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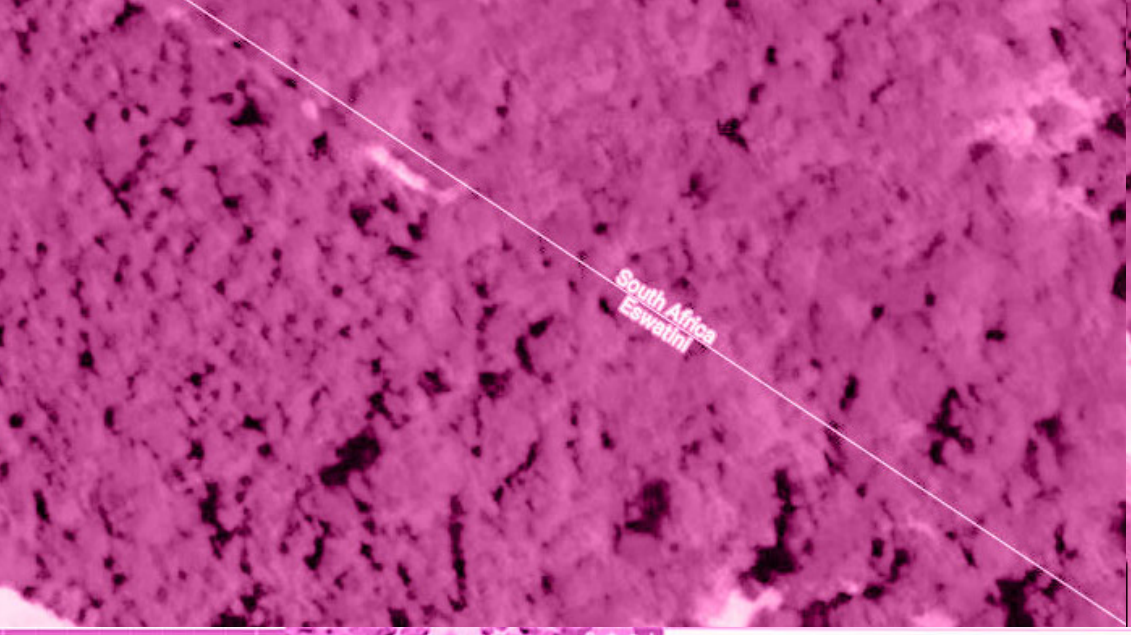
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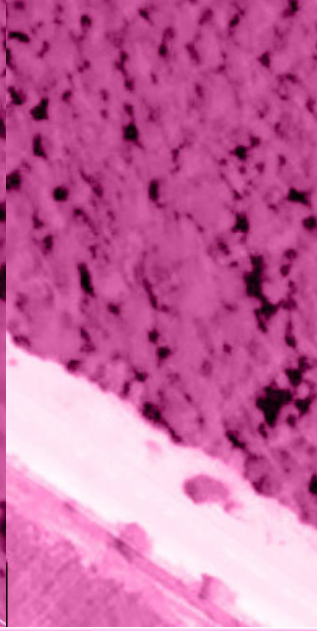
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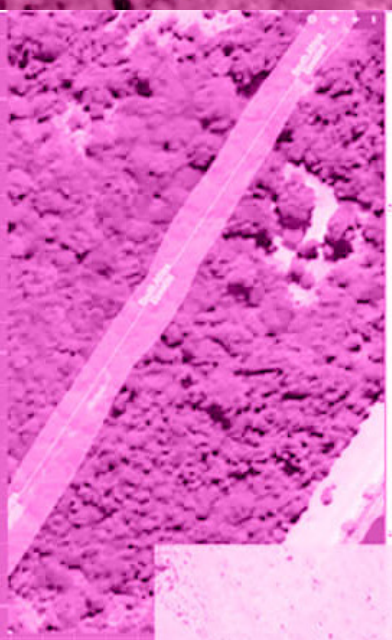
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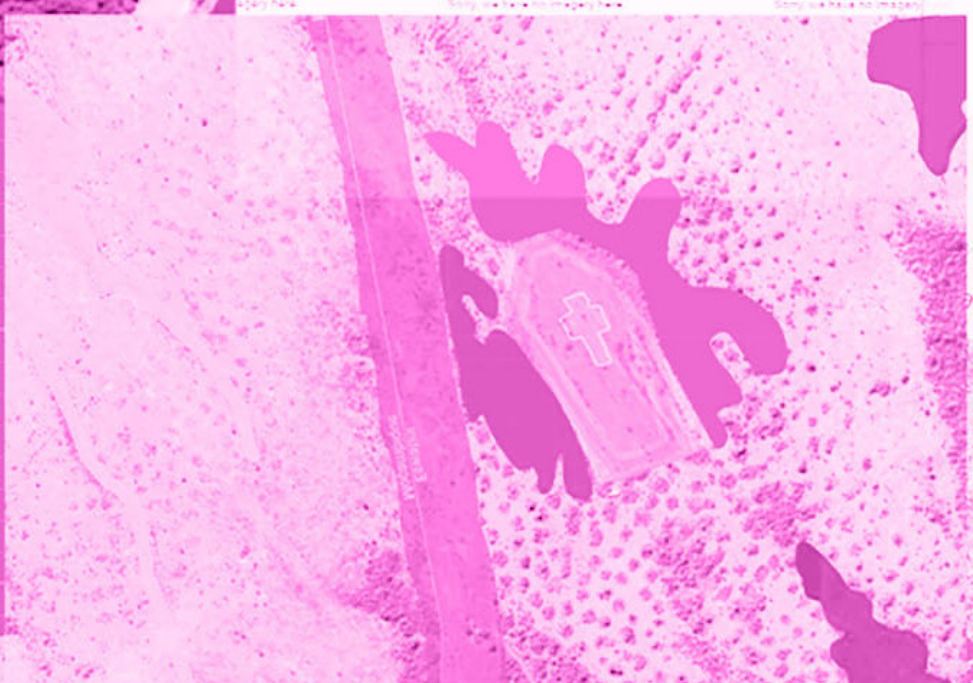
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South Africa
Eswatini









The Depart-Ment of In-Between Affairs: Liminality as a Space for Negotiation, Story-telling and Re-making of Identities

Siyanda Marrengane

Abstract

The research explores ways to write about the concept of liminal space or being in-between. A familiar experience that is encountered at both an individual and universal level at varying degrees and situations. My research uses the theme of *im/migration* as a starting point to speak about liminality and placing this research in the context of South Africa and Eswatini because of my personal experience. In addition, my research considers how the historical residue from colonial and/or apartheid regimes have affected the ways we see ourselves and our inherited infrastructure in the broader perspective of the post-colonial. For example how borders that have been arbitrarily defined, have disturbed our understanding of belonging, creating conflicting ideas and consequently, have embedded bodies in a perpetual in-betweenness. More importantly, this research applies the idea of the 'experiential' as a methodology, and therefore a valid form of knowledge production contributing to the knowledge pool of *im/migration* and liminal space.

Keywords: Liminality, in-between, im/migration, experiential, borders

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my deepest appreciation to my supervisors Rangoato Hlasane and Donna Kukama for their invaluable assistance that they provided during my research.

I would like to also show my gratitude towards the organisations: Rebecca Julia Suttner Scholarship and the Andrew W. Mellon funded bursary, awarded by the Wits School of Arts, that offered me some financial support during course of this research.

This research paper is dedicated to my mother, Nomcebo Marrengane, who has pushed me to not give up and supported me all the way.

Contents

Introduction 1

On liminality 10

Borders as Liminal Spaces 30

The Depart-Ment of In-Between Affairs 53

Umhlaba 75

Endless In-betweenness 81

Reference List 86

Liminal kanjani?
Could liminality be a loaded concept that expresses lived experiences?
That is not arbitrary and insignificant? But questions inherited historical ontologies.

How do we start to delink from Eurocentric epistemologies, and centre indigenous African languages and narratives as repositories of knowledge?
How do you look? How do the people in your immediate surrounding look?
Why do you insist on twisting your tongue, doing different contortions to articulate a language forcefully branded on your foremothers tongues.
Basop' you'll bite yourself.

Liminality is just being?
Occupying the liminal space is just living? Can you relate?

Liminality is a form of collaboration.
Between us, African women.

Usemkhatsini.

To be seen and not to be seen at the same time.
My stoep the rooftop, my stoep the apartment building foyer

First space,
second space,
thirdspace,
deadspace,
many spaces.

The border as transition. The border as stagnation.
Who's us? Who's them?

If the border is in transition, does it mean the body is like the border because it too is in transition?
We all crossed each other when we crossed the border.

These arbitrarily drawn lines that enclose us.

Matters of the home.
Affairs.

Perceptions.
Belonging.
Dis location.

In-between and in-between, and in-between, and in-between, and in-between
Even in death…

1.

Introduction

My research presents ways of navigating the notion of the liminal space/ liminality/ in-between space/ betwixt and between/ *thirdspace* / threshold and other types or experiences of *betweens. Between* in this research, can be looked at as a precarious position that a person might find themself in, which may be voluntary or involuntary; conscious or unconscious. This may be dependent on circumstances, environment, identity or histories' lingering burdens on the present. *Between* can be seen as a potential point of (self) reflection or paradoxically as a point of rupture.

The aim of my research is conceptualizing about liminality, through the lens of *im/migration*. Additionally, offering challenging ways of thinking about liminality and *im/migration* in modes that can disrupt, question, problematise and falsify our general understanding of *im/migration* and liminality. More importantly, I aim to disrupt historical male oriented and dominated master narratives of theorising travel. This position of largely male focused narratives, is echoed by Caroline Wanjiku-Kihato in *Migrant Women of Johannesburg: Life in an In-between City* (2013: 18):

> "Feminist scholars have long argued that urban studies have tended to be masculinist-eliding women's experiences and perspectives of city life."



Figure 1 Image taken in a cross-border taxi at the bus rank in Mbabane. The sticker seems to imply that either only males travel, or males who travel engage in promiscuous behaviour that might lead to infectious consequences. Photograph by Siyanda Marrengane.

The lens through which I write presents a notion of liminality that is elusive and, because of its reliance on experience, therefore transient- by deliberately breaking up words, sentences, and paragraphs. Further elaborating on this, my research creates intentional disruptions or fragmentations at different points as a way of challenging ways in which liminal space can be experienced and read. The research aims to highlight perceived understandings of liminality (which is mostly a study in the academic sphere) and show different ways liminal space can be experienced through text and practice. In continuing to push the boundaries of liminality, I have employed language (that is switching between SiSwati, IsiZulu and English) as a liminal tool by experimenting with the way paragraphs, sentences and words are written and consequently formed, which forces the reader to 'read *between* the lines', as stories are embedded in between. Together with configuring chapters in such a way that they emphasise the reliance of thinking about history and/

or experiences as happening chronologically. In other words, aiming to establish how multiple instances are happening simultaneously to each other, and how that is the essence of *in-betweenness.* The fragmentation allows for 'gaps' to be visible as a strategic method to force the reader to slowdown or even pause, sometimes disorientating them; an approach that attempts to mimic the experience of what it is like to continuously be a disrupted individual.

In this research, I am less interested in reproducing a 'study of liminality' or a 'study of borders', or a 'study of *im/migration* (as female)'. Rather I would like to propose what I term the 'experiential' as a succinct and legitimate form of knowledge production that underscores liminality, and in this way dealing with paradoxes by using everyday experiences as methods of analysis. Agnes Aita Apusigah suggests that writing about experience is "a valid form of knowing" (2006: 27). Another way of thinking about the experiential, which forms the basis of this research is referring to the concept of ethnography, more specifically autoethnography. Autoethnography is a theoretical approach whereby the researcher writes about the self through a critical lens, and a form of reflective cultural analysis. With this type of theoretical framework, mundane moments or acts that would otherwise be disregarded or labeled insignificant are given a chance to make social commentary and highlight cultural complexities. bell hooks describes it as a "yearning" (1990: 26). A "yearning" to connect "intellectual work" and "aesthetics that inform the daily lives of writers and scholars" (1990: 31). A similar sentiment reiterated by Audre Lorde (1984: 37):

> "Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives."

