

ABSTRACT

This research examines the representation of the South African migrant hostels within the conceptual frame of a 'just image', adopted here from Roland Barthes's text *Camera Lucida* (1987). Barthes (1980:71) used this term to describe a photograph he found of his mother as a child: not only did the photograph offer what he sees as a truthful physical description of her but, also describes the photograph as 'indeed essential' because it achieved 'utopically, *the impossible Science of the unique being*', a characterisation of her 'essential being'. This dissertation argues that despite common narratives about the hostels and their history, hostels have become a complex environment with various structures, traditions, and cultures which cannot be pinned down to their impoverished conditions. Using the medium of photography I also argue that the photographic description of the elements in the frame (a document of past presence), has the ability to trigger aspects which are not physically seen. I describe these affects in terms of their 'spiritual' senses. One aspect is memory. I look at Santu Mofokeng in: *Chasing Shadows* (2011) where he uses photography to capture presence and absence, and to trigger memory which is drawn from one's subjectivity. I also look at Yto Barrada's project *A Life Full of Holes: The Strait Project* (1998 - 2004), where she speaks about her hybrid status of growing up in two countries with different cultures. This allowed me to interrogate photographic hybridity and my own hybrid identity, which I have utilised to compile this research.