both creative and semi-nonfictional, an approach that integrates archival investigation, critical theory, and functional storytelling to examine the enduring impact of slavery, as well as the repercussions of racism and exile on African-American identity. The critical fabulation method is now being interwoven with how I tell stories of black hostel residents in South Africa to humanise and magnify the voices that have been historically marginalised, to redress and address the missing narratives with the aim of expanding the new image of hostels.

Chapter outlines

Chapter one: Insider perspective: *Wakithi*, what should we call this place? Redefining a hostel through my experiential encounters, memories, and realities.

Chapter one introduces a multi-dimensional picture of a hostel; it is an image that is physical, perceived, and imagined. The introduction offers a brief overview of South African hostels from a historical context to the present, and a generative starting point is to invite readers into the space by introducing conversational forms of writing that will recreate an imaginary landscape of hostels. This is a constructive mode that extends to benefit readers who do not have intimate knowledge and experience of a hostel. Therefore, this chapter redefines a hostel from my experiential encounters which are very much intertwined with socio-cultural realities and memories.

I have also introduced terms that encapsulate the feeling of being in a hostel, terms such as *kuyahlangana kodwa?* or *ukuhlanganisa* can shape how one looks and reflect the hostel scape. *Kuyahlangana kodwa?* is a metaphorical question statement that comes mostly in moments of social interactions, and it calls for a brief moment of yarning. Generally, the yarning invokes oral histories and narratives that unpack the socio-political complexities that we face as South Africans. *Ukuhlanganisa* as a key term for this chapter also affirms that a hostel is a temporal space for poor working-class people to use while they are still in a hustling stage.

Chapter two: How can a visual analysis contest negative portrayal of black migrant hostel residents in contemporary South African art?

This chapter will introduce the documentary series of images that depicts lives of hostel residents from a historical perspective, which is between 1950s and early 1990s. The black-and-white archives of images document the social conditions of black people during the times of oppression. In South Africa these archives are important because they carry layers of visual history that exhibits a thread of black lives within different types of frameworks and contexts. The prolific photographers or artists that are referred to in this chapter are Ernest Cole, Roger Meintjes, and David Goldblatt.

The selected images of the artists mentioned above will be briefly discussed and as well as how they connect to the current state of hostels. This form of critique will be in conversation with affirmations by Nocebo Bucibo's framework of A just image and Sabelo Mlangeni's Men only who claimed to be insiders in South African hostels.

Chapter three: Hostels in South Africa today: looking at a hostelscape through a creative- based lens, a discussion on what cannot be captured in photographic images

This chapter follows on from chapter two, where I review and critique the documentary series of images by David Goldblatt, Ernest Cole, and Roger Menjties in relation to the current state of hostels. I have valued the historical significance of these photographs with regard to how they contributed to social history, because the explicit portray of black subjects narrated the socio-cultural and political landscape during and after apartheid. This chapter introduces a sense of comparison between the old and new artists with the reasons to track and trace if there are any shifts in the photographic representations of hostel residents.

The main aim of this analysis is to generate a critical and a constructive dialogue between the old and new artists/ photographers. The discourse includes affirmations by Nocebo Bucibo (A just image) and Sabelo Mlangeni (Men only), who claimed to be insiders in South African hostels. The images by a new generation of contemporary photographers mentioned above shifted from the historical frameworks of documentary. Bucibo and Mlangeni's photographic contributions are more optimistic when dealing with black subjects because they captured hostels as living spaces.

Chapter four: Searching for meaning of objects within a hostel: and I hear sounds because objects speak!

My praxis searches for beautiful experiments through employing a wide range of mediums, such as drawing, sculpture installation, performance (video) and photography. This diverse approach allows for new ideas to manifest, and it is a counter production that intends to address the 'missing narratives' and to negotiate for a new image of hostels without masking the historical and contemporary manifestations of systemic violence.

This is explored through thinking with a scholar Naeem Mohaiemen Son[i]a #299, titled *A Great Missing Object* when he talks about his artistic research projects that do not end up successfully because he could not discover what he was looking for. He says that when you do not find what you are looking for, that is actually productive. I also draw from the social practice of yarnning because it carries a multilayered content that undermines preconceived portrayal of black migrants in South African photographic archives that often overshadow the beautiful experiments inside the hostel.

I look at objects that are placed near the bed spaces and respond to the narrative content in which these objects are carrying, and also how they contribute to shifting the image of hostel dwellers. Devices such as radios, earphones, and cell phones can connect a dweller to different parts of the world, and such tools open up a space for introspection and also re-imagining. I study these images, and objects in their interpretive state and listen to them by thinking with Tina Campt's concept of *Listening to images* (2017) where she theorises around different type of sounds in relation to the historical and current conditions of black lives.

Chapter one:

Insider perspective: Wakithi, what should we call this place?

Redefining a hostel through my experiential

Encounters, memories, and realities.

Introduction: What is a hostel?



Fig. 9: Greg Marinovich. The picture shows a traditional Zulu chief firing a revolver at ANC supporters during a march in Umlazi Township outside Durban, KwaZulu Natal in 1995. The war between ANC and Inkatha in KwaZulu-Natal cost thousands of lives. 1995

The introduction offers a brief overview of South African hostels from a historical context to the present. A generative starting point is to invite readers into the space by introducing conversational forms of writing that will recreate an imaginary landscape of hostels. This is a constructive mode that extends to benefit readers who do not have intimate knowledge and experience of a hostel.

Marinovich's opening picture (Fig. 9) is representative of a township hostel, and the image highlights the popular narrative of senseless killings, warlords, fearless regiments, contestation of power and intimidation. I recognise the hostel in which this picture was generated, and I have also marched in that street with IFP regiments. I disagree with the caption that reads, 'The picture shows traditional Zulu chief fires a revolver at African National Congress supports during a march in Umlazi Township outside Durban, KwaZulu Natal in 1995.'

According to intimate knowledge and experience of engaging with such events, I am aware that people would be forced to participate in a march or rally. If a person refuses to comply with Induna's command to join the march, they would be referred to as '*iqabane*,' an ANC member or supporter and they would be judged as such or perhaps be killed. Refusing to participate in gatherings and marches does not mean that one is an ANC member and the hostel authorities are aware of that. Such phrases and allegations to be referred to as *iqabane*, are tactics to manipulate, intimidate and subordinate residents.

The image of a traditional Zulu chief with his regiments takes us back to imagine the history of South Africa before and after Nelson Mandela was released in prison. This picture gives concrete evidence that hostel residents have always participated in the liberation struggle, sometime sacrificing their lives. For blacks in South Africa, to march and protest is also another way of communicating a displeasure of something like poor service delivery from local government. Hostel residents especially at Umlazi T17 Durban Hostel have been successful in their various political protests, such as refusing to be led by the ANC in their territory, and agitating for the changing of Mangosuthu Highway to Moses Mabhida Highway.

Let us look at the *Mail & Guardian* article titled '*Buthelezi cautions ANC over highway name change*' (2007) in which Prince Buthelezi warns the ANC about its proposal to change a Durban highway in KwaZulu-Natal, named Mangosuthu Highway. Stated in the article is that the IFP leader Buthelezi led the KwaZulu non-independent homeland government from the 1970s to 1994.

Buthelezi's immediate response or retaliation to this matter was to say, 'If removing my name gives the ruling party the satisfaction of gloating about being at the helm, they must go ahead and enjoy themselves.' He added, 'I feel obliged to caution the ruling party against their rush to rewrite the history of this province and country by giving prominence to only ANC-affiliated freedom fighters over everyone else involved in the struggle for liberation; especially those from the minorities.' Buthelezi noted that the highway was named after him to acknowledge his fund-raising efforts that then culminated in the establishment of the Mangosuthu Technikon in Umlazi township.

There is another powerful statement when he said, 'While I know that the removal of my name does not diminish my status or my contribution to the liberation struggle of this country, I genuinely fear that a new name for the Mangosuthu Highway could reopen many old wounds in KwaZulu-Natal which we have striven to heal for many years He further pointed out that 'It seems to me that freedom fighters who did not hail from the same stable as the ruling party are being given scant consideration.'

It is, he said, the right of communities themselves to rename roads and iconic government structures. And one must be phlegmatic, he added. As a practical politician who believes the purpose of human fellowship is for action, 'I am more concerned about how I will be judged for my role in doing something for the poorest of the poor like those in Umlazi [where the highway runs] than [for] physical epitaphs.' Buthelezi noted that the highway was named after him to acknowledge his fund-raising efforts that culminated in the establishment of the Mangosuthu Technikon in Umlazi Township. 'The technikon was funded mainly by [then Anglo American chief] Harry Oppenheimer' and other companies when he had been chief minister of KwaZulu, the non-independent homeland. 'It was my sole initiative, but it was not I who suggested it be named after me. It was Dr Oscar Dhlomo, my [then] minister of education, who suggested that the highway be named after me. This was accepted by the [KwaZulu] cabinet' (Mail & Guardian, 2007).

The hostel residents formed a strike against the change of the Durban highway without Chief Buthelezi's command or influence. The theoretical orientation and conceptual framings of my ideas and perceptions informs how I interpret knowledge that is related to hostels, and I would associate this radical response of political action by dwellers as a wayward practice by hostel residence.

The circle of political demonstration keeps returning. In October 2022 Mangosuthu University and highway were shut down by hostel residents demanding electrical power to be restored. The article titled '*Resident protest shuts down Mangosuthu University*' (2022) by Lungani Zungu gives an overview of the situation: 'Angry residents of Umlazi T in KwaZulu-Natal went on a rampage on Monday morning, blockading roads with logs and burning tyres after being without electricity for two months.' Zungu quoted hostel resident Mxolisi Zwane's speech in which he said: 'There's nothing else we can do. The only language our government understands is protesting. So, we will continue to protest until the electricity is restored.'

At this point I believe it is relevant to draw from Paulus Zulu's 1993 case studies titled: *Durban Hostels and Political Violence: Case Studies in Kwa-Mashu and Umlazi* Structurally he begins to unpack the social organisation of life in the hostels: 'The majority of residents in the hostels within the Greater Durban Functional Region come from Natal and KwaZulu. The Transkei contributes the second largest source of recruitment. Access to hostels tends to be through personal contacts, or via companies which reserve specific blocks for their employees. This has greatly contributed to the formation of homeboy cliques among residents in hostels mainly because personal contact is inclined to favour homeboys and, secondly, because previous employment policies by certain companies tended to favour regional cliques' (Zulu, 1993, p.3).

Hostels in South Africa are given many different names, and some residents are given mocking and derogatory names such as *ezimpohlweni*, and *impohlwa* (an unmarried man), and in general such men are not taken seriously in society. The term acknowledges the gendered dynamics within the space of a 'single sex men's hostel'. The *ezimpohlweni* dilemma has the potential to evoke a meaningful debate because it also begins to criticise the inside policies and laws that exclude, discriminate, and suppress women's rights within the hostel.

In 2007, a few months before my arrival in the hostel, there was a shocking broadcast on national television, and local newspapers, of the story of a woman who was assaulted by a group of men because she was wearing pants. I was also informed about the seriousness of this matter by my fellow hostel dwellers. As a second-generation person living in a hostel I did not understand the logic behind this law, even though our leaders *izinduna* (delegates) and *nezibonda* (*izinduna* assistants) *esisigcemeni sakow* 13 (Segment 13 inside T 17 Durban hostel) attempted to give insight on multiple occasions. In our segment there is an important spot that is used to hold meetings, it is called 'Kwa Mkhwanazi eshlahleni'. KwaMkhwanazi eshlahleni is a dignified historical site within the hostel, it is where most processions happen such as internal elections, ceremonies, hostel judgements and punishments. These happen from 6:30pm or 7pm when most migrants are back from work and preparing meals for supper.

It's then that an *induna* or *isibonda* or any appointed person will blow a whistle 'pri pri pri pri!' and commandingly announce, '*uMama, uBaba, intsha kwaMkhwanazi eshlahleni.*' This instruction requires an urgent response. People must leave whatever they are doing and attend the meeting with other hostel dwellers under the big tree called *kwaMkhwanazi*. These meetings have no agenda, and the *induna* speaks without being interrupted. When the *induna* is finished, there is time for questions, answers, and comments. But the hostel community has learned not to come with any form of objection, questioning or criticism of internal affairs, in any debated issue.

Generally, those who neither object nor try to disrupt the social and political dynamics of hostel culture will receive death threats or somehow, and are requested to take their belongings and leave the area immediately. This violent dismissal practice was common, but at least it was better than being harmed, or killed

It is an undisputable fact that a hostel is a violent space. For example, around July 2007, a 25-year-old innocent woman was beaten and stripped of her clothes. Makhaye and Mcetywa's article titled '*Men defiant about pants tyranny*' (2007) quotes a speech from the victim saying, 'I can never go

back to that area ... what they did to me was inhumane.’ See the summary of the article ² about the no-pants law enforcement in the hostels. It is still not clear why and how it was established in the first place. In our gatherings under the tree, *izinduna* and chiefs gave us insights that it was during the upheaval wars, conflicts of political violence between the late 1980s and early 1990s where unknown men would dress like women to camouflage and hide weapons inside those dresses. This tactic to disguise and intrude was a success and it had cost loss of many lives inside the hostel, meaning that intruders dressed in a female version killed people in hostels.

The relevance of this law after the millennium remained in question because in other articles it is indicated that the ‘no pants instruction’ was introduced because there was an incident where two men fought over a woman who was wearing tight pants.

² ‘The conservative men controlling Umlazi’s notorious T Section have remained unrepentant after torching Zandile Mpanza’s family home and vowed they would not allow women wearing pants to enter their area. Mpanza replied that she was not living in T Section, and so the ban did not apply to her. The two men then grabbed her, ripped her pants off and beat her with sticks. They forced her to parade half-naked. Mpanza and her family have since fled and are now in hiding. Two teenagers previously beaten by the men for wearing pants have also fled the area. "I am even scared of speaking to the media, as I have been receiving death threats," said Mpanza.’