I will look at how writers have approached liminality either by explicitly using the word

liminality, and/or inadvertently through describing a setting, an event, or a feeling. Examples of texts that I will draw from are Chickwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's *Juju Fission: Women's Alternative Fictions from the Sahara, the Kalahari, and the Oases In-Between* and Phaswane Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow*.

As mentioned earlier, stressing the experiential in this research – of which it is being conducted in an academic setting- is an important move in contributing to the already dense field of *im/migration* because the research offers a personal and relatable outcome, than one that might be based on the gathering of quantitative data, as well as experiencing a more human element as the reader, by using storytelling, for example.
It is also important to apply a level of criticality throughout the research, in both writing and in practice. Criticality "is a state of profound frustration" which results from instances that allow the merging of knowledge, of "knowing and unknowning" and the experiences that come with it (Rogoff 2006: 1 & 2). Criticality is valuable in this research because of its awareness to constant questioning and analyzing with the mindfulness that there is no simple, direct answer at the end.
In hindsight, is there even an end?

Seeing ourselves clearly (in the university)

My approach to this research is grounding it through Walter Mignolo's concept of the "decolonial option", as a shift in knowledge production and understanding in conducting research in academia (Fernandez- Gaztambide, 2014: 199). Therefore, approaching liminality not as a study, but as an option that centres the experiences of Africans, which in turn produces valuable ways of thinking, sensing and being.
During my research I contemplated how, through choosing the 'decolonial option', I can unsettle the structure of the academic research which is continuously taught and emphasised in universities. How can academic research using story-telling and the 'experiential' as methodology, be a way of expressing and producing knowledge? What is the role of language in all of this?

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (1986) proposes how decolonising is an ongoing process by which we start to centre African literature or centre ourselves before we look to others:

> "[T]hat is the search for a liberating perspective within which to see ourselves clearly in relationship to ourselves and to other selves in the universe" (*ibid*: 87).

Wa Thiong'o suggests that language, indigenous African languages specifically, is a significant element in looking towards the decolonising of institutions.

Genealogy

The concept of liminality is an occurrence that I have been long interested in although unknowingly so. I believe it came from understanding the complexity of my family structure. I have, for a long time, felt like a person constantly straddling the in-between, and being very much intimately familiar with it, but not quite understanding why. My family (when I refer to my family I am referring to my mother's side of the family) is one that has grown or expanded from the process of *im/migration*- it has its roots from as far as Mozambique, and then crossing between Eswatini and South Africa. I had my first passport at age 4 or 5; crossing borders to visit family for Christmas holidays, weddings, funerals, or milestone birthdays was part of my upbringing.

Sanibonani, ligama lami ngu Siyanda[1] Sikhulile Marrengane[2].

Lotalwa nguNomcebo

Lotalwa nguTshanyana

Umsa wa Luis Paulo

1 A Zulu name meaning 'we are expanding or growing in number'. Apparently, a gender specific name given to males. In my case quite the opposite, according to my mother, she gave me the name as a reflection of the number of girl children being born in the family. I have been asked on numerous occasions mostly by men, why I have a 'masculine' name, to which admittedly I have not been able to confidently answer, until now.

2 Not my prescribed 'government' surname or the surname listed on my birth certificate, however, has been my surname of preference ever since I learnt how to read and write.

Umsa wa Magumwane

Umsa wa Marrengane

Umsa wa Maringe

Umsa wa Matiko

Umsa wa Noni

Umsa wa Tjikala

Umsa wa Hahmele

Umsa wa Ndole

Umsa wa Mungwambi (Sithole)

I was born in Swaziland, and as of 2018[3] was renamed Eswatini, a landlocked country, almost entirely surrounded by South Africa on one side, and Mozambique on the other. Eswatini is an absolute monarchy, one of a few remaining in the world.

Born in June of 1994 in the capital city -more like a town- of Mbabane at the Mbabane Government Hospital, at the time of my birth, the country's population was around 907,622 (populationpyramid.net). In that same year, South Africa had its first democratic elections giving the African National Congress the majority vote, marking a significant end to apartheid enforcers, the National Party. Brenda Fassie released her eleventh album titled *Mama*, considered the mother of bubblegum and kwaito music. She subsequently passed the baton to greats like Boom Shaka, who produced their first album in the same year, as well as M'Du, who produced and released *Tsiki Tsiki*. Mozambique had its first multi-party elections, resulting in FRELIMO (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique [4]) winning against its rival RENAMO (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana[5])[6].

3 The announcement of the change was made during the 50/50 Jubilee celebrations, celebrating the current king's birthday and 50 years of the country's independence. The announcement was made by the king. The king referred to the change as a sort of 'delinking' from our colonial past/ heritage- and also because people kept confusing it with Switzerland.

4 The Mozambique Liberation Front.

5 The Mozambican National Resistance.

6 I reference Dineo Seshee Bopape's biography because of the way it captures moments in time

Marrengane is a surname which is one of several variations that comes from the Chopi people of Mozambique. My great grandfather came from a rural part of Mozambique called Ndoleni. He then migrated to a rural part of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa in the early 1940s. Around this time there was extensive colonial Portuguese rule in Mozambique, with legislations that were passed that benefited the settler community more than the indigenous people. This was done by guaranteeing the settlers a voice whilst simultaneously withholding the political rights of indigenous people (Friedland 1977: 333). At the same time, the colonial Mozambican and South African government struck up an agreement that supplied South Africa's mines with contracted labour:

> The Rand Mines owners utilized a deferred payment system which provided revenue to the Mozambican treasury. While working in the mines, the African miners were paid only a small percentage of the contract wage; the rest being transferred to the Mozambican government in *gold*' (*ibid*: 335).

Whilst settled in Mkhuze, my great grandmother brought up eleven children (three females and eight males), one of them being my grandfather. My grandfather left for Eswatini to attend school, eventually gaining citizenship in 1967 and started a family. Concurrently, South Africa witnessed several protests against the pass laws[7] and the documents that were imposed onto black people to carry when entering and moving

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that emphasize non-linearity; activating a sense of busy spatio-temporality. She makes reference to history and how she positions herself within this historical structure, both locally and globally. It is a layered biography, weaving a web of mystery, regarding the passing of her "paternal grandmother"; informative, concerning world events such as "AIDS is identified/created/named". and humour especially with how sentences and/or events are placed next to each other, for example, "Julius Malema is born. Millions of people cried. Millions of people laughed!" These are events, in between events, in between other events. (Bopape; http://www.oneart.org/biographies/artist/dineo-seshee-bopape).

7 One such notable anti-pass demonstration became known as the Sharpeville Massacre of 21 March 1961, resulting in a significant number of fatalities.

around areas outside government 'designated' locations. Their movements in-between spaces were monitored carefully, and they became forcefully stuck in this endless loop of *in-betweens*, from city to township and back, from urban to rural and back, constantly adjusting to different ways of behaving and speaking. These passes or reference books were colloquially called dompas (meaning dumb pass). This kind of imposition rendered black people, again, in a state of *in-betweens* as simultaneously non-citizens and citizens in the very own country that they were natives of and thus stripped them of many rights as humans.

This is a simplified family history, as there are more intricate details, emotions and events behind the migrations that were happening concurrently to each other. However, I wanted to present an awareness of events happening that may influence movements, or movements happening irrespective of events. Furthermore, putting emphasis on the occurrence of multiple happenings that shift away from seeing history as linear, with nothing else taking place around it. In addition, having the informed sensibility towards the role the border has played in my life and in the lives of many others, and the continual need for crossing it, along with where my concern or connection with the liminal comes from.
I can claim home to all three of these places, Eswatini, South Africa and Mozambique, which have differing and at times similar cultures and traditions, and yet at once I feel as if I can claim none of them: I can neither speak Chopi nor Portuguese, nor have visited family in Mozambique in many years; I am not considered a South African citizen in the bureaucratic sense, and therefore have to, on a continuous basis, apply for temporary residence to be seen as 'desirable'; and paradoxically, my surname is considered 'foreign'[8] in Eswatini, thus by that arbitrary definition, I am not 'authentically' Swati- whatever

8 In an attempt to change my surname legally from my 'government' one to my preferred surname, a woman in a Title Deeds government office tasked in looking over applications for surname changes and then certifying documents related to that application commented, "I would understand if you were changing your surname to a Swati surname like Dlamini, but you are changing from one foreign surname to another foreign one." – alluding to her reluctance to assist me).

'authentic' may mean. As a result, I go through a compelling mix of emotions, and questioning my own sense of belonging; feeling as if I am in-between and not fully one or the other. These emotions come from a place of a generalized understanding of singular belonging (or belonging as coming from a one place). Therefore, researching liminality as an emotional embodiment embedded in the everyday experience.

"I am a border woman."
"[T]his place of contradictions".
(Gloria Anzaldúa, 1987: vii)

2.

On liminality

"The marvellous is mystifying. The mystifying is real. The real floats in- between invisibly. Juju, in its mind- boggling manner connects, establishing a legacy of careless ubiquity" (Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, 2007: 5).

Liminal space or liminality can be a slippery concept; it does not have a singular meaning but offers space for multiple states which most often than not, depend on context. Liminal space is understood as periods or movements that are transitory; a moment where conventions or ways of behaving can be relaxed or challenged.

Fallacies

Early descriptions of liminal space were made by European anthropologists 'introducing' the concept to the European frame of thought in the form of studying what they believed was the 'Other', against their 'self'. Arnold van Gennep in his 19th century text, *Les Rites des Passage* (1960), presented liminality as one of the stages in a process, however he was specifically speaking about initiation rituals. Termed "liminal rites" in his text, this is the phase located in-between (separation and reintegration); a transitional stage (Van Gennep, 1960: vii & 11). Decades later Victor Turner, another anthropologist coined the

term “betwixt and between” (Thomassen, 2014: 75). Their interpretations however had racist implications. This research moves liminality away from these archaic European representations and proposes how as Africans, we can define or redefine the notion of liminality brought about by our experiences. Throughout the research, I will continue to stress and repeat how liminality or the liminal permeates through the everyday and is inseparable from experiences.

Liminality as signifier of both time and space.

Provocative instances of our liminality

As a result of researching the concept of liminality, I found myself being critical and highly aware of my position as an academic who has studied and understands the meaning of it. I am also aware of the difficulty this term might cause as it is not a term that one uses in their everyday vocabulary. The challenge I found is thinking of and using more appropriate and/or relatable expressions than the words liminality or liminal space. One must be in the position of already knowing liminality or the liminal as connoting in-betweenness. As a result, it could be why texts use the terms ‘in-between’ or ‘threshold’ as more relevant articulations. In this research I work through finding more engaging, applicable expressions for the term liminality.

One of the terms I came across was in *Juju Fission: Women’s Alternative Fictions from the Sahara, the Kalahari, and the Oases In-Between* (2007) by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. In her text, she uses the word *‘juju’*, a loaded expression that could suitably substitute the term liminality. Okonjo Ogunyemi, however, offers a gendered or better yet, ‘feminised’ illustration of liminality, by relating *juju* to womanhood, and describing it as a form of “female aggression”, which is the result of the fear men have of women, hence men’s insistence on and protection of patriarchy (2007: 9). However, *juju* not only poetically

expresses in-betweenness, but because it is shrouded in mystery, it also demonstrates ambiguity. Okonjo Ogunyemi portrays juju as being intrinsically part of the everyday experience of Africans, and more importantly, she defines *juju* as a way of "theorising women's experience" (*ibid*: 55).