A warrant of arrest has been issued for Umlazi Unit 17’s hostel induna Thulani Cele, who is alleged to have led the men who assaulted Mpanza, police spokesperson Superintendent Danelia Veldhuizen said. She said Cele had failed to appear in court to face charges of crime injuria, common assault, and malicious damage to property. Cele was arrested last Sunday, but was released after 500 armed men gathered outside the police station in V Section, demanding his release. He was released on warning and told to appear in Umlazi magistrate’s court on Monday (Makhaye and Mcetywa, 2007).

Camouflage



Fig.10: Lunathi Mngxuma, *Untitled*, 2021

Lunathi Mngxuma's photographic series was developed under the 'Of Soul and Joy' programme. It is described by Kirkwood (2021) as a distinctive mode of photographic education in South Africa. The creative platform offered introductory classes and workshops with professional photographers to disadvantaged youth in Thokoza, a township in southeast Johannesburg.

The rationale of the project was to give photography students an opportunity to go back at history, as Kirkwood noted, 'In the early 1990s the township was the site of significant violence between members of the Inkatha Freedom Party and African National Congress, a tumultuous time that took place before most of the students were born.' The project allowed for an intergenerational dialoguing within Thokoza, and old people are always keen to share oral narratives and histories to younger generations.

Mngxuma's conceptual project is a direct response to the histories of Kumalo Street in Thokoza Township. Kirkwood (2021) explains that many students explored self-portraiture; and they went through the spaces where the violence happened and did self-portraits, and explored what it means to reinsert yourself in that traumatic space.

There are photographs of men in women's dresses which are interesting to look at because they give an idea of what men would look if they represented themselves as women. The imagery contests the invisibility of women within hostels, and in a broader context such the photographs, have great potential to be a celebration of strength and to reclaim the space of the erased histories and contributions of African women '*imbokodo*' (rock) in society. The images are inspired by an historical event of a camouflaging tactic practised by men to gain access in hostels. They are also neutral and powerful enough to play a role in conscientising society about the gender-based violence, homophobia and femicide that is happening today.



Fig 11: Still for the video to Benny Maverick-*Memeza* (Feat. Dladla Mshunqisi and SpiritBanger, 2016)

These contestations are well translated in Benny Maverick – *Memeza* (Feat. Dladla Mshunqisi & SpiritBanger) a song and music video. This song is important in that it contributes immensely to shifting our attitudes and mindsets to stopping gender-based violence. In the video people of all genders are holding banners that respond to the death of Karabo Mokoena who was killed by her boyfriend in 2018. And her passing was used as a symbol of the wider violence faced by women in South Africa. See Times Live by Tanya Farber titled '*No country for women: For how much longer will women's day be a day of weeping?*' (2022). The article gives a summary of statistics of crimes against women in South Africa. The content of the '*Memeza*' video also reflects the socio-economic crisis of

our country and looks at decolonial interventions of progressive movement such as FeesMustFall (free education) and #RhodesMustFall.

Bhekizizwe Peterson's journal article around African studies '*Spectrality and inter-generational black narratives in South Africa*' (2019) is centred on one of the defining features of the student protests of 2015–2016. He explains, 'Their continuing ramifications is a difficult dialogic exchange between different generations and social constituencies in the black community. Over and above the specific problematic that underpinned the 'Rhodes Must Fall' and 'Fees Must Fall' movements, there are a range of dilemmas and questions that are the culmination of a longer and larger trajectory of different groups in South Africa trying to make sense of the contradictions, tensions, ironies and paradoxes that are symptomatic of life under segregation, apartheid and post- 1994 South Africa' (Peterson, 2019, p.1). In visual cultures, the quote eloquently explains that everything is connected to everything else and that creative social practices and movements are decolonial processes that are in responsive to our contemporary landscape.

Aesthetics of beautiful experiments



Fig. 12: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, *My daily view* photograph, 2023, T17 Durban hostel (image by Menzi Mpanza)

The aesthetic appeal of T17 Durban hostel is unique when compared to other hostels, and I would describe these blocks as match box houses, whereas Glebelands, Jacobs Men's Hostel, Thokoza Women's Hostel and Wemer, Kwa Dabeka hostel and Dalton are double-story buildings instead. The

houses or hostel blocks of Umlazi hostel are not easy to recognise from a distance as they integrate with the neighbouring houses within the township arena. These houses were originally first built of brick, roofed with the asbestos that is painted in red, then later the walls were covered with a grey rough crust and overtime the red paint on the roof started to vanish due to heavy rains and other natural causes, speaking to the limitations of the longevity of the material.

This is an interesting process because the dominance of colourful shacks around these single sex units makes dark grey hostel blocks or compounds to less visible. Zulu's explanation of these units and their conditions is that 'Umlazi Hostel is unique among hostels in the Greater Durban Functional Region. It consists of four-roomed houses such that were it not because of the disregarded, unpainted appearance of the buildings, the hostel would look like any residential section of the township. However, the type of housing is the only feature which gives any similarity between the hostel and the township. The surroundings in the hostel are markedly different' (Zulu, 1993, p.12) This is important to note because it refers to this simple, but a critical question of 'What is a hostel? And is it worth defining? why and for whom?

Zulu's (1991, p.3) case study affirms the lack of basic developments within hostels, as he notes that the yards are hardly ever attended to. Garbage is strewn all over the place, drains are almost in a state of disuse, there is bush between buildings, and the number of infill shacks is threatening to outnumber the formal structures.

As he further stated that 'Umlazi hostel comprises 1 282 units of four rooms each. Each unit has seven occupants where two men occupy an unfurnished room with a bunk for a bed for each man. There are three men in the larger room making a total of seven. The seven share a common kitchen with small lockers for each man's elementary groceries. There is a fixed cement table and two benches for the men to sit around in the kitchen. Each unit has an inside toilet and a shower. Outside each unit a tap serves both as a source of water supply and a space for washing clothes, utensils and cutlery. The occupants are responsible for the cleaning of their rooms, bathroom and toilet Access to rooms is via the housing queue. Therefore, it is normal practice for strangers to share a room although, like in many other areas, the informal network mediates in the allocation of spaces into the hostel' (Zulu, 1991, p.12).

What should we call this place?

I believe this question requires an intuitive response which is grounded within an interrelated set of frameworks, such as memorising, encountering, reality and experience. These experiential encounters are communicated or shared through storytelling, yarnning and oral narration, and by employing these creative methods I hope to provide an open-ended description that has a multi-dimensional perspective of hostels. This section is also engaged with the perceptions of Nomkhosi Xulu-Gama's book, *Hostels in South Africa, spaces of perplexity* (2017) and Nocebo Bucibo's *A just image: South African Hostels and Contemporary South African Photography* (2018). It is necessary to grasp such insightful engagements with these two female authors as well as applauding their bravery in engaging spaces that are male dominated.

Storytelling through visual art and yarnning could be an appropriate interpretive modality that challenges the reader and a listener to picture and imagine the hostel landscape otherwise. The idea to leave room for imagining is important because it allows for social and scholarly dialoguing with new constructive viewpoints.

It would be limiting to try and offer a linear description of a hostel, but instead I provide an overview of my experiential encounters since 2008. The emergence of hostels and compounds was influenced by the colonial economy as Svea Josephy (2014, p. 446) gives a historical overview on migrant labour and compound histories, 'From the advent of the compound system in the 1880s, migrant labourers, most often men, would leave their homes, and later "homelands" in order to seek work on the farms, mines and in urban centres around South Africa. The compounds and hostels of South Africa played a very particular role in sustaining the pre-apartheid and apartheid economy by providing temporary housing for its cheap black labour force.'

Hostels have shifted to become home-like set ups, as noted in Bocibo's chapter '*lhostela ngelinye ikhaya*'. This chapter is more of a hypothesis on the existence of hostels, and my initial contribution is to try and find new definitions of these spaces.

I would also like to share a moment when I embarked on a journey as a migrant to share a bed space with my father in a township hostel. Later I inherited his bed space and to date it is difficult to try and accept this new reality of being a hostel dweller. Over time I have learned that a hostel is shaped and shifted by its inhabitants; as a creative I am attracted to the beautiful and experimental activities

that are constantly happening in a hostel space, for example the joy in the faces of dwellers when responding to South African traditional music. The famous track, 'Ngafa' by Shwi No Mtekhala, released in November 2004, captures the socio-cultural dynamics of the hostel, and the lyrical content was in response to the damages done by the outbreak of deadly diseases such as HIV and Aids on a wider landscape.

In my storytelling approach I employ modes of close narration (Hartman, 2019) which is intertwined with the creative autoethnography that is drawn from the work of Mpe's *Welcome to our Hillbrow* (2001). Mpe's narration and aestheticization of Hillbrow reminds me of my experiential encounters with the hostel, when in 2008 I joined the hostel community to share a bed space with my father in house number T1323. On that day men within the space gathered around the table in the kitchen, and I was formally introduced as a new member.

My existence in the hostel was not recognised by the superintendent office and such people who are not recognised are referred to as 'zimbamba (the squatters)'. Generally, the hostel residents with bed ownership have more rights compared to squatters, and this means a 'squatter' feels inferior to the others.

My arrival in a hostel (2008)

I arrived in a single-sex men's hostel towards the end of 2008, and South Africa was in a state of emergency facing a tragic economic crisis because of the global recession. This was happening parallel with the very first xenophobic attacks in South Africa. Despite these complexities, hostels remain communal spaces. The culture of inclusivity is well narrated in the *Emzini Wezinsizwa* comedy series. According to Warren Mabona in the article titled '*The Mamelodi hostel where Emzini Wezinsizwa was filmed is a mess: Site of hit 1990s SABC series has no electricity*' (2022), 'A series was shot in Mamelodi hostel which became popular in the mid-1990s when the SABC1 Zulu comedy, titled *Emzini Wezinsizwa*, was filmed in one of its rooms.' There is humour in the plot but at the same time it captures and encapsulates the truthful representation of hostel life. This reasoning is based on my experiential and intimate knowledge of being in a hostel. A set of images below in fig 13 offers a holistic overview.



Fig. 13: Still from the video, *Emzini Wezinsizwa*, 2009

In a hostel, I was more interested in hearing the sounds of people talking in spaces especially when some make efforts to prove that they are intellectuals. Talks happen in the kitchen and I would hear someone asking a random question such as, '*Unayo i science ekhanda lakho, unayo yin i psychology?*' (Do you have science in your head, do you have psychology in your head?). In formal ways of speaking, the question doesn't make sense at all, and it is phrased incorrectly. But in my interpretation is that metaphors are employed here such as making someone aware that he or she is not smart at all.

The phraseology of this question or ways of speaking clearly demonstrates that the imposed colonial economies and apartheid systems denied blacks an opportunity to become educated. This way of conversing is an attempt to prove the person is an intellectual, it is a familiar experience to hear person saying. '*Ngichithiwe ekhanda ungaboni ngihlala e hostela*' (Don't underestimate me because I am not what you think). In this way of speaking, it is important to note that a dweller is also acknowledging that a hostel is a degrading space where residents are taken for granted and categorised as backward. When analysing the social profiles of hostel residents Zulu (1991) conducted a survey which shows that, 'A vast majority (62%) of the residents either had no formal education or has not progressed beyond primary school. Lack of formal education limits the world view of a number of migrants. It was found that communicating with the outside world was mainly through Radio Zulu and to a lesser extent, the indigenous press, *Ilanga* and UmAfrika.'

I do not fully agree with Zulu's interpretation of data that he collected through the survey, because newspapers and radio are reliable sources where one receives up to date information that can school a person and expands ones thinking abilities. And I would agree that some hostel residents who have not obtained certificates such as matric or a university degree are excluded from larger parts of the South African economy.

Transformation of space



Fig. 14: *Emzini Wezinsizwa*, 2009



In *Emzini Wezinsizwa*, parts two and three introduces narratives that challenge the conventional social setting of the hostel. Mkhize, (character played by Ronald Bantu Mqwebu) a man on the left, has returned from work and while removing his boots he hears the sound of a newborn crying inside their block.

The social settings are being disrupted by a woman who entered the hostel to visit his husband without notifying both the husband and superintendent. And, in addition, she gives birth to a baby boy inside her husband's bedroom. The scenario conceptualises the reality of South African hostels today. And how a hostel can shift into being residential family units because children are born in these spaces and wives can stay permanently; The *Emzini Wezinsizwa* scenario reclaims the visibility and contribution of women that is not usually acknowledged and inscribed in our black histories.

The *Emzini Wezinsizwa* sitcom relates to my framework and it expands to the nuances that narrate the true social ecology of my hostel where I joined a group of old and young males that later became my other family.

Wakithi!



Fig. 15: Tom Stoddart and David Turnley/Getty images, *Some of whose members are seen marching (below) before the first democratic elections in April 1994, 1994.*

There is an important term or code that validates a person's existence in a hostel. Wakithi in isiZulu means 'omunye wethu', 'this way of talking acknowledges that a person is one of us'. Revisiting the concept of waywardness, I begin to observe that hostel dwellers have restless characters, relevant and active participants who are very much into contemporary vibes or are up to date with contemporary times

The social setting of the space allows dwellers to spend time in the kitchen, to share a meal, drinks or supper, and this social activity is part of our everydayness. As a new member I was afforded an opportunity to be briefed about the hostel atmosphere during the times of violence. This would paint a picture that I was very lucky to join the hostel community now, because it is much freer and we are doing as we please. The IFP supporters were expected to appear in a particular way, such as wearing traditional sandals, Brentwood trousers, a leopard vest and carrying a stick called 'uDonkane'(sjambok).

It would be a problem if you appeared to be clean, stylish and being followed by beautiful women because you could be suspected to be part of the *amaqabane* group, the ANC supporters, and this would have resulted in receiving multiple death threats, or be forced to vanish from the area.