Liminality is omnipresent.

Kuchaza kutsini kutsi liminal / liminal *yini*?

Another one of the interpretations, or maybe an alternative, of liminality that I have been playing around with is the phrase 'kuba semkhatsini'. Kuba semkhatsini is a SiSwati word which loosely translates as "to be in the middle of (usually a person being between two things, states, moments etc, or more)". The imagining behind this came about when I was attempting to explain my research to my mother, continuously falling back on using the terms liminality or liminal space as I explained the research. She found the words challenging to comprehend and visualize in a sentence, but their descriptions clearer. I asked her what a possible equivalent in SiSwati could be and she suggested the phrase "kuba semkhatsini", as a relatable alternative. What I want to make clear though, is that I do not want kuba semkhatsini to just be a translation of in-between, but rather to embody in-betweenness and its effects on the lived experience and the corporeal. Perhaps 'transplantation' would be a more appropriate approach as it suggests a movement from one situation or space to another, rather than a straightforward conversion or translation.

The ‘stoep’



Figure 2 The photograph was taken in 1996 or 1997, on the stoep at the family home built by my grandfather in Mbabane. On the left is myself, holding a puppy. Wearing a pretty pink dress is my aunt and at the back also holding a puppy is my uncle. Photograph by my mother (From a family photo album).

Perhaps the stoep could be another transplantation of liminality. Hence the stoep (or iVeranda as some of us call it) as a generative in-between space created from place making. A space (and place) where identities are created and recreated, contested and displayed. An ambiguous space that is formed through the built environment and architectural design, but also as a space that is formed through its use and echoes of memories, like a house which is more than just a physical structure, but “represents the psychic familiar which [you expect] brings peace [unless otherwise disrupted]”(Gqola, 2006: 62). The stoep is experienced differently by people depending on its position in

the home. Some houses have the stoep located at the front of the house facing the street, others have stoeps located at the back in the yard, and yet others have stoeps located at both the front and the back of the house[9] (the house thus sits in between).

As such, some stoeps sit between public and private space and thus acts as a border demarcating the private and the public; visible to passers-by and neighbours, and simultaneously 'invisible' as intimate spaces attached to 'private' property. Because of its ambiguity between public and private, the stoep rests at a precarious place whereby, as the public on the street, you cannot simply welcome yourself onto someone's stoep, even if it is visible and within reach, without greetings which in turn elicit permission to enter and a passing through that threshold happens. But at the same time private activities like sitting around and conversing with family take place there[10].

9 Growing up in my grandfather's house, I remember there were stoeps on both sides, but the front one being most used, as it was the biggest and bathed with the most sunlight.

10 I asked my mother about what memories she could recall about what she used to do on the stoep, and one memory stood out the most for her: "I was three or so, riding a bike on a very high veranda, I fell off the edge and had to get stitches. We used to play there while Mbande [her grandmother] did her handicraft."

One of my more vivid memories is seeing my grandfather sitting at the table set outside on the front stoep, drinking a cup of tea, and eating Moir's Tea Lovers biscuits, whilst intensely reading the local newspaper. Another one was during a sunny winter's day, I would go outside to the stoep and unroll licansi onto the floor and take a nap, whilst soaking up some sun, like a lizard basking on a rock, before heading back into a cold house. Other experiences I can remember were playing with puppies and assigning each one of us a puppy or two to take care of, and giving them, what we thought at the time were powerful names like Danger or Rambo. And the one time the stoep was not used for a period of time was, the first (and so far the last) time I ever witnessed snow, it was either 1997 or 1998, and according to my mother, it had never snowed in Eswatini before in her life time. It snowed for one night, but left behind an amazing sight for a young child to experience the following day. I do not really remember that day, but I do remember a blanket of white, icy fluff, like an endless sea of snow, completely covering the stoep and the property.

The stoep represents the extension of the home and the creation of more space, but also the stoep allows for the creation of more experiences and memories.



Figure 3 Image of me posing on the stoep, during the time it snowed in Eswatini. The thick layer of snow made moving around outside difficult. Photograph taken by my mother (From a family photo album).

The rooftop as a transient stoep



For those of us who live in apartment buildings in the city (of Johannesburg), and unfortunately do not have a balcony, could the rooftop be considered as a temporary stoep and therefore a liminal space? Something that I think about every time I decide to labour through doing hand laundry and going to the clothesline to hang my laundry, which is located on the rooftop of my apartment building. One cannot be completely oblivious at the highly feminised nature of this space. Firstly because of the predictable sexist associations of laundry and home making as the role of the woman, but also- I make this generalisation of that space being gendered because of my observations every time I would go up there- there just seemed to be predominately women[11].

11 Once when I was up there, I saw two men and a woman who appeared to be familiar with each other conversing. While they were engaging in conversation, the men were just standing there whilst the woman hung a basket full of laundry, as if watching her. I thought to myself, surely this would move a lot quicker if the other two men helped. Then again, I do not know



Figure 4-6 Siyanda Marrengane, *Untitled: Rooftop*, 2018, video stills, 1min 21secs.

This is not to say that men do not do laundry, however, I did notice at times several women, sometimes in pairs, would congregate to discuss issues affecting their personal lives. Ironically, it became a private space where they could say almost anything, away from the congestion of the city, but also isolated from prying ears; a stoep of sorts that offers those ambiguities spoken about earlier. This action of intimate conversations transforms the rooftop into a space in-between the private home of an apartment and the public open area of the city streets below.

On reflecting on the multi-functionality of this rooftop, I want to highlight the position it had in the history of the city of Johannesburg, which does not seem to be as written about as I believe it should, as it offers some further insight into the notion of homeplace. The what type of relationship they have and them assisting with the laundry might be an intrusion of personal space or the idea that this laundry being hung is that of 'another man's family'- this could be me overthinking and inserting other kinds of thoughts into a situation that were never there in the first place. But I thought it curious.

rooftop was a place of living during apartheid and still is, as it presents relatively cheaper accommodation in the city (that is becoming increasingly gentrified in the name of 'taking back the city' and urban regeneration/renewal).[12] This space (rooftop), not so long ago, was relegated to workers, who provided services to white homes. More specifically, domestic workers who had qualified for permits that allowed them to live and work in the city 'legally', according to apartheid laws:

"There were laws to ensure our return. To not return was to risk being punished" (hooks, 1984: ix).

These 'legitimate' workers in the city could live on the property of their white employers but were at the same time completely out of sight. In suburban areas, on the other hand, their living quarters were usually located at the back of the property, behind the house, once again reinforcing their hyper-invisibility.

The in-betweenness in this circumstance is read differently from what was previously described. In this regard, it is not a contemplative space but rather an oppressive one. Domestic workers living in these one-room spaces were made invisible by their placement in the periphery, but at the same time very much visible as they were needed by the families to complete housework, and thus central to the workings of the household. Continuously remade as liminal beings, domestic workers straddled the consciousness of being very important and yet at the same time were disregarded and taken for granted. They were both not part of those residences but worked amongst them and for them:

"To be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (*ibid*).

12 Briefly touching on gentrification, it is important to note the idea of 'taking back the city', as a problematic one. Who is reclaiming the city? And who is it being reclaimed for? Many abandoned and dilapidated buildings (some not completely abandoned, but occupied, usually referred to as hijacked, with their own system of operating only known by those inhabiting them) are being bought up by large property companies and renovated. Although improving the surrounding areas with additional security and such, the improved property value results in higher rentals. These higher rentals eventually push out people who are unable to afford, forcing them to travel longer for work. Therefore, going back to the notion of belonging.



Figure 7 Zanele Muholi, *Massa and Minah 2*, 2008. Photograph taken from the Stevenson, website http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/muholi/massa1.html.

The domestic worker was in a disconcerting thirdspace, where she was away from her own family but was very much obligated in taking care of other people's families- who did not always consider her as family. And this providing service of care for other families, left very little energy for her own. hooks writes of it as "this tension between service outside one's home" and that of their own "families and communities", which "distinguished the lot of black women" in society from that of black men (1990:383).

Thirdspace

Thirdspace is another interesting transplantation to liminality. Although generally referring to architectural and geographical spaces, Edward W. Soja describes *thirdspace* as a space that can be used to challenge and think differently and newly about "space and social spatiality", whilst considering the interweaving and interdependency of history, sociality and spatiality (Soja 1996: 2 & 3). In a sense, the idea that space may affect the way you

behave, but maybe it also happens that way because of certain historical implications of that space and how you then possibly redefine that space for yourself, even if the engagement in that space is brief. Or maybe you come with your own set of preconceived ideas of that space, and input those beliefs into that space, subsequently shifting what that space may mean; that exchange is that in-betweenness[13]. Most significant about his descriptions of *thirdspace* is the idea of how space is both concrete and physical, but also abstract; real and imagined (*ibid*: 31). *Thirdspace is a multi-layered elaboration of space that cannot be defined but is experienced. Thirdspace* is more of a social space more than anything; it comes from the experiences of people and their engagements in-between. Drawing from Homi K. Bhabha, *thirdspace* provides "the terrain for elaborating strategies of self-hood- singular or communal - that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of identity of society itself" (1994: 1).

Deadspace

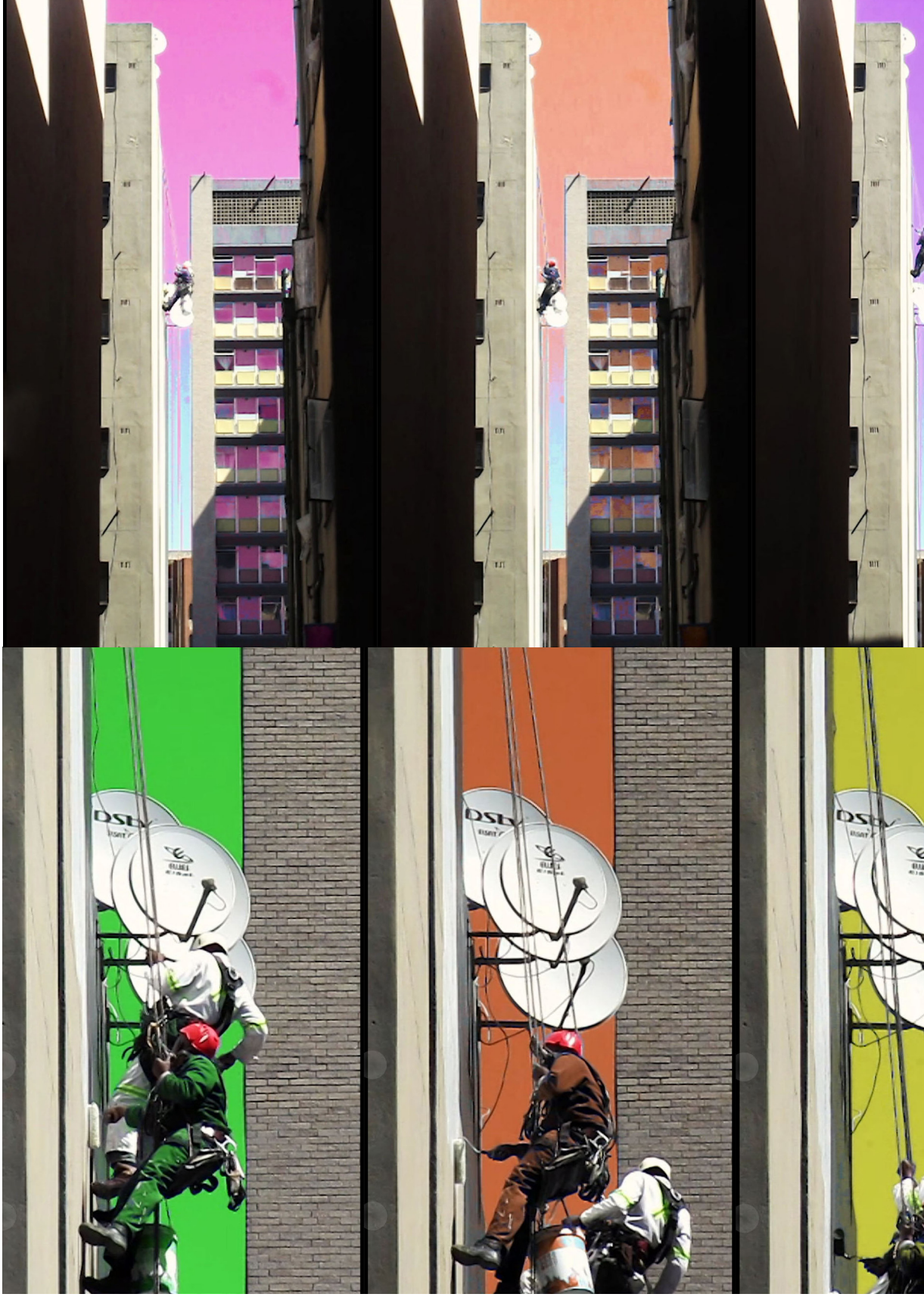
Deadspace: a space considered to be barren, inactive, insignificant and subsequently invisible, and yet at the same time very much rich in culture.

13 Take the border for instance. You enter that space the way that you have constructed yourself to be, with an identity that has been shaped by where you were raised, the language you speak, the food you eat, your clothing and your music preferences, but the border is not built in such a way to consider those things, or what the immigration officer sees. The immigration officer sees the institutional, for a lack of a better word. Information that has been imprinted in your passport documents, which includes your birth date and whether you have been granted or denied a VISA. How you would have once carried yourself before you entered because you are no longer Mbongiseni aka Bobo, you are Mbongiseni Hlangamandla* from Siteki who last crossed/departed Oshoek Border on the 18th of May 2020 and returned/arrived on the 26th of May, lawfully. The sociality and the history embedded in that space thus affects the way one would behave. The border is both physical, a concrete space with concrete walls, but also quite abstract, because of the experiences shared or not shared in that space.

‘Deadspace’ could be comparable to liminality, not necessarily an alternative, but similar in that it is an ambiguous space, formed by exchanges and activities going on in that place. This is also similar in theory to ‘border thinking’, which shall be discussed later.

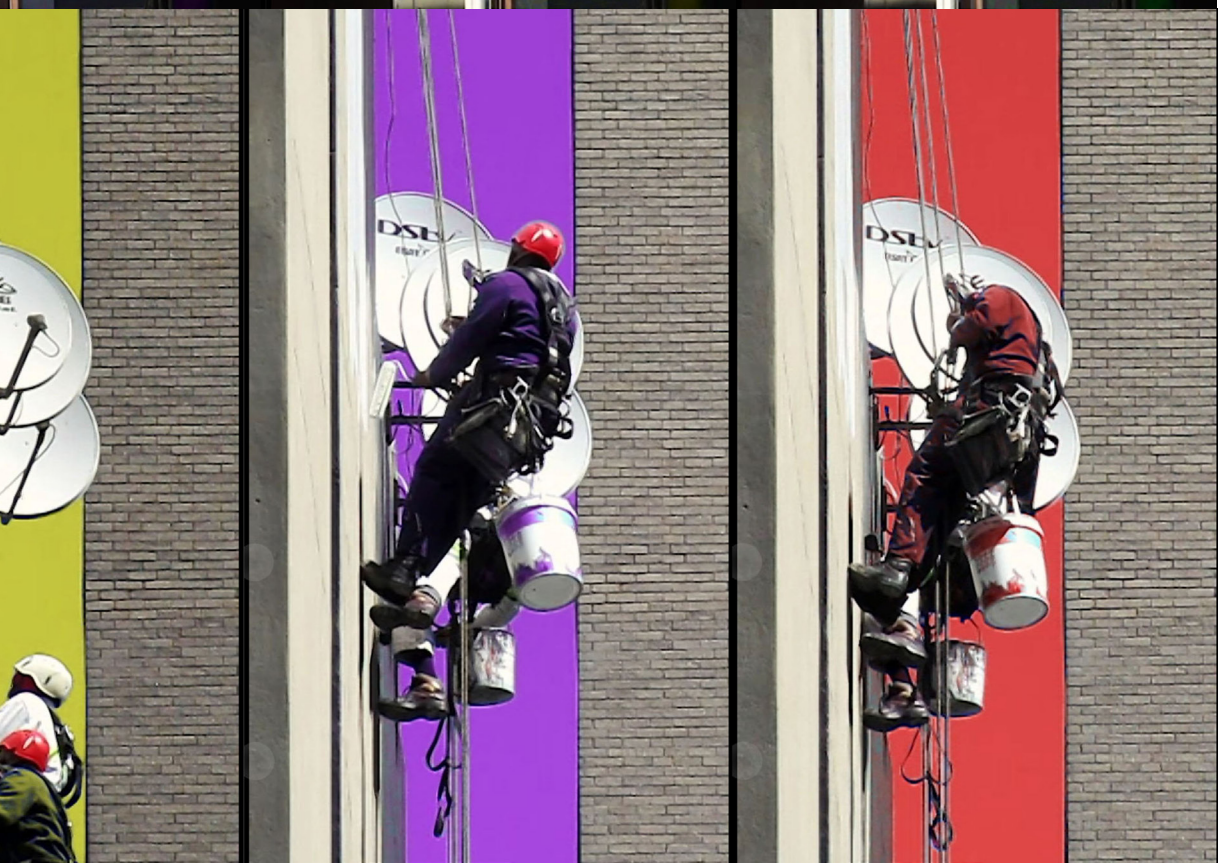
Contrary to our understanding of the word ‘dead’ as lifeless, the work, *deadspace: a letter to thirdspace* (2018) engages in the idea of such spaces that are in-between and looked over or not considered as significant and worth investigating because of their mundanity. In the case of this work, the space being referred to is the in-between, formed by the ‘backs’ of three apartment buildings. These are spaces where labour can happen which is removed or hidden from the public.

Not public, but not quite private either.



Figures 8 & 9 Siyanda Marrengane, *deadspace: a letter to thirdspace*, 2018, Video stills.





During the pandemic of the COVID-19 virus, many countries implemented 'hard' lockdowns or partial lockdowns that forced a momentary halt on majority economic activity and movement, forcing their citizens to stay at home in order to curb the rate at which the infection was spreading. One of the measures implemented, was closing the borders to international travel. Focusing on South Africa, one of the lockdown regulations, specified a ban on the sale of alcohol and cigarettes, therefore resulting in the closing of bottle stores and taverns. Eswatini, on the other hand, which had a 'partial' lockdown, with its own slightly varying policies, did not ban the sale of alcohol at first[14]; although the operation of taverns or any drinking spots were shut down. Almost like a knee-jerk reaction however, numerous reports surfaced locally, that people living near the border on the South African side were jumping the border into Eswatini in the prospect of purchasing alcohol. Of course, this is not to say that people were using these 'informal' crossings simply for alcohol. These crossings were still occurring regardless of the closing of borders or the spread of the virus, posing a potential threat for both countries since these were people walking around, who may be carrying the virus, unchecked. Much to the dismay of the imbibers who crossed, the alcohol was being sold at a much higher price since those selling alcohol saw an opportunity to make a quick buck. This 'deadspace' creates a rich tapestry of exchanges and tensions which complicates the notion that the border is merely a place to traverse across ill-defined spaces. Those transgressions that occur on the periphery are significant and should be added to the conversation too. Sticking with COVID-19 and the regulations that were made as a result, I found it interesting how the, "Stay at home" mantra created a complex brew of new issues and caused the resurfacing of old ones that had long been swept under the rug. As a result, a different kind of negotiation with the city streets persisted. The emptied streets became the site of an even more present police force that, before lockdown, had hardly ever responded to emergencies in a timely fashion. Super-hyper-visibility of the military to

14 This policy eventually was changed, and alcohol sales were later banned. But this regulation was subsequently reversed, allowing for sales again. On writing this on the 6th of July 2020, the regulation was reinstated, and alcohol was banned again.

fight an 'invisible' disease? How the interaction with police and military, automatically criminalised the citizen as soon as they stepped out of the threshold of their doorway in the name of protecting them from an unseen enemy [15] . The, "Where are the police when you need them?" was replaced with them being more present than ever but inflicting extreme harshness and brutality on citizens in the name of protection. That same energy you would wish they would use to impose on criminals wreaking havoc in communities daily. The paradox being played out on the public space, which by law are supposed to be empty, but instead is active and in mediation with, "I'm going to buy groceries for my family because they are hungry" transgressors and, "I must enforce the law given by the president and make you do 50 push ups" power tripping, 'security' men and women, butting heads. The question then is, what are you safeguarding?

Liminality is "unrepresentable in itself" (Bhabha 1994: 37).

15 Mostly speaking to the heavy presence and heavy-handed approach of police and military in black communities.

“THE STAIRWELL AS LIMINAL SPACE, IN-BETWEEN THE DESIGNATIONS OF IDENTITY, BECOMES THE PROCESS OF SYMBOLIC INTERACTION…” (Bhabha 1994: 4).



banister, and the sight was like that of a very long piece of diseased skin. The banister had originally been a wooden one, and to this time it was still possible to see, in the deepest of the cracks between the swellings of other matter, a dubious piece of deeply aged brown wood. And there were many cracks, though most of them did not reach all the way down to the wood underneath. They were no longer sharp, the cracks, but all rounded out and smoothed, consumed by some soft, gentle process of decay. In places the wood seemed to have been painted over, but that must have been long ago indeed. For a long time only polish, different kinds of wood and floor polish, had been used. It would be impossible to calculate how much polish on how many rags the wood on the stair banister had seen, but there was certainly enough Ronuk and Mansion splashed there to give the place its now indelible reek of putrid turpentine. What had been going on there and was going on now and would go on and on through all the years ahead was a species of war carried on in the silence of long ages, a struggle in which only the keen, uncanny eyes and ears of lunatic seers could detect the deceiving, easy breathing of the strugglers.

The wood underneath would win and win till the end of time. Of that there was no doubt possible, only the pain of hope perennially doomed to disappointment. It was so clear. Of course it was in the nature of the wood to rot with age. The polish, it was supposed, would catch the rot. But of course in the end it was the rot which imprisoned everything in its effortless embrace. It did not really have to fight. Being was enough. In the natural course of things it would always take the newness of the different kinds of polish and the vaunted cleansing power of the chemicals in them, and it would convert all to victorious filth, awaiting yet more polish again and again and again. And the wood was not alone.

Apart from the wood itself there were, of course, people themselves, just so many hands and fingers bringing help to the wood in its course toward putrefaction. Left-hand fingers in their careless journey from a hasty anus sliding all the way up the banister as their owners made the return trip from the lavatory downstairs to the offices above. Right-hand fingers still

dripping with the after-piss and the stale sweat from fat crotches. The calloused palms of messengers after they had blown their clogged noses reaching for a convenient place to leave the well-rubbed moisture. Afternoon hands not entirely licked clean of palm soup and remnants of *kenkey*. The wood would always win.

Figure 11 Ayi Kwei Armah.*The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. 1968. Pages 12- 13. Scan.

Figure 10 Dorchester Mansions', corner Rissik and Bree street, downtown Johannesburg. Photograph by Siyanda Marrengane. (Previous page).

3.

Borders as Liminal Spaces

"Double consciousness is border thinking and border thinking is double consciousness" (Mignolo & Tlostanova: 211).