Fig. 16: Gideon Mendel/Corbis via Getty Images, Zulu Chief Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi at Orlando Stadium. Mangosuthu Gatsha Buthelezi is president of the Inkatha Freedom Party, a major political party in South Africa with a predominately Zulu membership. 1990

The carrying of uDonkane or a sjambok stick is one of the interesting social practices within South African hostels, especially the ones where IFP has a stronghold. Carrying a stick can symbolise victory and also can show off a person's rural background that consists of humanity, culture and discipline. The stick speaks multiple languages within black cultures: besides the masculine connotations, it shows a proud Zulu with strong beliefs to his manliness who complies with being identified as a good troop, or a good regiment under Zulu Kingdom. Indigenous practices that link to our tangible and intangible heritage have been influenced by the late King Goodwill Zwelithini ka Bhekuzulu and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

The two leaders played big roles in establishing ceremonies that preserve and revive Zulu culture, such as the reed dance that takes place at KwaNongoma Enyokeni, and Shaka's Day or Heritage Day in Stanger KwaDukuza where hostel dwellers are the main participants. The Zulu cultural revival is confirmed by Oupa Nkosi's review on the coronation of His Majesty King Misuzulu Sinqobile ka Zwelithini, Nkosi's reflections are highlighted in his article titled '*Hostels are finding ways to transmute blighted history into safe places for cultural expression to take root*' (Mail & Gaudian,

2022). He reminds us that the rich traditions and values of Zulu culture, including ubuntu, love, respect and solidarity were showcased by regiments in the event served to mark a new beginning for the Zulu nation (Nkosi, 2022, p.48). The hostel dwellers' ways of conversing and yarning are always interesting to listen to, and I appreciate how they challenge social constructs especially on culture, tradition, and norms; they pose lot of questions that challenge me to think broader and possibly look at a hostel in it multiple dimensions.

This form of critically engaging within these rough spaces is impressive as we begin to look at the hostel landscape differently. A new member in a hostel could make his way up to being a leader for example, an induna or a chief. And for a person to be bold and standout amongst other dwellers affirms that hostels could be a generative space for wayward practitioners. A hostel could be a place to think and imagining, it is an arena where there is an explicit exploration of living free and self-defining, codes of self-describing could be through material objects, choice of music, pictures that are displayed alongside the person's bed.

The arts on the walls



Fig. 17: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, *Arts on the walls*, photograph, 2022 (image by Menzi Ngcobo)

The rooms are decorated with newspaper articles and magazine posters; see in Fig 17. *Arts on the walls*, created by room owners. I am intrigued by these interesting activations on the walls. They are

collaged with carefully curated magazine posters; the exhibit of images captures celebrity life in different parts of the world. I understand this intervention as a form of refusing to be categorised as backward and this begins to prove one's relevance in society as well as enforcing individuality.

Another interesting example is when I encountered an open window with a speaker playing loud music. What could this scene mean or represent? This is demonstrating uniqueness, the claiming of space and territory, revealing character and a demand for recognition. A second encounter was seeing a group of young boys dancing to Amapiano music gazing back to the outside world; the people who were passing by froze and looked at them. The scenario spoke to the recording of the times; the people here were challenged to understand this group of young men as shape shifters. The semiotics of this spectacular performance is challenging a precept of othering, and this was an open demonstration showing that hostel dwellers do not live differently from their nearest communities. Behind the door there is a picture of the map and for me it resonates with aspirations that take place inside hostels, a map is a metaphor that add to reference movements of cross migration by dwellers.

Kuyahlangana kodwa? (Is it coming together?)

There are clues that signify how much we adhere to epistemes of systematic violence. Here I critically unpack the role of language and how it plays a role in shaping our consciousness and ways of surviving in spaces that we inhabit.

There are newly invented terms and phrases that are continuously conditioning blacks to accept hardships and poor standards of living from generation to generation. For example, phrases like '*ey ndoda!* (things are bad!) and *kuhlangahlangene*' (Things are mixed up or all over the place) are commonly used within poor working-class communities, such as hostels, townships, and rural homelands, especially during moments of social interactions. Looking at greeting, a person would ask: 'How are you?' One would say '*Siyazama, siyancenga*' ('We are trying) or '*Ukukhala akusizi*' (it does not help to cry) and these conversational terms clearly show that days and lives of black people have always been about struggles. Blacks are indeed making attempts to refuse and escape these systematised hardships by associating with institutions of higher learning to obtain degrees, which is a most appropriate route to escape poverty and despair.

A good example of using '*Siyahlanganisa* or '*Siyazama*' is when early in the morning I pass vendors in the streets installing temporary shelters to sell or push some products so that they can put bread on the table. The uniformity of this activity could be performative and metaphoric to the construction of life in a day-to-day basis. In these encounters I see the vending tents or shelters being assembled and later when the sun goes down, they are being disassembled and these practices resonate precisely to the kind of culture, language, and lifestyle where circumstances change up and down within black populated spaces.

Another phrase '*Kuyale nale*' means 'Life is going sideways', and this term has multiple meanings because it is also acknowledging that someone is attempting to find social and financial stability. As much as these terms are a mirror to our socio-cultural landscape in this new dispensation, I still recommend a critical review of these terms, because they influence poor black communities to accept hardships and low standards of living. And at the same time these terms can also bring a sense of comfort that things one day will come together i.e., '*Kuzohlangana*' (keep trying). It is important to theorise *ukuhlanganisa* (putting life together) or the question of, '*Kuyahlangana kodwa?*' (Is it coming together?) This changes the narrative of the hostel and also helps me to look and reflect at a hostel (scape) creatively.

The question of '*Kuyahlangana kodwa?*' is a metaphorical question statement that comes mostly in moments of social interactions, and it calls for a brief yarning. Generally, the dialogues invoke oral histories and narratives that unpack the current socio-political complexities that we are facing as South Africans.

In my day-to-day engagement with these informal settlements (shacks and hostels) that are within South African landscapes, I witness different forms of crimes, violence, and drug abuse. It is where most people live through a survivalist mode of '*Ukuhlanganisa*' meaning doing whatever it takes to make ends meet. These realities of social and political structures reveal that past brutal experiences of slavery, apartheid, forced removals, massive land dispossession and continued poverty are still prevailing in the present. And these historical repressive policies determine how people interact and move through spaces today (Kgatla, 2013).

Therefore, through grappling with this question of '*Kuyahlangana kodwa?*', I negotiate for new narratives and meanings within the social sphere of black lives. And this mode of theorising and dialoguing in this scholarly journey informs my ways of seeing and interpreting, as well as exploring new ways of constructing knowledge.



Fig. 18: Greg Marinovich A group of youths gamble with dice, Orange Farm township, Dec 5, 2007, south of Johannesburg, Gauteng province South Africa. 2007

***Ukuhlanganisa* (putting life together)**

A hostel could be a lab for recovery because people have started to believe that it is a space to use when you are still putting things together as the phrase '*ukuhlanganisa*' has it. I also look at the informal gambling materials that I encounter in the streets, such as card players, and dice games, it is quite ironic that these gambling boards are elevated on top of the steel frame of a school furniture table, and this begins to raise questions about the system of education in South Africa.

Key words of a hostel lexicon serve to show a summary of the hostel landscape reflecting the atmosphere, socio economic status of the dispossessed. These are: '*Kuyalunga kodwa?*', '*Inja u Khongolose*', '*Akusikh ekhaya lana*', '*Emfethu akusiyo indawo le ikwa doti*' ('this is not a place'), '*Ukukhala akusizi*', '*vuka uzithathe*', '*Umshikashika, Ngisezintweni mina*' (meaning 'I am up to date'), '*Zabalaza uma uyindoda*', '*Umntu uyahlanganisa la*', '*kuya le nale*', '*kuyafiwa la*'.

The key words given above inspired me to offer a meditative poem that is continuing from a sound piece that was displayed at the University of Witwatersrand Point of Order Gallery.

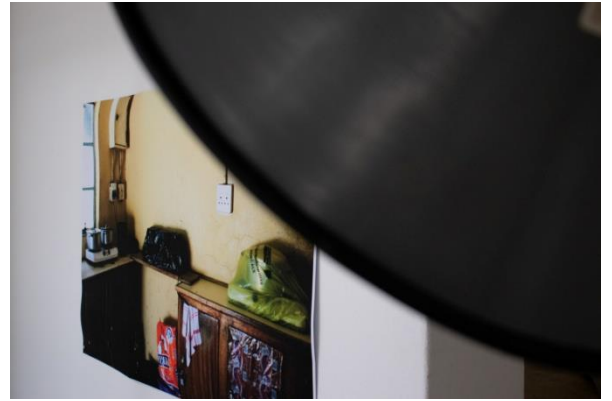


Fig. 19: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, *Singayibiza ngani lendawo?* 2020, sound installation

Poem

What should we call this place? And why am I still here?
This is not a place, but maybe it is a space of reflecting
And have a contemplative conversation with myself
A hostel is an arena of uncertainties
Because anything can happen, meaning *kusengenzeka noma yini*
And it is indeed a space where everything has happened
I am aware it is a temporal space, for migrants to come and go
Here I am forever fighting a successful transitioning
To completely leave the space and don't ever come back, because I want freedom
A space that is much more open, a space consists of clean air
I mean fresh air, because I want to break free from suffering
I want to be relived from suffocating

I have sworn an oath to myself that I will work hard so not to raise my kids in a hostel
Today here I am and the kids come here
The worse part now they talk fluently and asking constructive questions
Baba why don't you have a proper house?
Why do you like this place?
Questions that paint a picture of that being in a hostel reflects my failures in life
I hear yearnings that reference big traumatic threads of violent past
And they resurface in the present
Hostel is a space where masculine cultures are promoted on a daily basis
Yes, it is a nest where criminals hide, and find comfort
I have trained my psyche that death can happen anytime
The space has taught me to be brave everyday
And also, not to be afraid to die.

Chapter two

How can a visual analysis contest negative portrayal of black migrant hostel residents in contemporary South African art?

Chapter two will examine and the selected documentary series of images that depicted lives of hostel residents from a historical perspective, which is between the 1950s and early 1990s. These black and white images carry great weight as they captured social and political conditions of black people during the times of oppression in South Africa. These archives carry layers of visual histories that exhibit a thread of black lives within different types of frameworks and contexts. The prolific photographers that are referred to in this chapter are Ernest Cole, Roger Meintjes, and David Goldblatt.

The selected images of the artists mentioned above will be discussed as to how they connect to the current state of hostels. This form of critique will be in conversation with affirmations by Nocebo Bucibo's conceptual framework of '*A just image*' and Sabelo Mlangeni's '*Men's only*' who claimed to be insiders in South African hostels. This conversation between (younger generation of photographers) Mlangeni and Bucibo's positions and visual history within that of (older generation photographers), Ernest Cole, Roger Meintjes and David Goldblatt, then becomes a touch point to me as a younger generation artist-photographer who has insider status as an itinerant hostel dweller. The creative research work exhibited at the Point of Order (TPO), University of Witwatersrand forming part of this submission, grounding chapter four of this report, is a symbolic dwelling between, the gap, the lingering that occupy my reading of the two generations mentioned above as they represent the hostel experience.

In this chapter I give value to these archives of black migrant workers and hostel residents in the works of Ernest Cole, Roger Meintjes, and David Goldblatt. These are important archives in the history of South Africa, and visually they captured harsh and poor living conditions, joy, pleasure, and the resilience of blacks during the times of apartheid. I value these visual archives or representations because of their historical significance and the complicated 'truth' of narratives that are conveyed by images. These images played a pivotal role in exposing the socio-political climate of South Africa from the early 1950s to the late 1990s. The documented events by these prolific photographers mentioned above draw my attention because of their generative interrelated frameworks. Thematically, the selected portfolio of black and white images has common pictorial codes and nostalgic sepia tones that highlight the historic events and a period in which the picture was taken.

The examination of these photographs is informed by my first-hand experience and knowledge of black South African migrant hostels. I argue that the historical archives of documented images are not cast in stone, and this research journey serves as a generative platform in contesting the negative portrayal of hostel dwellers in contemporary South African art. This contemplative process is essential, and it is employed with the intention of finding a well comprehended representation that truthfully portrays an authenticated image of hostels in South Africa. It is also important to look at the shifts in post-apartheid hostel representation where artists begin to reject conventional frameworks of social documentary and focus on the scenes of everyday life.

My experiential encounters with South African hostels

Over the years of looking at my father's photo albums, and carefully decoding his images, I am intrigued by their astonishing visual appearance; all the pictures show a well-dressed aspiring black man with dignity. And this generic representation for blacks is a playful gesture of mimicking success, which is also a reaction against imposed status quo and the marginalisation of poor working class. This is a powerful act and a social practice that constantly erases the historical archives of hostel photographs. A good example to further substantiate my argument is the photographic portfolio of T J Lemon from the series *Oswenka, the Jeppe hostel swankers*, 2010. In my father's photo album, I recognise my father's informed choices of representing himself before the camera lens and in the public domain, and I interpret this dignified gesture of my father as a radical practice to refuse the hostel dwelling status.

In my critique of the documentary series of photographs by Ernest Cole, Roger Meintjes, Eli Weinberg, and Sam Nzima, I acknowledge their emotive quality and value in how they narrated repressive conditions of black lives under apartheid. These artists were guided by two interrelated frameworks which are 'strugglism', a depiction of black subjects in pain, struggles and poverty and 'The expose' framework used to expose the injustices performed by the apartheid government, i.e. the 1976 Soweto uprising, for example, the photograph by Sam Nzima of *Hector Pieterse being carried by Mbuyisa Makhubo after being shot by South African police. His sister, Antoinette Sithole runs beside them*. Mr Nzima's image changed the future of South Africa, where he used a camera as a weapon to fight against oppression and injustices in South Africa. In visual arts, artists were commanded to be in the forefront of the struggle by producing works that reflected social ills of the time.

In this form of activism under the resistance art movement artists employed different media to produce confrontational, and socio reflective works that intended to defeat the evil nature of apartheid regime. Sue Williamson's book titled *Resistance Art in South Africa* (1989, 2004) offers an in-depth overview that Resistance Art was rooted within the Black Consciousness movement or philosophy to use art as a tool for social change and to encourage unity amongst humans. In retrospect, revisiting the holistic meaning of images produced within the resistance art movement and relevance of resistance art today, Williamson (2004, p.6) declares that 'It is my hope that reissue of resistance art will continue as a resource for all those around the world who have become fascinated with the art and the mechanics of change in South Africa, and give pleasure and insight to those looking at these images for the first time.'

In visual arts, resistance art movement are demonstrated to have a strong integration with the strugglism movement and 'The expose' framework. The integration is evident in the work of Norman Catherine, *Dog of war* (1988) and Jane Alexander's *Butcher boys* (1998). The mixed media collage by Sam Nhlengethwa titled *It left him cold – the death of Steve Biko* (1990), explicitly illustrates the humiliation and brutal assassination of Steve Bantu Biko by the apartheid government.