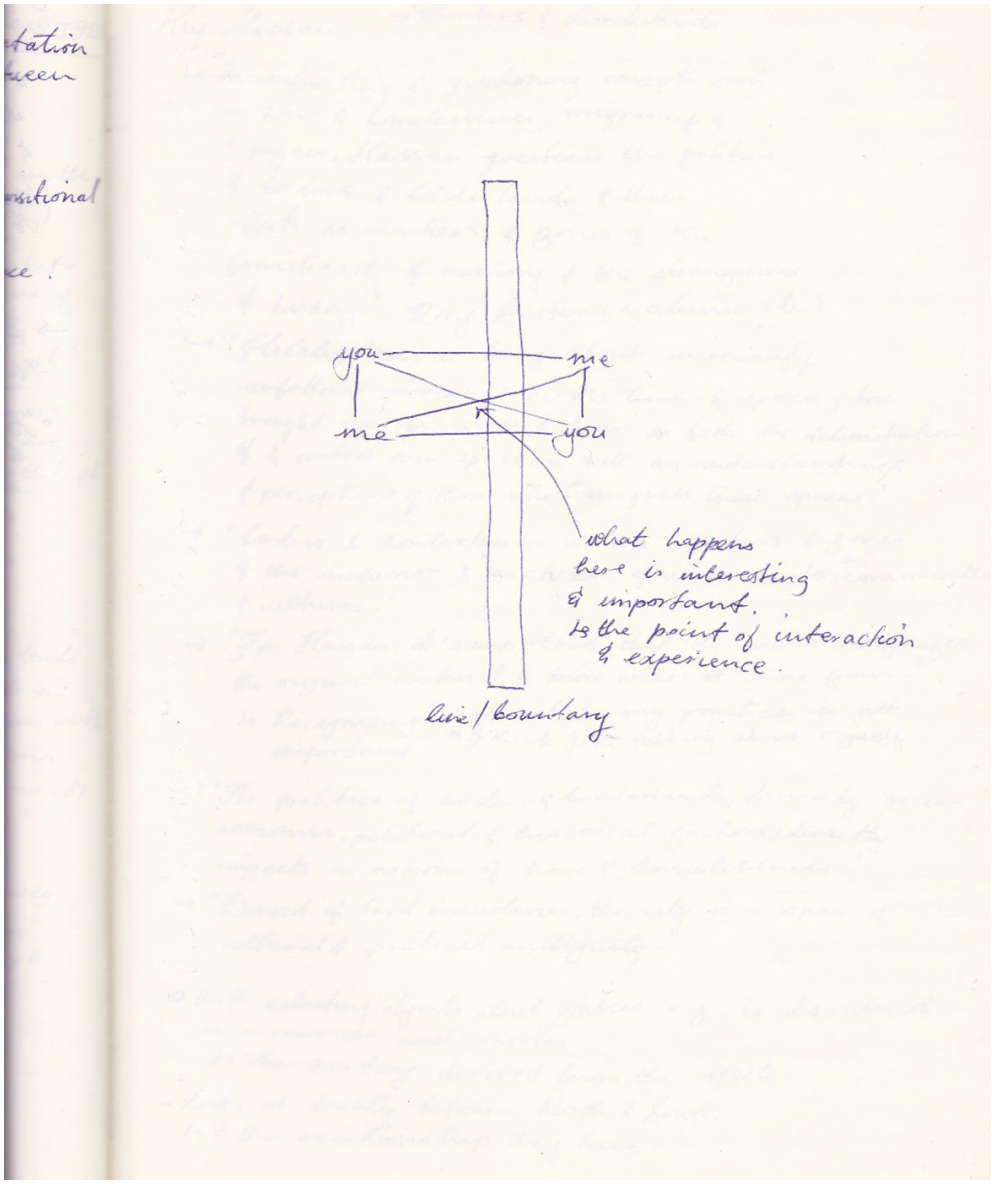


Figure 12 Siyanda Marrengane, *Liminal Illustration*, 2015. Ink on paper. Scan.

'Border thinking'

'Border thinking' is the process of looking at borders beyond their geographical classifications but examining them as both politically driven and subjective (Mignolo & Tlostanova, 2006:208). Therefore, we are speaking about borders not only because of their physicality but also as intangible sites of sensitivity; a thirdspace. 'Border thinking' is based on the experiences of the so called 'Other'. Notably, 'border thinking' is a decolonial project as it is involved in the practice of delinking. Delinking is a process of shifting our mindset from putting Western knowledge at the centre of our "thinking/ sensing/ doing" and abstracting our experiences as valid epistemology (*ibid*: 206)(Mignolo, 2011).

To quote Mignolo:

> "Border thinking or theorizing emerged from and as a response to the violence (frontiers) of imperial/territorial epistemology and the rhetoric of modernity (and globalization) of salvation that continues to be implemented on the assumption of the inferiority or devilish intentions of the Other and, therefore, continues to justify oppression and exploitation as well as eradication of the difference" (*ibid*: 206).

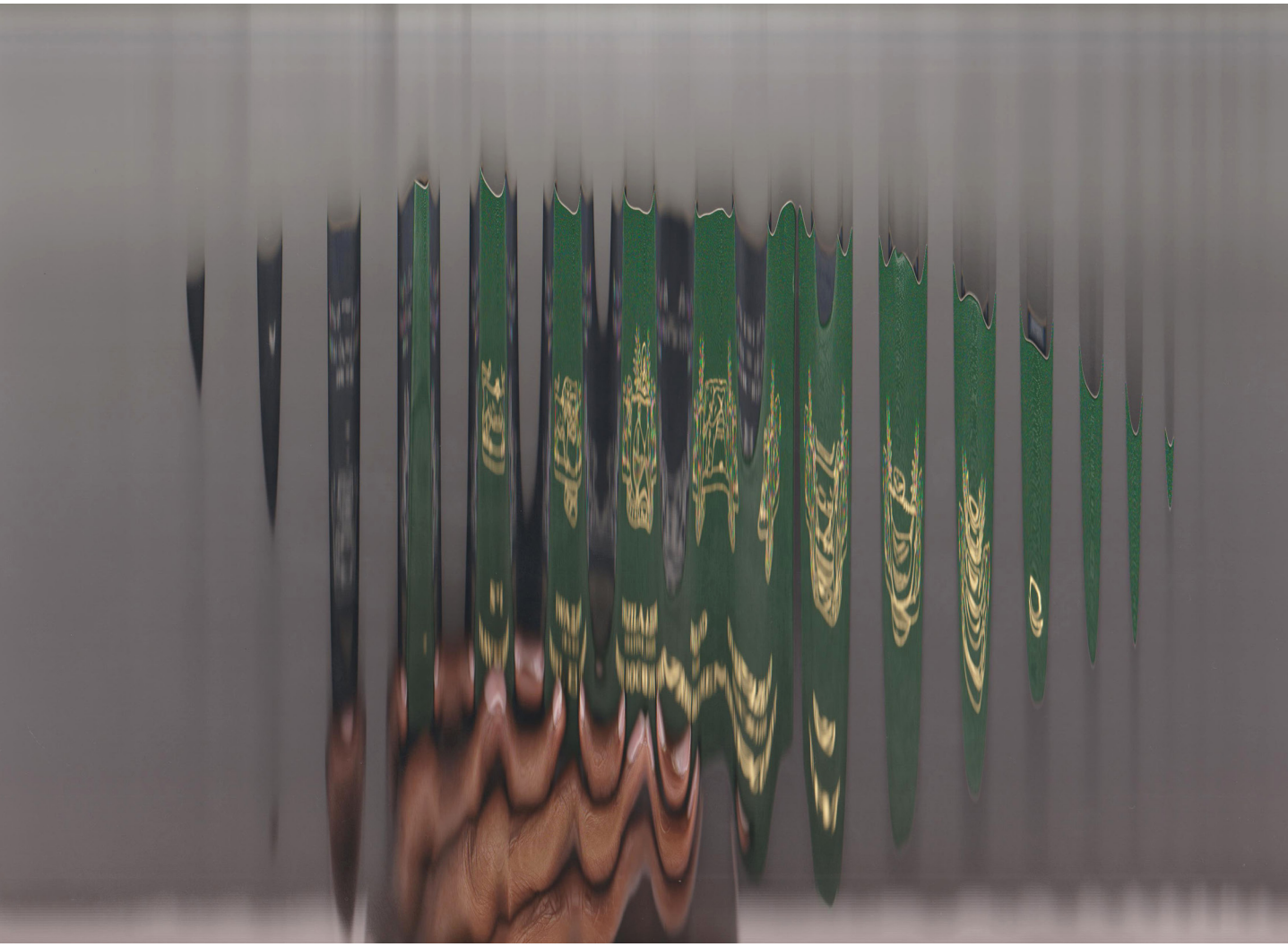
Comparable to 'border thinking' as a conceptual framework around the centralising of our experiences as knowledge, is what Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) describes as 'borderlands'. This kind of thinking through the borderlands, recognises how the 'periphery' has been written about in Western epistemologies as a meaningless place (recall 'deadspace'). It pays attention to, how we can start to think, speak, do/perform against the grain of what has been previously laid out for us as legitimate. Borderlands further expresses how the forms of Western knowledge completely disregards the people who inhabit these spaces, by theorising these as socially and culturally loaded spaces:

> "A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary" (Anzaldúa, 1987: 3).

Borders are thus in-between spaces that are organised as politically and bureaucratically motivated, and colonially inherited as well. But they also support a complex network of differing cultures and languages with their own communities and culture.

As I mentioned earlier, I have become quite familiar with the border and its processes. I grew up crossing different borders to enter either South Africa or Mozambique. However, although familiar, it is still unnatural to me; there is still an easiness that I feel in that place. The border I have become well accustomed to is the Ngwenya- Oshoek borders between Eswatini and South Africa, which is the border I pass through to get to Johannesburg (roughly a four-hour car ride).







Figures 13-15 Siyanda Marrengane, *I'll show you mine if you show me yours I-III,* 2020. Photographs.

The border as a performative ritual

drop off in town eMbabane at 7.30 am for the best chance of catching transport that will arrive in downtown Jo'burg Park Station to be specific before it gets dark walk towards the bus rank dodging morning rush foot traffic to get to the bus rank passing through the metered taxis parking spot reflect on how the rest of the world has Uber but here we still don't have get to where a gathering of minibus taxis are parked going to different places like Sandla, Sidwashini mixed in with Jo'burg look for the taxi where the drivers usually sit and take passports watch for a random guy standing near this taxi approach letsa emapheha ekuhamba points you to the taxi that will be leaving this early in the morning you will probably be the first to arrive giving you free reign to select whatever seat choose a single window seat towards the back this way you do not have to deal with someone taking up space with their manspreading you also have control of the window which you can open when it gets stuffy since people seem very reluctant to open windows worse is winter time when no one wants to open a window even just a crack to let fresh in you just keep breathing each other's breaths eventually making the windows foggy the taxi is scheduled to leave at 10am but usually leaves at 11 am it's roughly a three hour wait and in the meantime watch as people trickle into the taxi Sanbonani iya eJozi yini observe everyone who comes in a man comes in with no luggage at all another comes in with a half empty backpack closer to time of departure the taxi finally fills up passports are handed back to the passengers sitting in front and then passed back at the same time a man responsible for collecting the fare comes in Nine bekunene ngicela sibhadaleni money exchanges hands Emalangeni swapped for Rands door is slid shut driver starts the engine and depending on him and his beliefs he will ask that a prayer is said before leaving it is about 15km to Ngwenya border post the landscape changes from city buildings to suburban to countryside with roaming cattle grazing on the side of the road we arrive at the Ngwenya Border Post before we park passports are passed to one of the passengers sitting in front enter the building declare laptop stand grouped together on the left away from the queuing area while the passenger with all the passports stands in the queue passenger with the passports gets to an open window and hands the stack

of passports to an immigration officer officer calls out names of corresponding passports looks at the face as if to verify your presence stamps the passport and passes it under the gap between the glass screen and the counter Khumalo man goes up to counter forgets to take off cap and officer makes snide remarks along the lines of respecting the people and the institution and about how is one supposed to link the photograph in the passport to the person receiving passport if the face is hidden by the cap even after the man takes off his cap and apologises after receiving passport wait outside by the taxi for the police and customs officers to come search the vehicle and luggage Ngicela nikhiphe tikhwama emotweni batotiphenya laba bekunene grab bag from back of the trailer unzip bag and watch as policeman plunges his hand deep into the bag hoping that he does not end up fondling your underwear that you had carelessly tossed in the bag because you forgot about putting them in a toiletry bag after getting over that sudden anxiety and invasion of privacy in the name of serving and protecting the country walk through the fenced off on both sides passageway unceremoniously cross the border Welcome to South Africa Oshoek Border Post into another narrow building with steel bars that force you to form a tight queue a hundred instructional signs on the walls that are purposely not read instead watch as others struggle with commands of getting their fingerprints taken for the biometrics system when it's your turn to approach the next open counter like some kind of pre-installed software you know exactly what to do because of routine greet the officer push the passport on the wooden counters that have been weathered by age and by the thousands of elbows and hands that have rested on them look at the officer wait for instruction step to the side look at the camera place your left hand on the fingerprint reading system then your right hand then both your thumbs then watch as the officer flips through your passport stamps it and slides it back exit the building on the other end only to be faced with another bag search but this time less invasive in the physical sense but still as invasive since a large X-ray does the searching exit that enclosed area walk to a general dealer to buy a cold drink to quench the thirst that suddenly arose from all the emotions experienced by the way you are now in South Africa wait for minibus to cross as well finally Jo' burg bound

The act of crossing the border goes beyond just the corporeal; it also encompasses many emotions and at times tests your character. Crossing the border can be comparable to a ritual; certain elements need to be carried out for the ritual to be complete and valid, and for the 'initiate' to come out of it on the other side as an 'accepted' being. This performance requires valid documents that the state has enacted, provided that those documents do not have obvious errors. These are used at certain points with the effect of crossing over to another state authorised area. The border ritual is what the state has systematically implemented in the attempts of keeping lawfulness and monitoring who comes in or who goes out:

> "The border ritual reproduces the meaning and order of the state system. The border ritual
> is secular and modern sort of divine sanctity with its own rite of sacrifice" (Shahram Khosravi 2007:330).

Therefore, violating the prescribed state ritual in the form of crossing the border 'illegally', results in being placed in-between, the transition of uncertainty. The individual at this point is unsure if the ritual or crossing will follow through accordingly, but if they do make it across, the completion of the ritual transforms the initiate into an 'undesirable'[16] , still not at the same level as someone who crossed 'legally'. That being said, going against the state's ritual reveals the border's fragility and fictitiousness; that the "'[i]llegal' border crossing challenges the sacred feature of the border rituals and symbols" (*ibid*: 322).

The border is central to the ritual

Kuba semkhatsini (to be in-between), two nation states, where it was arbitrarily decided where one ends and where one begins. This ambiguously fluid space where one's sense of self is stripped so that you have limited or no agency, and your identity is put up for questioning. Khosravi describes the act of crossing the border as an experience "of honour

16 I recently came across the phrase 'irregular migrant'. I guess this is an attempt to remove the stigma and dehumanisation of referring to someone as illegal. And I have heard, repeatedly, the notion of "there is no one 'illegal' in Africa" when Pan-African sentiments are invoked.

and shame" and I am reminded of a very similar situation I unexpectedly found myself in, that illustrates the relationship between the two (*ibid*: 331).

A few years ago, I took a taxi to the nearest police station across the Ngwenya/Oshoek border into the South African side. The purpose of this trip was an administrative one; I was there to have my fingerprints taken, as one of the numerous requirements for applying for a study permit (to partake in study in South Africa). At the front desk, there were about three policemen, I greeted them and stated the reason for my arrival at the station. Soon after that whilst I was being assisted by one of them, a woman wearing a different uniform from that of the policemen entered carrying a couple of thick folders. I noticed that the uniform had Home Affairs patches on it; she greeted everyone in the room and proceeded to go behind the reception counter were the other policemen were. The policeman assisting, handed me two forms, explaining what each is for and that I needed to fill them in before my fingerprints could be taken. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary so far, I had gotten used to going to police stations for this for this very purpose, since study permits must be renewed every year. But it is where the group's conversation went that really piqued my interest- throwing the adage of minding your own business out the door; I adjusted my ears and listened carefully. The Home Affairs officer, let us call her Nomzamo, after setting her files on the reception table asked one of the police officers to bring the people from the cells. I assumed the police officer knew which people she was talking about as there was no mention of specifics. The police officer grabbed a set of large clunky keys from, I do not remember where, and exited. As I am still filling in the form, verifying passport numbers and all that, a group of about five people entered the station accompanied by the police officer who was given the instruction. They were led behind the reception where Nomzamo and the other policemen were standing and were made to sit on the floor before them. Nomzamo fiddled around with the folders and proceeded to call out names, which each person responded to accordingly. By the way, the forms were not that difficult to understand or fill in, but I intentionally delayed with the hopes of hearing and possibly seeing where the situation goes and eventually ends. So as to not appear nosy, I pretended to really focus hard on the forms and every now and then

take a peek at the group of people now gathered on the floor.
It was a mixed group of both female and male, they appeared disheveled and judging by the conversation that followed, it was difficult to pinpoint how long they had spent time in the cells- I could not tell if they were exhausted, frustrated, defeated or just annoyed, or a mix of all of the above and more. They obviously were not pleased. What was made apparent though was that they had been caught crossing the border from Eswatini to South Africa 'illegally'. They were each asked where they came from and where in South Africa they were intending to go when they crossed, and why they did not cross the border "like everyone else" (with passports). I did not get to hear some of the answers they gave because of how quietly they would answer, as if answering to the floor. A few of them said that they did not have passports because they could not afford to apply for them. At this point I had stretched out appearing to fill in the form for as long as I could, so I handed the forms back to the policeman. He then motioned for me to come behind the reception where there was another door leading to a passageway, and one of the rooms is where I would pay for the fingerprints. There I greeted and introduced myself and presented my reason for being there and was told to take a seat. I do not remember much after that, probably because nothing memorable happened in that room. I do remember though, more of what the room looked like more than anything else. There was a massive wooden desk where the officer was sitting. Many, many metal cabinets with dusty files stacked on top of them. The desk was also heaped with files and the room had that old government administrative office smell to it. After paying, I returned to the front where the group was still sitting on the floor and caught part of the conversation which was directed towards one of the men in the group. Gathering from the conversation, he was Mozambican. Nomzamo made the comment of how persistent he is in continuing to cross 'illegally' and how many times he has been detained because of that. I could tell from the tone that they were quite familiar with each other, as the man smiled back. But of course, because of my 'status' I could have been misinterpreting the man's smile for an emotion that was completely different, perhaps masking something else (perhaps forcefully smiling because he feels he has no choice, given the position he finds himself in).

After producing my receipt to the officer who had been assisting me, he led me to a table off to the side. This was a table small, and it was the type you would use when filing a report, as it had wooden panels or walls on either side, in the attempt of offering privacy between the officer and the person giving a statement- lest ears like mine are lurking around. The table was set: there was a thick blackened metal block, to roll your fingers on; a gloopy ink pad and an ink roller. An archaic method of collecting information, and an uncomfortably close contact process as well, with literal skin-to-skin[17] . Instead of using the booth how it would be used normally, sitting on opposite ends, I had to stand next to the officer so that he could take my fingerprints. And because we were blocked off from the rest of the group, this separation created an oddly intimate space that was made more uncomfortable by the unprofessional tone of the officer's questions that pursued, causing my fingers to tense up and him commenting on how I needed to relax.

The obscure coldness of the metal block, when placing my fingers onto it to catch the ink, is the best symbolism I can use to describe the unsettling feeling I had the moment I stepped into that police station. This is not to say that the police station is or should be a place of comfort, despite its duty to protect and serve the community. You should, however, feel a sense of relief when entering that space, not apprehension, especially if you are there to seek assistance. But the scene that had unfolded before me made me even more uneasy, and it may have been the honour and shame position



Figure 16 Siyanda Marrengane, *bureaucracy improvised*, 2017. Video

17 Thinking now during COVID times, how crazy it is that someone's un-gloved hand, a stranger's hand, pressed against your fingers and hand in an effort to take clear and detailed fingerprints, and to think that this still happens in some police stations that I have encountered because of lack of PPE.

Khosravi was describing. Where my position, a position of privilege, although not a citizen, was judged as an honourable one and before me siting on the concrete floor were a group of people, politically and bureaucratically regarded as criminals because of their alternate way of crossing of the border: "The legal traveler passes the border gloriously and enhances his or her social status, whereas the border transgressor is seen as anti- aesthetic and anti-ethical (they are called 'illegal and are criminalised)" (*ibid*: 331).





still, 8 mins.

After the outdated fingerprint process, I went outside to a nearby tap and washed my hands with a soiled Sunlight green bar soap placed on a brick next to it and wiped my hands on my jeans. I took a quick look around the compound to see if I could spot where the cells were situated and walked back into the station. Took the receipt given to me for my fingerprints, thanked the officer who assisted me (despite the improper question he asked me during the process), took one last look at the group of men and women still sitting on the floor and walked out of the station. Crossed the road and waited for a taxi that would take me back to the border. I wondered what happened to them, but more especially I wondered how they felt at that moment.

As much as states may increase the surveillance and militarisation of their borders, the in-between space breeds a culture of resistance and defiance of the state. These non-stop transgressions highlight the borders porousness and fictionality.

Figure 17 Dineo Seshee Bopape. *I didn't cross the border the border crossed me*, 2013. Embroidered fabric. 12 x 10cm. Image from the Stevenson Gallery website, http://archive.stevenson.info/exhibitions/bopape/the_border_crossed_me.html