Fig. 20: Sam Nhlengethwa, *it left him cold - the death of Steve Biko*, 1990, Collage, pencil and charcoal 69 x 93cm, Courtesy Standard Bank Collection at Wits

There is not much nuanced documented information on South African hostels and migrant labour. I have obtained this rich knowledge from being a hostel dweller in Durban KwaZulu-Natal, a train commuter, and a labour employee for white-owned companies. The set-ups in workplaces, hostels and in public transports are intergenerational and it is where elders get an opportunity to share their experiential knowledge about life and highlight where we come from as a nation. There is a therapeutic moment and purpose within these shared oral histories and narratives, in some contexts the narratives invite grief, yearning and sadness as they vividly provide insight that throughout history black bodies have been a site of exploitation.

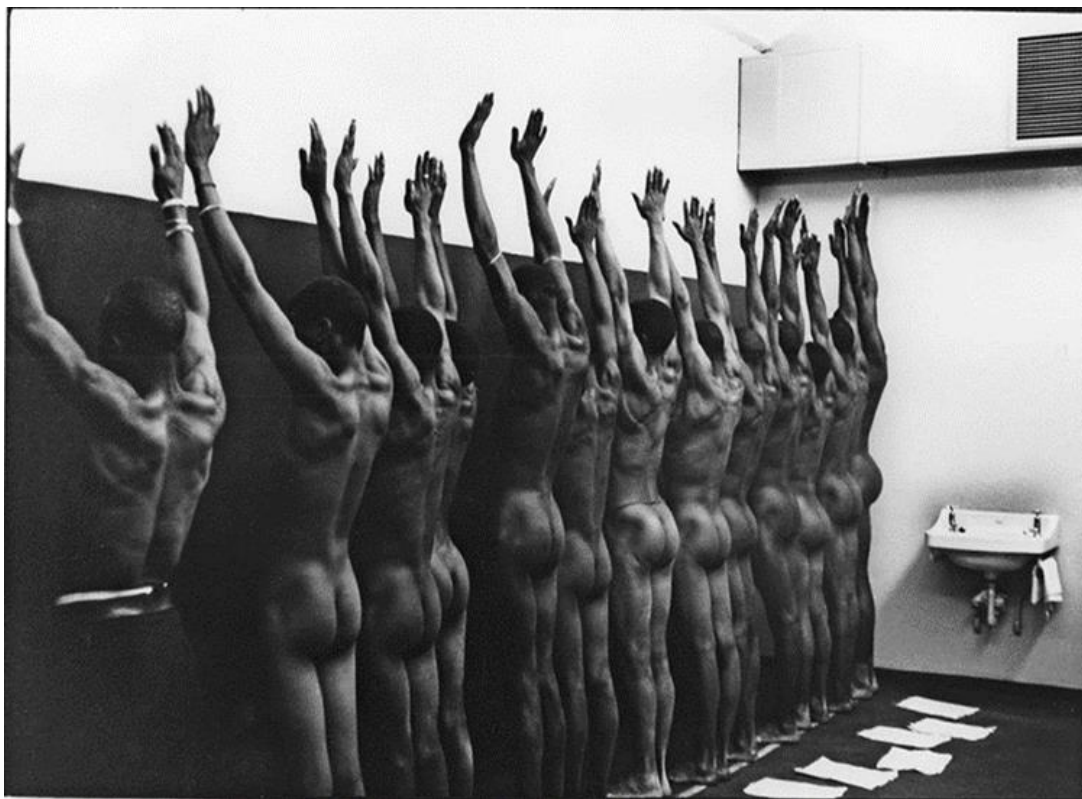


Fig. 21: During group medical examination the nude men are herded through a string of doctors' offices. From *House of Bondage*, 1967. The Ernest Cole family trust

Speaking of the violence and exploitation of black labourers, this is explicit in the work of Ernest Cole (see Fig. 21) where thirteen men are stripped off their clothes and are completely naked, we see their back view exposed while being positioned diagonally across the format of the photographic print. Their arms are raised up in the air, surrendering or complying with the repressive conditions on the mines. The photograph confirms '*ukuthwabaza*' which is to walk around naked to be searched or examined, a shaming practice that objectifies the other.

In this picture above, black men are not only stripped of their clothes, but also the dignity and individuality as the photograph and caption gives us clues that they are being processed and examined, and this form of degradation suggests an animal-like treatment. In the painting by Gerard Sekoto in Fig. 22, below, this shows another form of exploitation which is through hard labour.



Fig. 22: Gerard Sekoto, *Song of the Pick*, 1947 Oil on board, 49 x 70 cm

In '*Song for Sekoto: Duet politics and money*' (2013) Mathew Krouse, writes, 'In Johannesburg in the turbulent 1980s, I recall a postcard reproduction of [Sekoto's] 1946 painting *Song of the Pick* that imagined the dignified plight of street labourers working in unison under the watchful eye of a white foreman. Sekoto's painting was a reimagining of photographer Andrew Goldie's black-and-white shot of anonymous black workers in an urban setting.'

Krouse (2013) presents critical insights offered by the artist Mzuzile Mduduzi Xakaza, in an essay catalogue for the '*Song of the Pick*' exhibition. Xakaza says that this iconic painting was the result of a conscious effort by the artist to reconstruct the power relations between the white boss and black workers of the day. Xakaza writes, 'In Goldie's version, the workers look weak; they appear overwhelmed by the moment of toil. The white boss is in total control of his workers.'

Xakaza's radical writing clarifies that Sekoto was a painter who produced revolutionary imagery.

Krouse writes: 'By contrast, in Sekoto's version, the white boss stands in front of the workers, who engage in their task nobly. They are all endowed with athletic bodies and appear strong ... the white boss who stands in front of the workers seems threatened by the advancing pick-wielding men' (Krouse, 2013).

In Xakaza's essay, titled '*Who Occupies The "Centre"? Reflections on Power Relations in Gerald Sekoto's Landscapes and Other Approaches to Landscape Painting*' (2013) which looks at racial domination and space, he tells us that in *Song of the Pick* Sekoto interrogates the exploitative situation of back-breaking labour that is experienced by black men.

He continues: 'Little has changed since the ushering in of the democratic order; labours who obtained employment are still predominantly black, as are those who still fight and die for their rights. The idea of a male being a provider of a family is still etched in many people's minds and most employed men endeavour to provide for their wives and children in unbearable working conditions. A case in point is the 2012 Lonmin-Marikana incident, where 34 people were butchered by the police while taking a violent strike action' (Xakaza, 2013, p.94).



Fig. 23: Photograph by Andrew Goldie, 1930s, Iziko South African National Gallery.

According to *the Imbali visual literacy project* (2020): 'Sekoto based this painting, titled *Song of the Pick* (1946), [based] on a photograph taken in the 1930s of black South African workers labouring under the watchful eye of a white foreman standing behind them. However, in his painting the dynamic has changed. Sekoto has enhanced the grace and power of the labourers, turning them to confront the small and puny figure of the overseer, who appears about to be impaled by their pickaxes.'

Migrant labour has also played a role in the segregation of families, where the head of the family (bread winner) will leave the house for months or sometimes a whole year. Hall, Katharine; Posel, Dorrit (2018, p.1) in their article titled 'Fragmenting the family? The complexity of household migration strategies in post-apartheid South Africa' debate an important issue on migratory systems, quoting Platzky and Walker (1985), that 'The disruption of family life is one of the important legacies of South Africa's colonial and apartheid history. The marginalisation of Africans in "homelands", where there were few employment opportunities, forced Africans to migrate to "white" urban areas to find employment, but a range of restrictions prevented family migration or permanent settlement at the urban destination. The migrant labour system meant that it was mainly men who worked in urban areas or on the mines, while the rural homelands became places for 'surplus' people whose labour contributions were not needed.'

The migrant labour system contributed immensely to the breaking up of black families by creating uniform movement patterns that compelled men to leave their rural homelands for employment opportunities, and in this case many blacks did not see the need to matriculate and study further because their main concern was putting the bread on the table.

Brief analysis on the selected photographs

This section discusses works of David Goldblatt, Ernest Cole and Roger Meintjes, informed by my insider experience of hostels. South African hostels and migrant labour systems are a creation of colonial and apartheid regimes, and I believe these historical complexities of violence, poverty and exploitation may resonate for any researcher or photographer that engages with a hostel. This is indicated in the photographs (see Fig. 5) by Roger Meintjes, '*Bunks often referred to rooms by inmates*', Gugulethu hostel, 1993 and in Fig. 6, David Goldblatt's, '*Jabulani men's hostel*', Soweto, 1972.

The images were produced to represent hostels between the 1970s and 1990s. The photographic representations of black migrants perpetuated the violent gaze, as the truths in these images do not

extend to present the 'beautiful experiments' and restless characters by hostel residents. In Hartman's framework of beautiful experiments on method, she writes: 'In writing this account of the wayward, I have made use of vast range of archival materials to represent the everyday experience and restless character of life in the inner city. I recreate the voices and use the words of these young women when possible and inhabit the intimate dimensions of their lives' (Hartman, 2019, p.7).

Black migrant workers in hostels have been represented in undignified and limited perceptions, and those distorted representations perpetuate the historical norms that a hostel dweller should appear as poor, less human, savage, bitter and hopeless.

Despite these infamous negative symbols and the stigma formed by past events that identify hostels as a place with all forms of barbarism and violence, in this chapter I acknowledge that the hostels are also potential spaces for human beings to dream, aspire to a better life as well as make social progress. Mamphela Ramphele's book titled *A Bed Called Home* (1993) also offers historical insights into the social and political order of South African labour hostels in the then Transvaal by confirming that hostels in this period in particular gained worldwide disrepute as theatres of violence.

As part of the hostel community, I understand the value of using decolonial methods when collecting data that inform and inspires both research and practice. When I am in a hostel I visit spaces like *shisanyama* butcheries, and taverns to share beer with my fellow hostel residents on a regular basis. I value the experiences that occur when one engages with unplanned activities, such as stretching your feet by going to the nearest tavern to get a drink and fast food, and in such spaces, I pay attention to the multiple and chaotic sounds coming together in one space. Sounds and voices that have layers of humour, oral histories that take place in the now, without setting up interviews of conducting research.

As a creative, I interpret these multiple sounds as an innovative social praxis by dwellers that reconstruct the image of a hostel. I also see the yarning process as

another valuable form of generating research and constructing meaningful knowledge, as I have been made aware that in the 1950s Durban hostels had concrete beds. This image below, Fig. 24, of miner's bunks by David Goldblatt further substantiates a narrative that black migrants were treated like animals.



Fig. 24: David Goldblatt, *Miner's bunks in the abandoned Chinese compound, so called because it probably housed indentured Chinese labourers between 1904 and 1910, after which accommodated black miners. Simmer and Jack Gold Mine, Germiston, July 1965*

David Goldblatt's 'Miner's bunks' matches with the current beds of migrants in KwaMashu Hostel in Durban. Zulu (1993. p. 5) gives insights about the hostel infrastructure, culture, and social conditions. He says, 'The hostel consists of large single storey blocks of eight rooms each. Each room houses four residents thus making a total of 32 residents per block. Four men share a common kitchen with four cupboards, a table and two bunkers which act as chairs. Each man has his own cupboard, a bed made out of bricks and a wooden base as a mattress and built-in wardrobe made up of cement and a wooden lockable door.' Social conditions of the hostels are a prison-like setup and it is always intriguing to see black bodies being able to cope in such spaces.

I have engaged with the process of decoding the meaning of these images, they capture the essence of hardships that our forefathers had to go through on a day-to-day basis. Even though the structural coding of these photographs is educational, these archives may evoke hatred and anger in the race that was oppressed, and this include the generations of the 21st century. The narrative and meanings carried by such images could be theorised and interpreted in multiple ways, and I am interested in imagining life outside the frame of these photographs. For example, how did blacks manage to create beautiful lives for themselves in the midst of hunger, surveillance, apartheid, massive land dispossession? If one takes a step back and look at the frameworks by past photojournalistic photographers, I can attest that it did not only come in a form of exploiting the poor or vulnerable, for me, the images also come in a form of a prayer for a better future. Images also came in a form of mourning or grief, as well as a creation of hope and freedom in South Africa. The big question here is that looking at the present time, what is it that has shifted then? I do this by evaluating the value of the strugglism movement and exposé framework and their significant value in archiving black histories.

I also compare the time lines between past and present, besides the obvious fact that photographs of similar content have shifted from black and white to colour, in a wider context does this mean real situation of the oppressed race will also transform into a positive light? What happen if we use current sounds of black experience in hostile spaces to think about the future? And what happens if we blur these timelines, past, present and future; would one get a different sound?

This section introduces Zwelethu Mthethwa's work *Empty Beds series* within the framework of Josephy's article, '*Fractured compounds: photographing post-apartheid compounds and hostels*' (2014) and the photographic shift from pre to post-apartheid. The primary emphasis is on colour, emptiness, closeness, and distance. In the *Empty Beds* series there is an absence of human figures or sitters, which is an attempt not to continue victimise the vulnerable. Josephy (2014, p. 452) quotes Enwezor (2010, p. 94) explaining that the photographic series was shot in men's hostel in Durban KwaZulu Natal. And he continues, saying that according to Mthethwa 'with *Empty Beds* my interest was exploring how these migrant workers lived, and how they shared their spaces'.

Listening to the sounds of images and a thread of violence



Fig. 25: Kill site: Glebelands hostel has been the crime scene of at least 21 murders since February 2014

Durban hostels are known as a site of crime and violence and also a nest where the culture of the *ubunkabi* (a hit man) regenerates. I would also look at what it means for artists to create works and use a hostel as site of reference, and is it not stereotyping to always focus on violence? It is explored in the episodes of *Ehostela*, the South African television programme, which focused on the biographies of young hitmen in Durban. This is also explored in the novel by Nathi Oliphant, *Blood, Blades and Bullets*⁴. It is undisputable facts that people are drawn into hostel narratives because of popular violence that is both glamourised and aestheticized in media representations which promotes controversies of the everyday and by this I refer to violence in hostels.