Body as border and shape-shifting borders

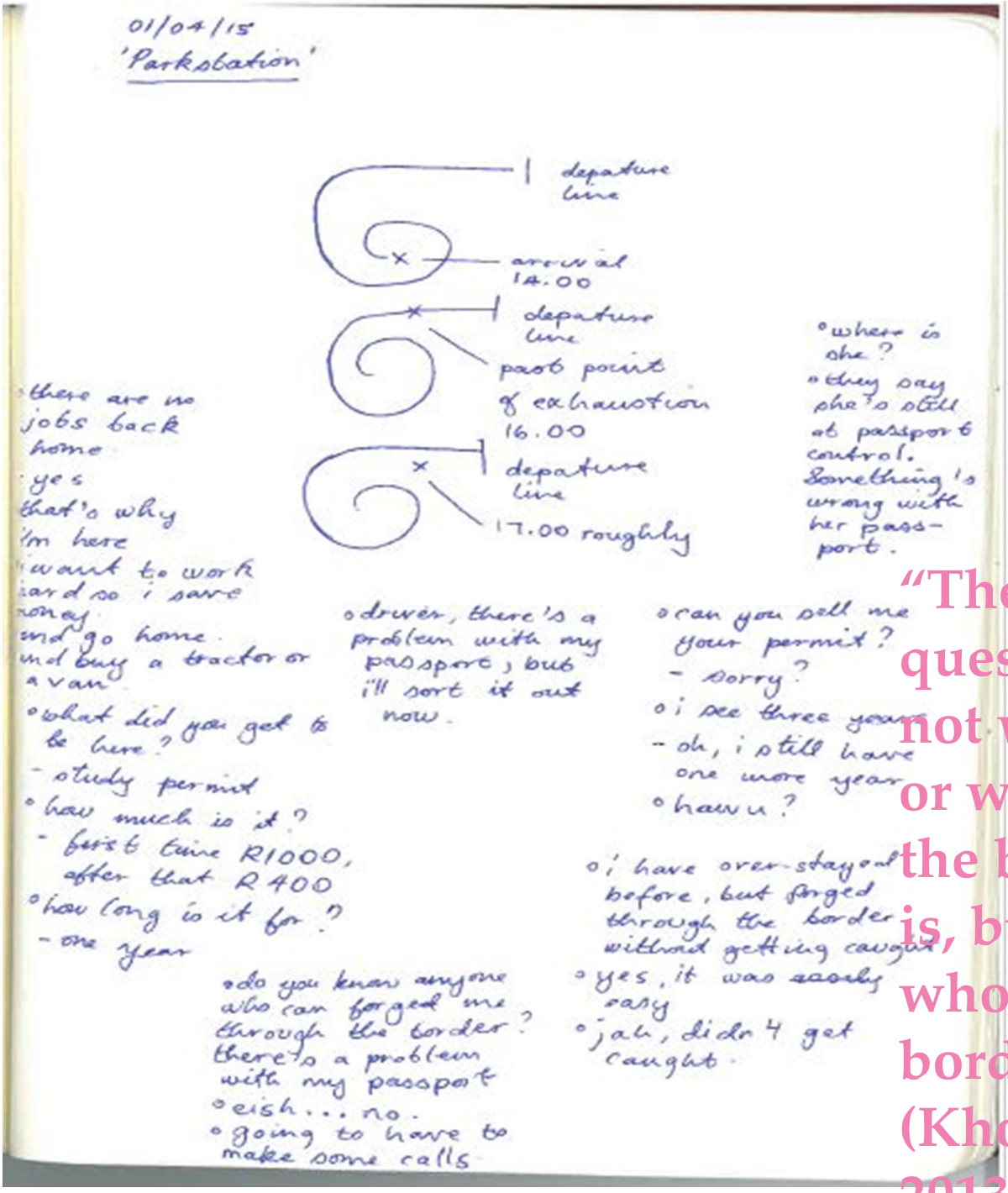
Dineo Seshee Bopape is a multi-disciplinary artist whose work explores themes of story-telling and symbolism through the use of objects, video and performances. *I didn't cross the border the border crossed me* (2013), references multiple issues. One concern could be referencing the Scramble for Africa, and how this meeting of European leaders resulted in the commissioning of arbitrary border lines forming countries on the continent, forcibly and perpetually placing the indigenous people in-between. The materiality of the work is also significant. The weaving of the threads to form the piece of fabric poetically references the crossing of borders and the complexity of migration. The weaving being so tightly bound that you get to the point where you do not know who is crossing who, where or even why sometimes. The theme of weaving is further extended to the embroidery of the text and the laboriousness that this implies. Moreover, the embroidery and the fabric allude to the domestic and the gendered. What is significant about a lot of Bopape's work, and what we can see in this work, is that the title of the work can exist as its own object or work, separate from the main installation. *The spaces I enter* (2020) attempts similar overlapping or layeredness using the digital sphere. Shifting in-between spaces of the physical and metaphysical, the body is presented as



crossing different thresholds, and therefore different borders, whilst simultaneously placing the body as the site of the border, as the body finds itself unpacking moments in time and space.

Borders have become a glaring feature in many people's lives especially in the wake of globalisation and intensifying migration. Borders continue to act as signifiers or as reminders of distinguishing "us from them" (Anzaldúa 1987: 3). The border has echoes beyond just the physical structure of being located at the 'edge' of nation sates, it also has an omnipresence that is represented in diverse forms. The body itself can be considered a vehicle of this potential to carry with it language, culture, traditions that can used as ammunition to exclude. But also because of these attributes, the body can go in-between. Constantly shifting accordingly, and reinventing itself to produce multiple identities, therefore challenging the status quo. Because borders have the ability to be everywhere and nowhere, stationed or located, but also in transition, this makes them infinitely social spaces. The migrant body can be treated similarly; they are not entirely at home, but at the same time are distant from home.

Figure 18 Siyanda Marrengane, *The spaces I enter*, 2020. Digital collage, 3.6m x 2.7m

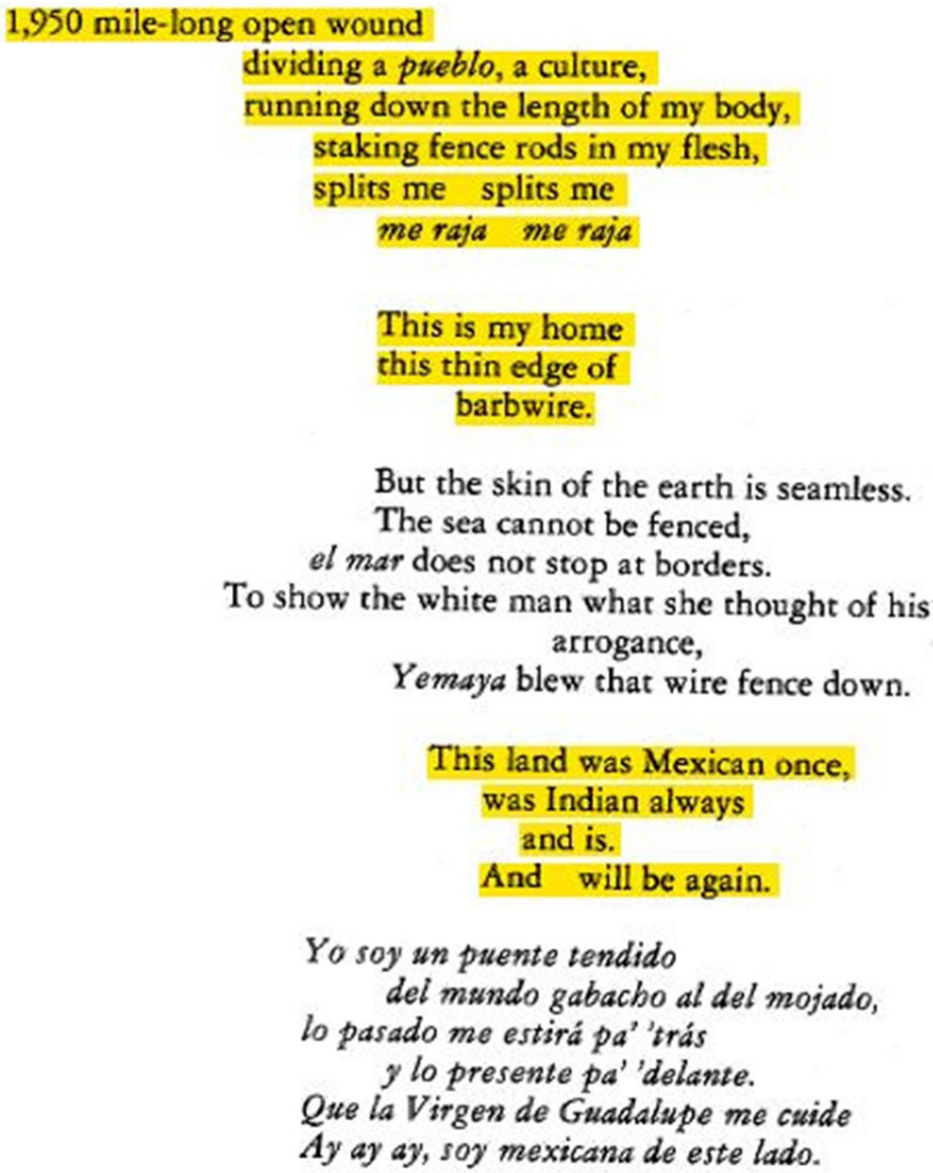


"The question is not what or where the border is, but who is the border?" (Khosravi 2013: 9)

Figure 19 Notes made from observations in a long queue. It was the day before Easters and I was waiting for cross-border transportation to go back home. Notes by Siyanda Marrengane.



Figure 20 Siyanda Marrengane, *We never stop, we simply find other ways of being*, 2020. Embroidery on fabric, 44 cm x 39.5 cm.


1,950 mile-long open wound
dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,
running down the length of my body,
staking fence rods in my flesh,
splits me splits me
me raja me raja

This is my home
this thin edge of
barbwire.

But the skin of the earth is seamless.
The sea cannot be fenced,
el mar does not stop at borders.
To show the white man what she thought of his arrogance,
Yemaya blew that wire fence down.

This land was Mexican once,
was Indian always
and is.
And will be again.

Yo soy un puente tendido
del mundo gabacho al del mojado,
lo pasado me estirá pa' 'trás
y lo presente pa' 'delante.
Que la Virgen de Guadalupe me cuide
Ay ay ay, soy mexicana de este lado.

Figure 21 Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, 1987. Scan. Pages 2-3.

4.
The Depart-Ment of In-Between Affairs

The Depart-Ment of In-Between Affairs (2017 to present) is an intervention which first started as interrogation on the state sanctioned Department of Home Affairs which plays an immense and extremely visible (and invasive) role in many countries (however under different titles[18] and in different departments). *The Depart-Ment of In-Between Affairs* is also a comment on the irony of how these departments are set-up. 'Home affairs', giving the impression of something personal and yet when you go to some of these departments, the treatment can sometimes be quite the opposite. The use of the word 'home' as being conflicting since we tend to associate home with comfort and nostalgia, a place with many good (and bad) memories. Thus, placing these expectations onto a government department is also ironic and emotional distressing, as well as confusing. On the other end 'home affairs' is a structure that monitors the internal affairs of society's consciousness at certain times, archiving it for reference, for example recording the birth of a child, citizenship, performing similar duties like that of a border.
The state sanctioned Home Affairs functions to monitor its citizens moving within the country and outside it, as well as non-citizens moving into and around the country. This kind of policing is political and historical, especially in the context of Africa and

18 Ministry of Interior & Cordination of National Government in Kenya,
Ministry of the Interior in Ghana,
Ministry of Home Affairs in India,
Department of Homeland Security in USA etcetera.

particularly in the context of Southern Africa, because of the historical migration of groups of people in this area.

The role of the *The Depart-Ment of In-Between Affairs* explores ideas of living as an 'interrupted' being and existing in-between, through creating imaginary liminal spaces suspended in time and space. It also creates spaces where different levels of intimacy brought about by questioning our understanding of belonging and home, can be explored and experienced. The *Depart-Ment* sifts through the particularities of the politics, policies, and histories of migrancy within Southern Africa, along with the cultural and social implications of this. It delves into narratives of what it feels like to be far from home, but not yet fully at home in a new environment, ideas of belonging, citizenship, being recognized by the state, (dis)location and creation of new identities. It does this by placing significance on the experiential, as this is inseparable from one's state of being and way of perceiving themselves in the world. The *Depart-Ment* moulds and shifts accordingly, whilst acknowledging the individual. The government department on the other hand is steadfast, not adapting to people and the various backgrounds each person might have. The *Depart-Ment* explores the differing elements of how something that is embodied and experienced, and therefore is not as tangible, can be represented through video, for example.

Passages

Pass-ages/Passing-ages (2018) explores multiple moments, and in this case the moments experienced traversing through public spaces, around the concept of liminality by locating this at a space that sells second-hand items, but also traversing beyond this locale. In this work, I examine other ways liminality can show up through performative actions in 'public' spaces as well as how these performative actions can present links between topics such as, globalisation, economies of exchange and personhood. The work does this by layering imagery, colour and narration in a sequence that almost appears repetitive in a installation to portray a feeling of endlessness.

The echo

In *Pass-ages/Passing-ages* (2018), a woman narrates excerpts, from Louis Chude- Sokei's *Dr Satan's Echo Chamber* (2008) and Phaswane Mpe's Welcome to Our Hillbrow (2001). These two passages are played in a loop:

"… the ear has to listen far beyond the melody, far below the bass, and where the mind has to constantly adjust to a vision (as sounding) of the world where meaning seems to reside everywhere and, yet, nowhere" (Chude- Sokei 2008: 34).