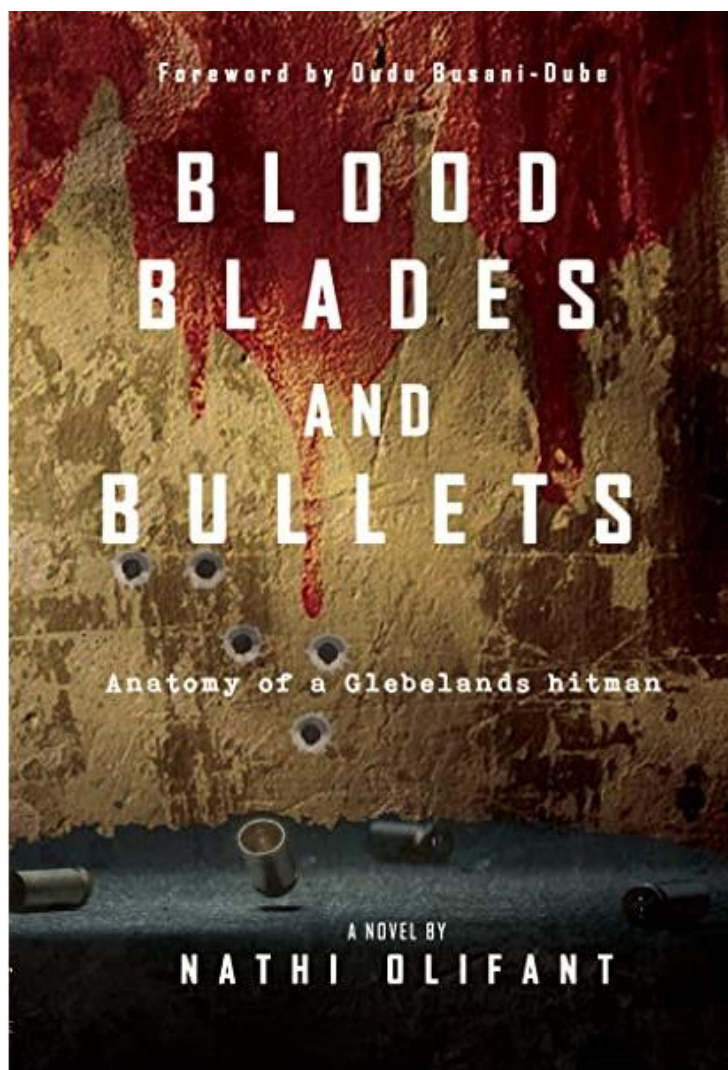


Fig 26, *Blood, Blades and Bullets*, book cover, 2020

It is important to acknowledge that South African migrant labour hostels have remained unchanged from violent historical complexities; it is an obvious narrative that blocks and limits creatives to respond to a hostel narrative through using innovative forms of representations that excludes violence and barbarism.

Violence killings are the inspiration of *Blood, Blades and Bullets – Anatomy of a Glebelands Hitman* (2020) by Olifant, see figure 26, who is a former Durban based crime and political journalist who worked for various newspapers, like the *Sunday Times*, the Independent Media Group and *The Witness*. I am looking at the angle which authors, artists, film makers and photographers use when engaging with hostels, and what appears to be common is the focus on violence drama and tension that takes place inside the hostels.

The book synopsis tells us that 'Mazwi Nxumalo is a naïve school dropout teenager from rural Nongoma who is unwittingly recruited into the dark world of Glebelands hostel hitmen. Coming from a poverty-stricken family, the odds are stacked against him. He is also running away from a mysterious man and his goons that he busted executing a man in a local forest. After getting in tune with the ways of the Durban taxi ranks and industry, he is soon trained in shooting, surprisingly by rogue cop friends of his handler, Zenzele. He returns one more time to Nongoma where, in a rage, kills his friend, former schoolmate and striking partner in the local football team after learning he had impregnated his high school sweetheart. Angry at his protégé and fearing that he would soon be out of control, Zenzele decides it's time for the traditional cleansing and strengthening ceremony, *ukuthwala*. Mazwi emerges almost invincible from this rite of passage to become an unstoppable but flawed killing machine. As the bodies pile up, including those of cops investigating his crimes, so is his irrepressible obsession with his doctored bullets and one woman whom his handlers believe will be his Achilles heel. The death of his father reveals more shocks around the young man's recruitment into contract killing and he would take everyone with him on his menacing rollercoaster ride (Olifant, 2020).'

In this note I have deployed creative modes that focus on the geo-body politic that opens up for multiple spheres of engagement. The ways in which I engage the hostels also focus on the forms of documentary and depictions that are human, innocent, and neutral.

Chapter three

Hostels in South Africa today: looking at a hostelscape through creative-based lens:
a discussion on what cannot be captured on images

The main aim of this analysis is to generate a critical and a constructive dialogue between the old and new artists/photographers. The discourse includes affirmations by Nocebo Bucibo '*A just image*' and Sabelo Mlangeni's '*Men only*' who claimed to be insiders in South African hostels. The images by a new generation of photographers mentioned above shifts from the historical frameworks of documentary, Bucibo and Mlangeni's photographic contributions are more optimistic when dealing with black subjects because they capture hostels as living spaces.

It is a generative practice to be in dialogue with the new generation of contemporary photographers because it is opening up other platforms, to redefine a hostel. A critical question here is reviewing if photography can provide a truthful representation of hostel experience. If hostels are living spaces, how is it that we tend to be trapped in representations that are static? I think it is not easy to define hostels, and I also do not think it is necessary to represent a hostel. Why do we represent or show, for whom and why?

My point of entry here is to give value to the photographic practices by Mlangeni and Bucibo because of their dynamic shift from historical to contemporary, and this include visual codes, semiotics and colour, and by default they capture the essence of beautiful experiments. It is phenomenal, this dynamic shift of representing black bodies with respect and dignity as in Sabelo Mlangeni, with his exploration of visual intimacies, and breaking of gendered stereotypes within the hostel.

For me the images that they have taken seem to erase a stigma of sadness and poverty, there is more life in the images in which I refer to as a foundation of 'beautiful experiments' a framework that was coined by Saidiay Hartman (2019) to re-narrate voices of the marginalised communities. The formal aesthetics applied by a new generation of photographers align, contextualise, and locate the hostels within a relevant timeline.

In chapter four, there will be an intense engagement with my praxis and I think I should be explicit in asking how my observations and reflections differ when compared to the historical? Why am I looking for another image that goes beyond just erasing the stigmatisation of hostel dwellers? The image that I intend to arrive at is driven by intuition and instincts. I do not have an idea of what it is going to look like, but I hope that I encounter something meaningful. At the back of my mind I keep

visualising the image that responds to the feeling of being in these spaces; an image that is both felt and imagined.

In my art practice I explore with diverse materials, the central focus is trying to find the missing narratives, as I believe they are integrated with aspirations of the everyday. This includes material objects, and the ordinary socio-cultural activities because they draw my attention, and also begin to describe a hostel landscape in a different way.

There are intriguing moments of multilayered sounds that begin to paint a complicated image that has a potential to expand and to mirror reflect South Africa. The socio-cultural activities, textures and voices are a radical contestation of humanity and authenticity, that photography video or film cannot capture.

Zwelethu Mthethwa's *Bed series* is a fascinating portfolio as he chooses to avoid the visibility of human figures in these photographs. In other works where he documented spaces where poor black subjects will be visible, he makes sure that he depicts people in a different light. In an interview with Enwezor *tilted Off the Shelf* (2010) Mthethwa said: 'They are poor but I wanted to portray them as human beings.'

And in the bed series, each bed has its own distinctive character and in a way that represents people even if they are not included in the picture frame.



Fig. 27: Zwelethu Mthethwa, *Empty beds series*, 2002

Josephy (2014, p. 452) explains that 'Zwelethu Mthethwa has become known as an acute observer of the human subject. He has photographed people posed in their places of work, in their homes and

in landscapes. In this respect, his *Empty Beds series*, which shows hostel beds, is unusual in that these beds contain no human subject, but instead focus on the environments that people inhabit. This choice may be informed by reluctance to position the hostel dweller as victim.'

In a hostel expect anything because: *Kusengenzeka noma yini*

The phrase *Kusengenzeka noma yini* (anything can still happen) is influenced by my philosophical positioning as a researcher, artists and an interpreter. My experiential knowledge of the socio-cultural dynamics of township life also influences my explicit framing of narratives. As in my day-to-day engagement with such spaces (shacks, hostels) I began the practice of studying visual materials to try to make meaning out of them. In these moments of encounter that happen within the township landscape, especially when I begin to employ my aesthetic sensibilities, I tend to make notes, sketches and generate photographs using my cell phone. I acknowledge this practice as my intellectual artistic intervention, because such visual adaptable materials have inspired my current body of work where I explored with drawing, video (performance), photography and sculpture installations.

Overview of a township

History applauds township communities for participating during the events of the liberation struggle against the apartheid regime. According to Sigodi's (2015, p. 123) perspective on township experience he broadly explains that, 'South African townships are among the most layered and important spaces in the country; politically, economically, culturally. As a place, the township is imbued with historical symbolism memorialised through events like the 1976 student protests in Soweto, the Sharpeville Massacre of 1960, the displacements of District Six, etc. And it is part of our general knowledge that in South Africa townships are normally built on the margins or peripheries of towns and cities.



Fig. 28: Kagiso Pat Mautloa, *Reconstruction*, 1994, canvas, wood and acrylic: From permanent collection of Iziko: South African National Gallery. (See a close-up detail on the right)

In the anthology edited by Emma Bedford, *A decade of Democracy: South African Art 1994- 2004*, I am intrigued by Andries Walter Oliphant's essay, '*In Post colonial South Africa: Three canvases on art and change.*'

Reconstruction in Fig.28 is one of the important works within contemporary art discourse, as in reality, the work gives a clear indication of where we come from as a nation. Oliphant (2010. p. 11) tells us that Mautloa's *Reconstruction* serves as a poignant encapsulation of important moments in South Africa's evolution, spanning recent events and historical epochs. This triptych not only mirrors the nation's metamorphosis but also embodies a complex web of interrelated concepts. Each of the three postal bags represents a distinct phase of visual and thematic evolution: from the depiction of a devastated landscape to the portrayal of a newly-built house in a collage painted on wood fragments; the third shows a new South African flag overlaid with indigenous iconography. These representations transverse traditional painting, collage, and assemblage, mirroring the progression of South Africa's visual stages of conflict, destruction, and reconstruction.



Fig. 29: Berni Searle, *Lull*, from the series *Black smoke rising*, 2009

The work of Berni Searle is important because of its relevance to the current events of looting and unrests in South Africa. *Black smoke rising* was a response to the socio-political climate of South Africa back in 2008 where our economy was depreciating due to global recession. It was also a time where xenophobic attacks happened. The burning of a tyre in Fig. 29 shows a forever disrupted landscape which is a continuing circle as it prevails in the present.

The black smoke rose again in July 2021 where we witnessed scary unrest, looting, and violent protests between provinces. It was influenced by the historic imprisonment of the former president Jacob Zuma. In his book *Eight Days in July: inside the Zuma unrest that set South Africa alight* (2021) Thabo Mbeki's take on the matter was recorded on 16 July 2021, when he said, 'Our country is harvesting the bitter fruits of a counter-revolutionary insurgency that has long been germinating in the bowels of what we commonly call "state capture". The hallmarks of the "state capture" [is] the deliberate and systematic denuding of state capacity that we have witnessed at South African Revenue Service (SARS), State-Owned Enterprise (SOEs) the weakening of all arms of the law enforcements including Intellectual Agencies (IA) and the National Prosecution Authority (NPA). The economic sabotage, wanton destruction of property and infrastructure we have witnessed cannot be incidental. We call the current situation was foreshadowed by open threats of civil war and unrest' (Hunter, Singh and Wicks, 2021, p. 12). It is a fact that political unrest that has cost many lives was a result of anxiety due to Covid-19 lockdown rules and regulations, structural poverty and unemployment that have been forever a plague in South Africa.

Two weeks later after looting (in July 2021)

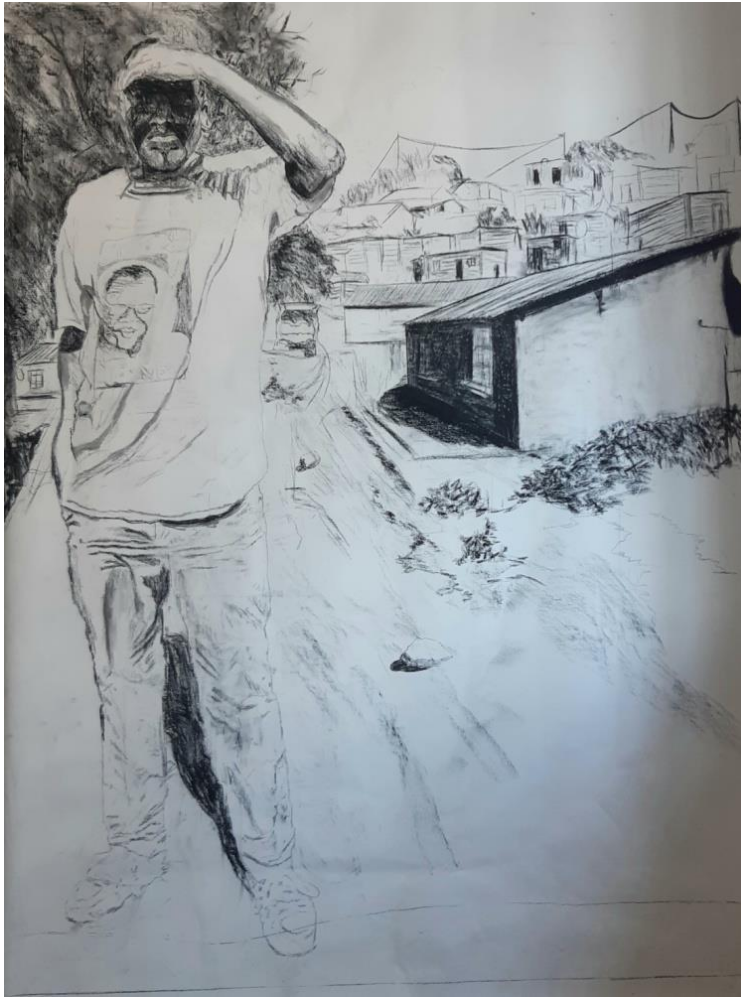


Fig. 30: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, 2023, *looting aftermath*, charcoal on canvas

There was a moment of interaction that cannot leave my memory, and I decided to capture a moment in a form of drawing, see Fig. 30. The social encounter happened at my hostel in Durban. A man pulled me aside and shared a personal story, explaining how devastated he was because his three sons had passed on, and the cause of death was fire. He burst into tears while explaining that this looting was now intertwined with other criminal acts. He requested that I assist him where I could. He believed that if he were to find the truth, about the death of his children and justice will be served accordingly, and their souls will rest in peace. A possible step forward is to contact the local journalists and distribute the story so that the perpetrators are caught. These ordinary and extraordinary moments of encounter are not easy to capture using the medium of photography, but instead I use drawing, yarnning, and writing.

Without exposing any further details, I look at the image again that is captured in a form of drawing in Fig. 30 and try to decode it. I observe that he could be the age of my father, and this clearly illustrates that this man is from the generation that lived during the times of apartheid. The codes within the image are obvious, especially the logo of a well-known political party in South Africa, that of the IFP, and also because of the site in which the interaction took place. In my subconscious it registers that hostels have been, and are still hostile environments or 'theatres of violence'. The tears of this man who was not afraid to cry in my presence could signify that history is repeating itself as these painful histories of systemic violence and traumatic threads are being carried through in the present.



Fig. 31: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, 2022, *Crisis of shelter and space* (image by Phumlani Maphumulo)

Black voices: translated using objects

The drawing of an *impempe* (whistle) is a symbol of urgency, whistle blowing is a powerful tool that is still used today in and outside the hostel to report internal emergencies and to hold gatherings that includes cultural activities, marches and political campaigning. The initial aim in drawing this object was to provide a meditative process that is in response to the crisis of space, adequate service delivery and the land question. I was not only limited to thinking about the problems of space inside the hostel, as these key problems extend to touch on the politics of space in South Africa at large.

Black sounds: looking at the shack as an extension to the issues of land and space

Shacks keep popping up in most parts of the South African landscapes and the new culture of the shack-dwelling community is growing rapidly. My take on shacks is that there are vulnerable, risky, and living in them poses much danger to human life. I also take a moment to reflect on my position, both as the insider and the outsider in a hostel. And I acknowledge moments of encounters where my appearance in the hostel space changes the social settings completely.

In this case I can become a mentor, a teacher, a leader, and a brother to others. And while valuing those daily social interactions, I also do not take for granted the interrelationships of stories and events, and that is when in 2022 I found myself being updated about the incident of a neighbour who died in a shack that went up in flames because she fell asleep while cooking. A few days later after the body was collected, a newly built structure of a shack was erected on top of that ash for a new immigrant to occupy.

The rebuilding of another shack is an activity that does not only speak to the inhumanness in that space; but metaphorically it could speak to the discrepancies of our democracy. These are the discrepancies that start from the resurfacing of police brutality and massacres, and also the rebuilding processes that is unstable as they overlap the unhealed wounds of apartheid. The South African Constitution and Truth and Reconciliation Commission are confusing and questionable.

Looking for possible interventions: despite the complexities blacks have always navigated ways to create beautiful lives for themselves



Fig. 32: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, *Iyazilungisa indoda*, 2022, performance addition 1/7 (image by Menzi Ngcobo)

I performed *ukugquma* inside the hostel with an intention of making photographs that will serve to mark the time when we were devastated by Covid-19. Ukugquma or steaming is an indigenous activity that is continuously practiced by Africans for healing purposes such as removing bad omens, escaping poverty and attracting good fortune. The common use of steaming plastic is a replacement of blankets, and this may be problematic to campaigns like Greenpeace Africa that fight against plastic pollution, such material is a major problem that is ruining the environment.

I look at plastic as a versatile material because it is also used by poor working-class homeless people as a blanket against the cold and rains at night as well as a convenient tool to build commercial shelters in the streets. Since, 2008, as I walk around inside my hostel, I encounter plastic hanging on washing lines. The visibility of plastic is an alert of the presence of the Covid-19 pandemic that we have a responsibility to fight through steaming, which is believed to limit the chances of getting

infected. *Ukuqguma* is an historical practice among black communities and in a hostel. It is a common ritual that is integral to the social cultures of the space, and we use plastics or blankets to wrap our bodies.

The practice of *ukuqguma* is connected to African spirituality, using traditional herbs. It is mainly used for healing, cleaning a person's aura to remove bad luck for the sake of attracting good energy, unlocking life opportunities and progress. Steaming is a painful process, but on a positive note it is a temporary moment of engaging with the self in that personal secret space, praying to connect with the higher ancestral powers and God to manifest desires.

The process of *ukuqguma* is painful and suffocating and it reflects how I feel during my stays inside the hostel block. The hostels are congested, uninviting and temporary, they are similar to *ukuqguma*. Despite the complexities of violence, poverty and the high unemployment rate, I also acknowledge the fact that hostels can also allow for progress, failure and the crafting of wayward practices such as refusal and fugitivity, which includes exploring of life opportunities, self-determination, and recreation of freedom.

Chapter four

Searching for meaning of objects within a hostel: and I hear sounds because objects speak!



Fig. 33: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, 2023, *Installation view* at The Point of Order Gallery at the University of Witwatersrand

I will begin by introducing the meaning of objects within the conceptual framework, *Singayibiza ngani lendawo?* (What should we call this place?) which is an art exhibition that took place from 2–18 February 2023 at The Point of Order exhibition space at the University of Witwatersrand. The practical component is a counter production that attempt to expand the hostel narrative.

What should we call this place? Looking at hostels as a temporal space and where wayward practises take place. I resonate with the thoughts of Naeem Mohahiemen Son[i]a#299.audio titled *A Great Missing Object* (2019) I admire his artistic processes as he is in a search for something. He tells us that, 'It is a familiar experience for me not to quite find what I am looking for, but find something that is completely different, because of the way project or event or record that you are trying to find, you experience a search that doesn't end up successfully. But when you don't find what you are looking for, that's actually productive.' He continues: 'I have talked about a missing film that I've been trying to find for many years and I've never found it, and now I am convinced that the film doesn't exist, that it was a fable told by my elders which I wanted to believe because it's such a beautiful story of a filmmaker who passed away and his unnamed film is sitting somewhere in the

archive waiting for me to discover it. Well maybe it doesn't exist. But while I am searching for it, I find other things.'

In his mind, there is this great missing object that he is trying to find, and that the case for most creatives, because in my work I am trying to find a unique image that is a counter-production of the representation of black bodies in South African hostels.

I also think of Tina Campt's *Listening to Images*, and interpret sounds and objects that I encounter in a hostel. In my creative journey, finding the new image is explored in multiple frameworks, starting with critical fabulation as a method; this term borrowed from Saidiya Hartman in which she uses knowledge gained through historical research. Her work focuses on the histories of African women enslaved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade as well as the experiences of black women during and after reconstruction. These histories are built on a combination of historical fact and extrapolation, since the histories and historical records about the oppressed peoples are often incomplete, inaccurate, or largely marginal (Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments_ A Salon in Honor of Saidiya Hartman: 2019)

.

My praxis begins with listening to the sounds and objects that are placed near the bed spaces inside the hostel. I look at the narrative content and quality in which these objects carry, and also how they contribute to shifting the image of hostel dwellers. Devices such as radios, earphones and cell phones can connect a dweller to different parts of the world, and such tools open up a space for introspection and also re-imagining otherwise. In a setting of shared spaces within the rooms, earphones and a simple activity as reading a book or a newspaper could be a demand for peaceful moments and privacy. My generic methods of engagement with these spaces, is zooming into these small items and predicting their role and function and their connection to the daily practices of waywardness.

The archived content of images captured by photographers such as Angela Buckland for example seem to exhibit uniform aesthetics and narratives, images slightly connect to the black and white documentary series by Ernest Cole, David Goldblatt and Roger Meintjes. In my opinion the images represent the hostel at surface value and they seem to be representing one truth. In my work I am searching for the hidden image, and a multi-layered content that captures the multiplicity of truths within the hostel dwelling experience. This method of practice is intuitive, as I use text, photographs, process drawings and sculpture installations as a process to allow new ideas and images to manifest. And to explore a wide range of mediums is reconnecting to the idea that *umuntu incwadi engafundeki* which means a person is a book you cannot read, nor define through a photographic

representation, a person can be a lot of things, therefore the pragmatic component argues against the notion that video and photographs carry or show the truth, but instead my practice navigates for right methods to represent truthful human experiences.

To be a hostel dweller this is not a desirable experience. Therefore, it comes naturally to refuse derogatory labels such as *impohlwa* (bachelor), *iqaba* (uncultured and uneducated) and *inkabi* (hitmen).

The South African socio-economic and political landscape has conditioned blacks to be multi-rooted and this is done through acknowledging my multiple identities, as a fine artist, a researcher and a mentor for developing artists. These generative activities that I perform play an essential role in the regaining of respect and dignity for hostel community. In this case am I the new image that I try to search for?

The practical work includes, drawing, sculpture, video-performances and photography, and it is a set of interrelating ideas. I employ this vast range of cross-mediums to search, and in the moments of searching other images began to prevail; I started to see other things which I was unable to see before. I saw the images being ineffable, by showing characters that convey multiple meanings because a human is not static but '*uyashintshashintsa*' (changes every day).



Fig. 34: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, 2023, *Mother, Random man, brown envelope, vending tent and a gambling board*, The Point of Order Gallery at the University of Witwatersrand

Is there a hostel at the point of Order Gallery?



Fig. 35: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, *Ukusinga okukhombisa ukudideka*, 2023, close up charcoal on canvas

There is a critical moment where a person has to make curatorial decisions on what to put up on the wall and what to leave aside. I had to disconnect a little from my praxis or the pragmatic. I entered The Point of Order Gallery (TPO Gallery) and prepared a layout of my work on the floor, the work was chaotic, busy, and very loud. I felt these multiple sounds echoing in my head, the sounds of different voices are converging, overlapping, and diverging.

The echoing vibrations on drawings, photographs, performance, and sculptures took me back to the hostel immediately. The threads of imagined sounds repaint hostel realities, as a person would hear when someone shouts '*Ey wena ikwaGogo wakho la! Phaphama! Akusikho kini lana* (Hey you, you think this is your grandmother's house! Wake up! This is not your home).

I was reminded of the disruptive sound is of a gunshot and when you are having a private moment with your partner, a fellow inmate or roommate will knock in a disturbing tone saying, '*Umonyule bhungu sengifikie*', (I am here pull out). I memorise textures that are bold and temporal as well as their contribution to continuing hostel aesthetic. It is the chaos, slums, squatter camps, loud maskandi music everywhere, and smell of junk at non-authorised dumping sites, regular corruption, which is mugging, murder and theft.

In most cases you would hear someone shouting 'Mbambe!' (Catch him!). It is where you would see a person running for his life, because if the mob catches the thief, and they will be lucky to survive death. The first thing to be cautioned about was crime and regular killings, which was confirmed in 2008, a week later after people shouted, 'Sebemshayile omunye' ('They shot and killed another one') and later I saw a dead body of a young male that was exposed in a hot sun, lying with his back facing up with his mouth open. People walked past as if nothing had happened past the disturbing scene of a dead man lying on a pavement.

The body

In a video performance I have used my body as a way to negotiate and beg for ancestral protection and eternity on the site of historic and contemporary violence, because hostels are still spaces of uncertainties. The use of my body could be a serious call to remember and cleanse the haunting spirits of hostel dwellers who died due to political violence. The body becomes a critical vehicle to link between the dead and living, as to steam is a cleansing ceremony that might be the ultimate solution to stop violence and senseless killings inside hostels.



Fig. 36: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, *Qguma/Futha*, still image performance, Video, 2023

An essay by Mgcineni Sobopha, '*Re-PRESENTING THE BODY: In search for postcolonial moment*' (2011) discusses the deployment of the body in contemporary visual art, especially after post-apartheid, he gives us some context that, 'The body is always viable as a discursive tool for generating meaning in society. The dominant social frameworks through which the body is narrated and situated in society are historical, scientific, cultural and religious.'

Emma Bedford (2004, p. 68) expresses that the body as a discursive artistic prioritisation was absent from the earlier South African art as a result of political repression, conservatism, and religious mores.

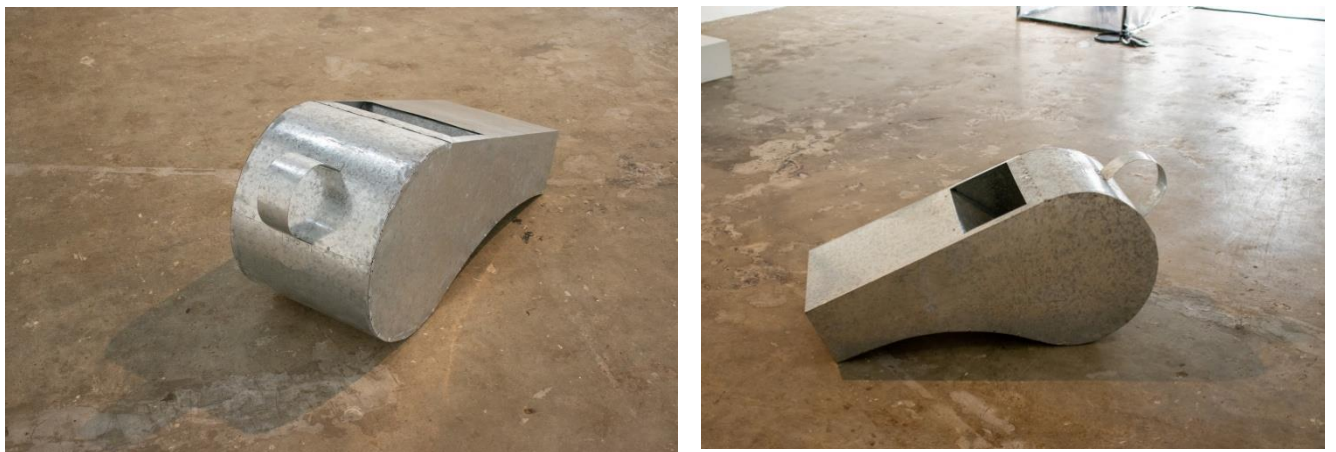


Fig.37: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, *Iva likhishwa ngelinye iva*, (it needs a thorn to remove a thorn), 2023

Bringing a hostel into TPO Gallery

The *impempe* (a whistle) in Fig. 37, symbolically addresses the crisis of shelter, land and space in South Africa; it is titled "it needs a thorn to remove another thorn" and is a deliberate reference that criticises the rapid growth of shack dwelling communities.

Looking at these images and objects inside the gallery, a rhetorical question arises at the back of my mind, 'If I had to give this body of work one sound, what would the sound be?' I thought that the sound would be 'free me'. My reading of these images and imagined sounds is both closed and open ended, there is a counter narrative thread running through the work, in which I observe traces of a

storyline of a man who wishes to escape the hostel. This form of escapism could be relational to any other person in a different landscape, which could be a prison, a rural area or someone homeless in the streets, yarning about finding a home.

There is a vague combination of these sounds, imagined sounds and images, sometimes the message gets lost, and I find it very difficult to explain the work in its holistic sense. The introduction of negative spaces on the gallery wall is intentional; the blank spaces are left for viewers to find meanings within themselves without me 'the artist' explaining, and also to open up for a critical dialogue and social engagements to emerge. At the same time, I do not underestimate talks that are informal, unplanned (generic) because they allow for multiple meanings, and do not limit the image of a hostel dweller to a singular perspective.

Reflecting on the complete installation at TPO gallery, I am caught between searching and learning, and in that magical moment, there is a generative substance because the more I search, I begin to discover new meanings, and the prevailing of new meanings, reconnects to the open-endedness of this image I try to search for.

The installation of the vending tent made out of steel titled, '*Itende lokuhlanganisa*' is symbolic of doing whatever it takes to make ends meet. These eventful activities are not permanent, but they are temporary; their sense of temporality is similar to the idea of hostel dwelling. I unpack this from the moments of ordinary encounters with informal business traders, and there are times where a person will pass people hustling in a corner and notice that the trader is absent. If one is lucky, it is possible to locate them in a different space, and if by any chance yarning arises, this would be centred on a topic of, '*Ey ndoda angisakuboni lapha ekhoneni*' (I don't see you at your hustling corner anymore). Generally, one would respond by saying, 'No that thing did not work out bro, I stopped because I was not making money. Ooh no, I got a job *ndoda* because that thing was temporal; I just needed a driver's licence *qha!* And it has helped me to raise funds.'

Another response might be, 'I couldn't stay longer because the police were harassing me and I was tired of giving them cold drinks.'

Temporalities have no time frame, sometimes they are intuitive, and they solely rely on situations, instincts and emotions, sometimes they are not properly planned and are not predictive. This analysis of hustling is a true reflection of the inflexible image that I try to search for, and it is related to the historical and contemporary setting of the hostel experience. It is a similar scenario when I bump into an ex-hostel mate, and he or she says, 'Oooh, wow, do you still live there! Why are things

not coming together for you still? I will never go back there, but I would not mind visiting my friends. *Awusho usaphila u Mr so and so?* (Tell me something Is that person still alive?).

It was indicated in the opening of this chapter that the *Singayibiza ngani Lendawo?* exhibition title is open ended. It is an erasure of fixed stereotypes on the historical and contemporary representation of hostels, and is also a radical contestation of narratives that allude to misrepresentation. The use of metaphors 'speaking objects' obvious sounds and interpretive sounds have meant that the show has achieved its intended purpose, there is hardly a trace of identifiable individuals, but instead there is an abstract representation of a hostel, see the drawings in Fig. 34, and 35, sculpture installations fig. 36 photography Fig. 37 and video component Fig. 36 of a steaming performance. A person enters the TPO project space and does not see the hostel. A large drawing of a man in fig 30, *Looting aftermath*, 2023 reflects and captures a particular moment in time, it is one of the ordinary scenes that relates to the everydayness of social encounters that I think it encapsulates the everydayness of hostel life.

The memory captured in *Looting aftermath* is of the man who lost his three children does not leave me. I recall sounds of grief highlighting the aftermath of looting, unrests that happened between KwaZulu-Natal and Johannesburg. Technically the drawing is very loose, and I think it captures the vulnerable state of this man.

The image in Fig. 35 is rendered in black and white and has a nostalgic feeling, and is intended to connect to a personal memory of a traumatic incident. I appreciate the essence of its temporality, because I will never see this man again, and if by chance we happen to meet again, he might not remember me, and I assume that we might hold a conversation that is totally different. And his gesture of *ukusinga* (to look far or look closely) becomes a permanent part of my memory.

It is important to look at the temporalities and continuities in a larger scheme of things in terms of a linear timeline i.e. past, present, and future within the context of black experience, as in lives of poor working-class South Africans. This includes spaces that I have navigated, such as hostels and townships within this new dispensation, I would say temporalities are repetitive and ongoing.

Let us look at the vending tent for example and tell me, 'What do you think?' There are no jobs and South Africans should find ways to create jobs for themselves. And these temporal tents are part of our informal economy. *Ukuhlanganisa* (to hustle) which is a fundamental practice that favours the capitalist system that we conform to, so that one can put bread on the table or to make ends meet. But *ukuhlanganisa* and *ukuthatha ubeka* goes a long way, look at the mother for instance, in fig. 34

drawing; the huge figure of a woman is looking directly at the vending tent with the gambling board, which is a brown object on the floor.

Umshika shika is a tactic of conducting informal businesses by fronting legal products but selling illegal products privately as a way to raise fast money.

When looking at scenes, of everydayness in terms of semiotics, seeing a man pushing a trolley and collecting cans for recycling, this could be a sign of hunger and poverty. Whereas in a hostel seeing a man carrying a side bag or sling bag, you would think it is a hitman, who is an amateur or a veteran.

The curation process at TPO

The works were placed individually on purpose because I wanted each work to have its own power and capacity to communicate, I understand exhibition as a way to make a proposition to the world. The art gallery is a meaningful platform that allows for diverse minds to engage and share how the work resonates with our contours of everyday.



Fig. 38: Still video to Reece Madlisa & Zuma's, *Iy'ntsimbi Zase Envy* features Busta 929, Beast Rsa & Dladla Mshunqisi, 2021

A great starting point of engagement is to carefully observe Dladla Mshunqisi's dress code in Fig. 38; he is a well-known figure in Umlazi. But what may have granted him access in that hostel space is '*isiphandla*' the skin or goat hide bracelet in his right hand, an African bracelet that is extracted from a goat skin that is slaughtered during an ancestral ceremony. And there is an intriguing link of contemporary inter-cultural fusions between the *iKasi* (township), hostels in relation to these other spaces of entertainment businesses. Again, we can look at this video in relation to the '*Amanikiniki 2020*' music video produced by *Wayward* production music company to witness the explicit and a seductive dance as well as contemporary vibes that conceptualise and show off new dominating subcultures, and this type of music could be an interpretation of open-ended lexicon cultures in hostels and townships.

The repainting of the *iKasi* landscape shows how younger generations are recasting the township, the hostel, the rural with the city and the suburb in decolonial and complex ways – it supports and builds on what has been made possible by Mlangeni and Bucibo. They are not searching for the new image, they are showing the image, celebrating it and recuperation and 'reasoning creatively'. And of course, it does not come without its own challenges, but provides new reference points and raises exciting questions, opening up not only scholarship but also expanding black popular culture and its visual library.

When looking at the spaces of entertainment businesses in relation to Kasi (township), suburbs and rural, there is an interesting shift of contexts, where one *kmele enze izinto zenzeke*, (you are compelled to make things happen), and this is done through adhering to the new dominating subcultures. Whereas in a hostel the main cultures are still being promoted for the following reasons: to prove *ubuhle bendoda iinkomo zayo* (looking after one's parents or family, building a descent home, and living a prosperous lifestyle).

A hostel is dominated by a group of people who are still very conservative and to be a womaniser is not approved of. Even a traditional doctor would refuse to give out *umuthi ' ukuqinisa uthando* (herbs for love portions). A person would be asked such questions as, 'What are your intentions with that woman in particular? If you are not intending to marry her, then there is no point in using a portion, because a role of healers is to build the nation not to destroy.'

Whereas in nights clubs and other places of entertainment, there are no parents present or such guidance, they are space to have fun, kiss, play, hug, dance, mingle and explore. They are free spaces where money and affordability are your tickets. '*Ubuhle bendoda iinkomo ozayo*' is a traditional saying that means what makes a man attractive is his cattle or assets.

It is interesting to see how this old saying gets re-translated within the new subcultures; especially in spaces like clubs where trying one's luck on women 'ukubheja' (to bet) is a crucial step to kick starts a game. *Izinkomo* (the cows) in this context would be the purchasing of expensive alcohol like Hennessey, yager bomb shots, champagne bottles such as Rich, Spades, and GH Mum. The bottles of alcohol get delivered with a spectacular performance and this somehow create an illusion of a dreamy-like heaven on earth space that does not exist.

In reviewing and evaluating the new contemporary vibes (being relevant) and cultures performed by dispossessed communities, this is clearly a critical step to fill the gaps that were left open by historical photographers. However, the primary concern of my research is to discuss the value of wayward practices by hostel residents in contemporary art. The pragmatic components are not literal representations of what I find in hostels; instead, I explore with drawing, performance, video and sculpture that intends to be a counter production that reclaims and contest for representations and narratives of hostel life.

Conclusion



Fig. 39: Peter Magubane, *The unspeakable humiliation of mine workers being regularly inspected by a medical doctor in the diamond mines of South Africa during the apartheid regime for the 'theft' of precious stones, Johannesburg, 1968.*

Ernest Cole and Peter Magubane's work share stylistic similarities, see in Fig. 39. These similarities are evident in the image, 'The unspeakable humiliation of mine workers being regularly inspected by a medical doctor in the diamond mines of South Africa during the apartheid regime for the 'theft' of precious stones, Johannesburg, 1968'. The photograph depicts the front view of migrants which also reveals and exposes their sexuality, whereas in the image taken by Cole captures the back view of mine workers.

It is understandable that such photographs, generated in the 1950s and 1960s, were intended to expose the injustices by the apartheid government. Bucibo (2018, p. 52) shared her views on struggle or resistance photography, a term was used to describe the style and purpose of photography during that era. Made particularly for the international community, photographers from this period used the medium to directly oppose the apartheid government's policies and to shed light on the inhumane conditions and violence black South Africans were subjected to. Since their main objective was to expose the wrongdoings of the government, their photographs were not necessarily concerned with the aesthetics of the images, but the message that they wanted to send. One of the reasons for this could be that independent photographers had to sneak into prohibited areas and take photographs without being caught. One of these prohibited areas was the hostels (Bucibo, 2018, p. 52).

This conclusion touches on the photographic shifts in the post-apartheid era. Threads of photographic transformation of hostel representation are seen in Peter Magubane's work. Josephy (2014, p. 452) observed the fundamental difference and a shift from conventional notions of social documentary to focus on depictions that are optimistic, quite cheerful, making an example of a Magubane's photograph of the Mtshali family sitting outside their converted hostel.

In Josephy's acknowledgements, we are now made aware that, 'Magubane's sitters appear at ease in front of the camera, in spite of the seemingly hard conditions, and they are no longer portrayed as victims: a smile shows on Mrs Mtshali's face. It is also significant that in a post-apartheid context, Magubane sees the hostels as sites of preservation of culture whereas previously many regarded them as spaces associated with the destruction of culture' (Josephy, p. 451).

Sabelo Mlangeni's visual intimacies within the hostel have disrupted the obvious narratives on hostels; see the image below fig. 40, *Abangani*, title referring to friends where two men are cuddling and smiling towards the photographer as well as the continuities by Bucibo's photographs, where she exhibits a hostel as a living space; see fig. 41 the image of a dweller braaing meat at KwaMadala hostel. Both images encapsulate the current state of hostels, and subvert the historical depictions by old generation photographers.

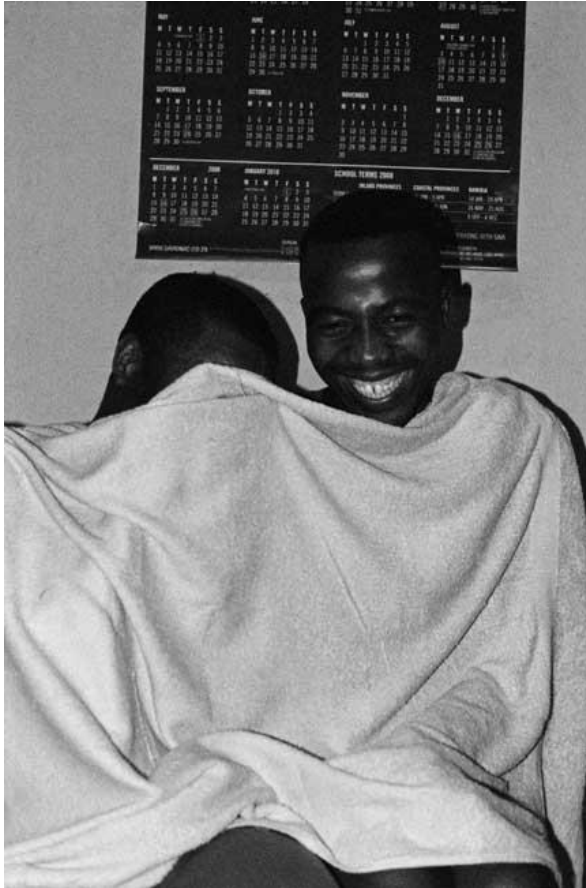


Fig.40: Sabelo Mlangeni, *Abangani*, (2009) courtesy of Stevenson, Cape Town and Johannesburg



Fig.41: Nocebo Bucibo, *Shisa'inyama*, Madala hostel, Alexandra, 2012–2017

The photograph above shows hostels as a living space, and also a potential site for cultural regeneration. The man in the foreground standing near a braai stand proudly demonstrates that he is an Orlando Pirate fan and at the same time, he could be using the cross sign as a way to hide his face from the photographer.

The images speak multiple languages because they reconnect us to the idea of opacity where the man in the foreground refuses to show his identity. Such decisions maybe informed by his consciousness that a dramatic gesture would communicate by giving an idea of who he was in that space, instead of being identified as a man braaiing. The image shows us that he recognises his dramatic visibility contributes to social history through creating a contemporary dialogue. And I conclude by interpreting this man's reaction as a way of writing a complex statement through the photograph.

At this point, I began to see success in the works of Bucibo and Mlangeni, whereas in Buckland's photographs it seems like the majority of sitters or participants have been instructed to look away from the camera. This is similar to identification photography and Camp (2017, p. 5) explains that 'these photos are not produced at the desire of their sitters. They are images required of or imposed upon by empire, science, or the state'.



Fig. 42: **Left** Angela Buckland photographing Thembi
Right: Thembi looking at her photograph

The body of work that I showcased at TPO was made in different spaces between Johannesburg and Durban, and also during the difficult time of Covid-19, political unrest and looting. The body of work captured the spirits or zeitgeist of the times because it was produced during the period of uncertainties, where most people were grappling with surviving the Covid-19 pandemic. The lockdown restrictions, rules and regulations did not stop people from finding alcohol illegally, as well as cross migration, meaning people moved in-between provinces (which is a wayward practice) the body of work relates with the notion of ukuhlunganisa, hustling and planning as a man. And the expected roles as breadwinners or family provider did not have to stop because of the pandemic.

The emergence of Covid-19 worsened the problems of financial instability, unemployment and poverty. SABC TV News (2020) broadcast a sentimental scenario of a hostel dweller named Doyi Whitey who pushes trolleys to make a living. He made an aggressive appeal during a live TV broadcast about the Covid-19 lockdown restrictions and regulations, harsh living conditions and hunger in Mamelodi Hostel. He later requested R20 assistance from the very same journalist who was conducting an interview.



Fig. 43: Covid 19: Good Samaritans give assistance to a man who pleaded for R20 on live TV, 2020

The videos of Doyi Whitey trended on social media platforms, and it drew more attention to Mamelodi Hostel. Mabona (2022) wrote about the current state and the difficulties faced by the dwellers due to the electricity power cut by the city of Tshwane, he quoted one of the dwellers speeches saying, 'He said doors are broken, some of the toilets are broken and do not flush, and men, women and children have to share toilets. I have been staying in this hostel since 1998. It

became very popular when *Emzini Wezinsizwa* was filmed here. But today, we cook with primus stoves and over an open fire. This hostel was built by the City of Tshwane for us, poor people, and we don't pay rent but we need electricity and other basic services.'

The work of the media is a straightforward portrayal of the situation, and as spectators we take it as a reality and truth because it is shown on a camera or video. In my praxis, I have contested this idea by introducing other possibilities that allow spectators to look, learn, engage, and understand that there could be multiple truths within a hostel dwelling experience.

I am convinced that photographers, journalists and artists visit hostels and poor communities with an already fixed image at the back of the mind, and during their process that imagined image prevails in their capturing of the situation. My body of work that was shown at The Point of Order gallery further advances the hostel image by employing a multidisciplinary practice that intends to neither avoid exploiting the vulnerable nor perpetuate a continuous reproduction of the violent gaze.

The thought processes involved in my praxis have always been guided by a conversation between Angalika Sagar and Kodwo Eshuni's critical reflection of Another filmmaker called Muhammad Bakri who filmed *Jenin Jenin* in Jinni, where he did exactly what they ended up avoiding, which was to ask everybody in the camp what has happened.

In the conversation Sagar and Eshuni reminds us that 'Jenin Jenin film was then used as evidence in a court in Israel to suggest that nothing had ever happened. So, the testimonies were worthless, speaking the truth became pointless because it could always be shifted and twisted according to a political agency. We decided that we were more interested in the idea of opacity, which is and turning your back on power or turning your back on speaking truth to power, hence on the film many people are looking out on windows as they have their back on camera, widows as a frame of representation into the world of witnessing (Otolith group: Fonds Audio #7; 2011).'

The Otolith group approach is related to my praxis because I have made the point that I am interested in the interiorities that happen within the hostel before the arrival of a researcher. I have engaged with a process of making a body of work that reflects my lived experience in a hostel, and during the process of engagement, I have avoided representing a hostel experience that only focuses on violence, and only shows the world images of blacks in poverty.

Sagar and Oshun's discussion had an emphasis on politics of representation with caution, drawing from a framework on an event that happened in Jenin 2002. The event was of a tragic invasion in Jenin where Israel military shot and killed over 75 people and bombed the refugee camp, and a

documentary film was made by Muhammad Bakri as a tool to look for people who had been responsible for committing suicide bombings in Jerusalem. The conversation by Sagar and Oshuwn is a social and a critical commentary that questions the over exposure of Palestine, because it is overly filmed and overly exposed, meaning too much photography, and they posed an important question asking that 'if you go to Palestine with your camera and take images of suffering (the problem is assuming that your image force for good) and the problem with Palestine is that it's overly exposed. A small place intensely visualised, and this overexposure of imagery does not necessarily produce new knowledge. So, if you had to go to Jenini and film there you have to ask yourself what it is that your camera can do that all other cameras have not done?'



Fig. 44: *Song of the Pick* 1978, oil on canvas, 107cm x 105cm, Iziko South African National Gallery

In visual arts Sekoto's artistic interventions have improved and advanced the portrayal of black migrants. I appreciate how he has altered a photographic version by Andrew Goldie taken in 1930s, showing black South African workers performing duties of manual labour under the surveillance of a white supervisor standing behind them. In the photograph workers are being enslaved and exploited by whoever is in authority or in charge over their lives. In Sekoto's choices of representation, he employed visual aesthetics showing black labours taking responsibility to transform an exploitative condition into a poetic and performative activity that threatens their foreman. Xakaza (2013, p. 95)

informs us that the beauty of design and pattern in *Song of the pick* highlights the artistic eye for aesthetics, and Sekoto's wit and humour emerge when one considers that the boss will have to step backwards as the workers move forward. This invokes thoughts of a reversed power hierarchy in which the economically disempowered are enabled and dignified beyond imagination. The physical strength, robustness and courage of these works evoke notions of heroism in the face of hardship, an idea reinforced by the artistic device of hiding the workers faces.'

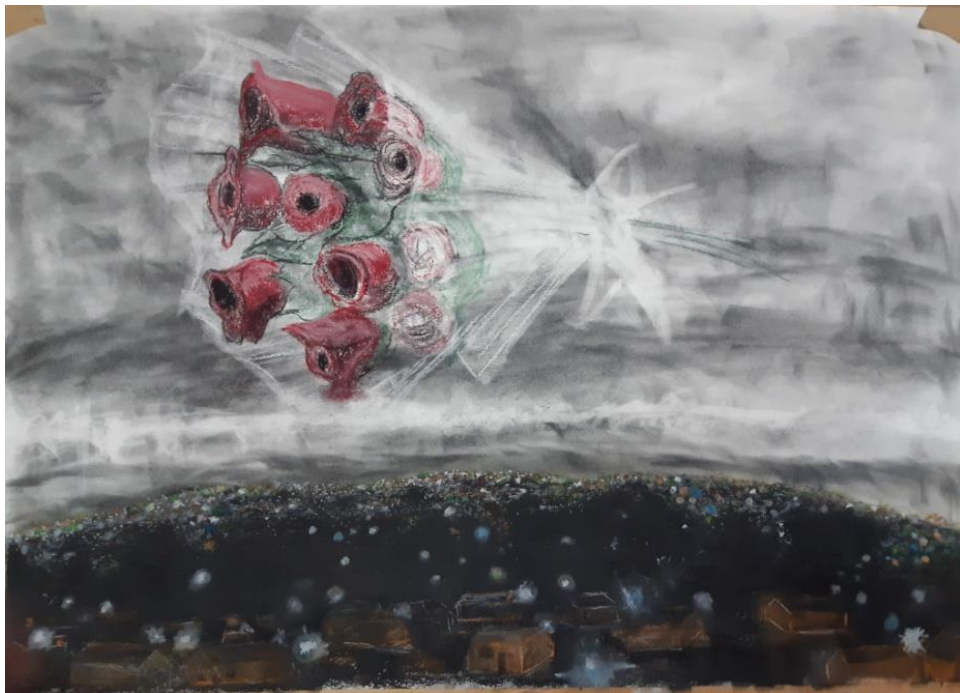


Fig. 45: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, *Hope*, 2020 charcoal and pastel on paper, 70cm x100cm

The large drawing of brown houses protruding in a dark space with red roses flying above references a township landscape. The abstracted brown houses represent hostel units that are located in **Umlazi T 17 Durban hostel**. The drawing is referenced from a photograph that I generated during the late hours of the day, and it was already getting darker. I was intrigued by the technical miracle performed by the image as the grey and brownish hostel blocks began to blend in with the townships adjacent to it. The grammar and the sound of the photographic reference and a drawing began to subvert the precept of othering, because at this point it is difficult to locate and label the hostel and its residents.

Cleansing and healing



Fig. 46: Mhlonishwa Chiliza, *Ukukhipha ibhadi*, 2023, photographs

Ukukhipha ibhadi means washing off bad luck and it refers to different types of cleansing practices that includes of steaming with herbs, praying in a waterfall and slaughtering. In this section I write about healing and cleansing by introducing the innovative aspect of my practice that involves practices of African rituals. The steaming practice is common in my work, and it plays a crucial role in the reclaiming of African rituals that have been demonised by Christian missionaries.

The body here is central and a discursive tool of engagement, used to meditate, negotiate and finding meaning in life. A hostel is a progressive site that does not restrict and demonise African traditions. I also look at Buhlebezwe Siwani's thematic framework, explained by Boutebo (2020): that 'It is rooted in exploring her body while interrogating African Spirituality and its relationship with Christianity.' And Siwani (2020) claims that body is a vessel or a vehicle that allows the ancestral work of healing to take form, and she explains that it has rooted meanings of African spirituality and how it speaks to colonisation, history, socio-economic dynamics, cultural traditions, and representation of the black female form. She says these themes remain relevant today, shaping our understanding of humanity in the contemporary world.

In the image titled *Ukukhipha ibhadi* I have captured the aftermath of steaming that I performed in a township hostel, a few minutes later the footprints and the moisture evaporated. The temporary visibility of the moist on the floor could be a confirmation that bad luck is being left behind and the evaporation of footprints leave us with some unanswered thoughts, such as being curious, along with scepticism, wondering if the activity was successful or not. A speculative question remains in our subconscious, thinking about whether the values of the practised African traditions can remain, if we are not yet granted enough access to land and socio-economic freedom.

In the book titled *Chasing Shadows: Thirty years of photographic essays* (2011) Mofokeng explains that In South Africa many black people spend their lives chasing shadows. He unpacks that a shadow is: 'The word *sereti* overlaps the word meaning shadow, but the absence of light is not all there is to *sereti*. In everyday usage *sereti* can mean anything from aura, presence, dignity, confidence, spirit, essence, status, wellbeing and power to attract good fortune and to ward off bad luck and disease. The demise of apartheid has brought to the fore a crisis of spiritual insecurity for many people who believe in spiritual dimensions of life. Today, this consciousness of spiritual forces, which helped people to cope with the burdens of apartheid, is being undermined by mutations in nature. If apartheid was a scourge the new threat is a virus: invisible perils both.'

We are heavily reliant on practising our traditions and rituals to solve contemporary problems of unemployment, poverty and economic freedom, I have a feeling that Santu Mofokeng's quoted statement refers to this as chasing a shadow. My general understanding of chasing a shadow is to try and reach for something that is impossible, or trying to find something that does not exist at all!

Pitika Ntuli's take on healing is contrary to my sceptical thoughts, as it is elaborated in his travelling exhibition titled *Azibuyele Emasisweni_ Rertun to the Source* (2020). The exhibition came as an urgent alternative to fight and tolerate the Covid-19 pandemic. A curatorial statement by Ruzy Rusike affirms, 'African art has traditionally been functional, and has been inseparable from healing the physical, socially and culturally. *Azibuyele Emasisweni* (going back to the roots) attempts to negotiate the disjuncture between spirit and materialism and came to it full fruition during the period of Covid when the demands of a global pandemic highlighted the urgency in the world for physical and spiritual healing, some of the works carry protective medicinal plants within them for example *izintelezi*.' The main enquiry here is how then coming back to the source or roots solving our contemporary problems.

If art heals, how does the work of Pitika Ntuli contribute in healing the nation? Is it physical, emotional, and physiological? Can now one retrospect and observe if healing and cleansing have opened up possibilities to attract social and economic transformation that may lead to leaving a hostel? The entire journey of the project is mainly based on contemplating between photography, visual art and narrative. These three components are used to explore how I see and interpret information in hostels and narrate how historical events and traumas connect with recent memories while allowing the hostel to tell its own story.

Hostels and their complex narratives are difficult to explain, portray and understand, the complexities and contradictions inspired me to write this thesis, 'Kusengenzeka nima yini: Wakithi singayibiza ngani lendawo?' The writing of this thesis was my refusal to be overlooked and

stereotyped as *impohlwa* and backward, and this proposes to caution researchers, photographers and critics to find more constructive ways when engaging with hostels.

I have deployed Hartman's framework and themes of critical fabulation and wayward to search for a new image of hostels that is not placed in compartment. The wayward framework in relation to 'Kusengenzeka noma yini: Wakithi singayibiza ngani lendawo?' proposes for new definitions, narratives and meanings of what it means to be a hostel dweller in South Africa. The genesis of critical fabulation started when I studied objects such as my father's briefcase which had important documents like insurance letters, photographs, payslips and handwritten letters which represented his professional life. A briefcase is an object of stories and I appreciate its potential to transform my ways of seeing and knowing my father beyond his migrant worker status.

Through the research I studied objects and their ontological relationship with me inside and outside hostels, and how they add to expand new narratives of hostels. The work I produced reflected aspirations that exist in my family (background), and that I have multiple identities. Through researching I learned that I carry the hostel memories with me, and stories are communicated in the thesis and by making a body of work that further complicates the image of hostel dwellers. The exhibition *Singayibiza Ngani lendawo?* was a constellation of multiple objects, images, drawings, video and sounds that were arranged to challenge viewers to perceive, learn and understand migrant labour hostels differently.

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