"But then she discovered, like you did Refentše, that a conscious decision to desert home is a difficult one to sustain" (Mpe 2001: 55).

"Because home always travels with you, with your consciousness as its vehicle" (*ibid*).

The work is expressive how the state of in-betweenness can be thought of and experienced in various ways. The echo relates to not only reverberations in sound, but also to cycles, to passages of time and space, to events and to memories that are both familiar and unfamiliar, shared,collective and individual. In using these statements, I wanted to put emphasis on listening and ways of listening. The video contains visuals that appear to be repeated (and are also repeated), and within this repetition I illustrate moments of difference that can be noticed through the intimacy of looking. This intimacy forces the viewer to pay attention to, not only what is said, but how it is said, and when it is said. As Chude- Sokei writes, it is "[f]ocusing less on the words and more on the sound" (2008:8). The idea of repetition comes with the assumption that it produces sameness, however, it expresses difference at varying points, and that is why we must "listen far beyond the melody" (*ibid*: 34). There is a perception that repetition, simply put, is sameness. However, when you occupy a certain position, or have experiences from repeated events, you start to notice minute differences or intricacies that someone else might overlook and deem unimportant. Crossing the border for example, of which is a regular occurrence for some people, they become very familiar with the environment and how they are required to operate in that space, but because of their constant engagement, they start to notice difference in procedures, or notice the extra signs on the wall that read "No Caps/ Hats" and "No Cellphones". You therefore become aware of your position in-between.

The echo, as another way to articulate in-betweenness, becomes the bridge between home and the city, that carries along with it one's perception against what reality is.

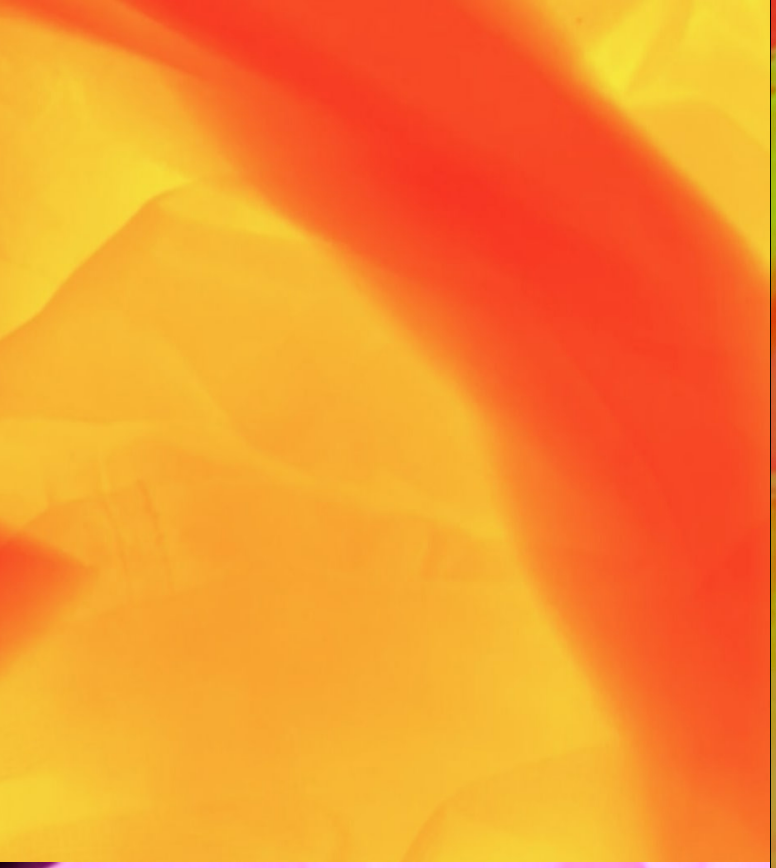
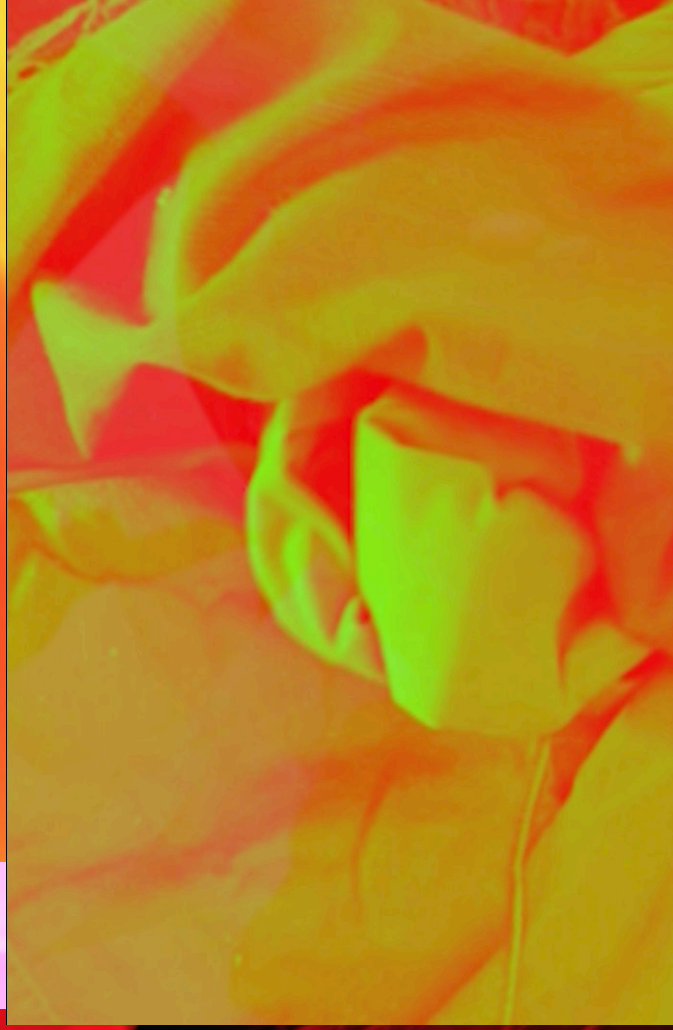
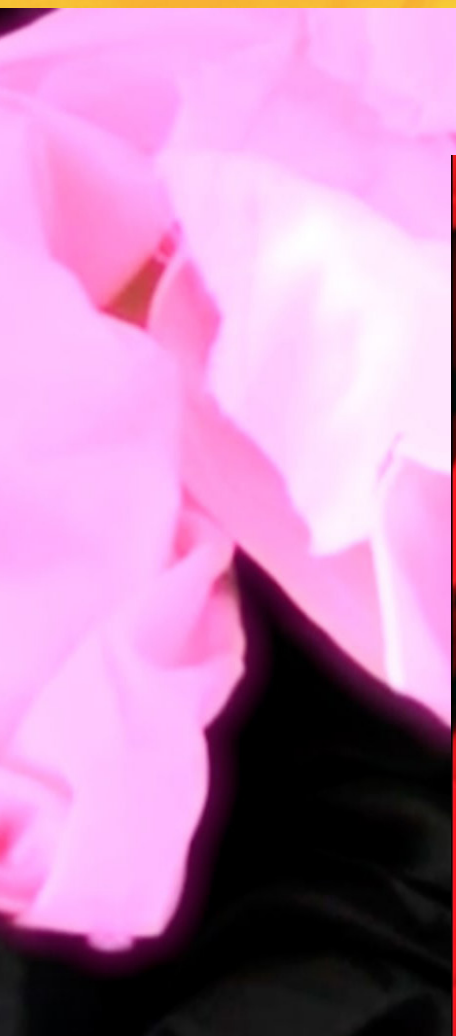







Figure 22-27 Siyanda Marrengane, *Pass-ages/Passing-ages*, 2018. Video stills, 9mins.

‘Dunuza’

-dunuza

verb

1. to bend over

Dunuza

noun

1. a colloquial way for calling a place that sells second-hand clothing, because you have to bend over to get the clothing. Sometimes getting clothes off from the ground.

-dobha phansi

verb

1. pick from the ground.

Dobha phansi

noun

1. another colloquial way of calling the place that sells second-hand clothing, because you must pick the clothing from the ground.

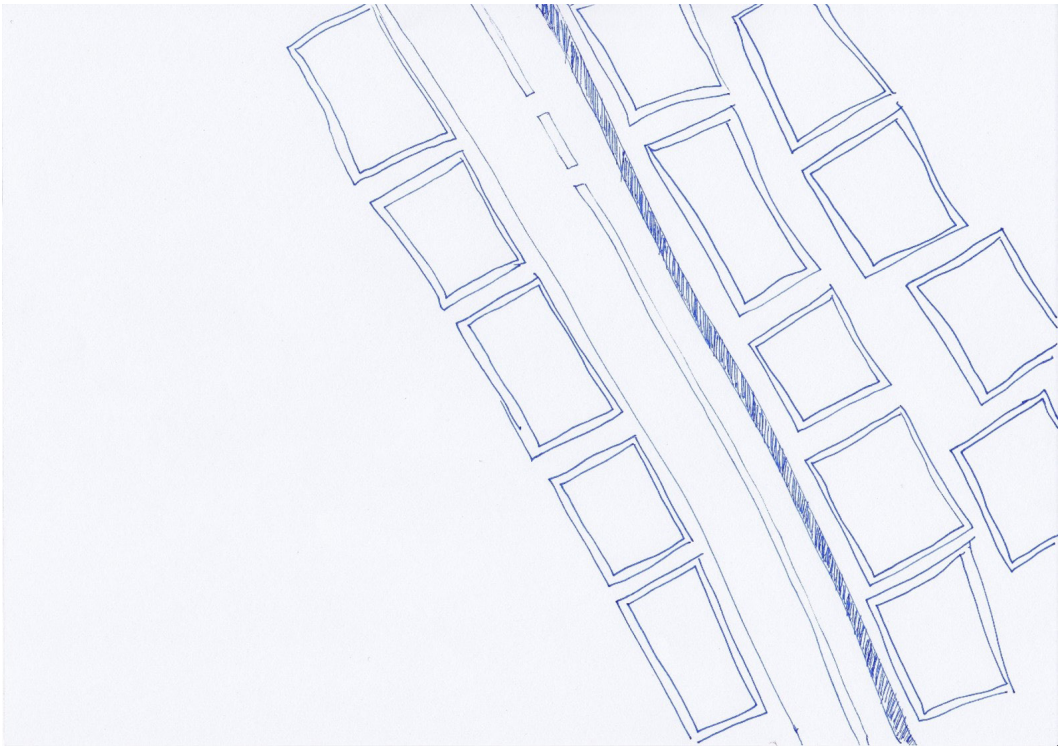


Figure 28 Siyanda Marrengane, *Dunuza*, 2019. Ink illustration.

'Dunuza' is a physical location where second-hand items (clothing, belts, bags, shoes, as well as books) are sold near Noord taxi rank ('officially' named Jack Mincer Taxi Rank) in Johannesburg. Dunuza is laid out in such a way that it takes over the sidewalks of De Villers street, in some moments spilling onto parts of the street.

Dunuza becomes a dizzying hive of activity. With the sun beating down your forehead, the heat seems to intensify the experience of the space, making it so much more overwhelming compared to any other day during the week. It involves many of the senses, making you hyper-aware of your presence amongst many other bodies brushing past you. The close physical contact with another person is almost unavoidable. Any previous perceived ideas of personal space become a distant memory until you leave the space and it becomes somewhat restored albeit not completely. Because walking through the city is constantly a negotiation of the pavement with other people, street vendors and obstructions from previous construction work that have long been abandoned. The piles are so densely packed together that there is less than an arm's length of room to stand and

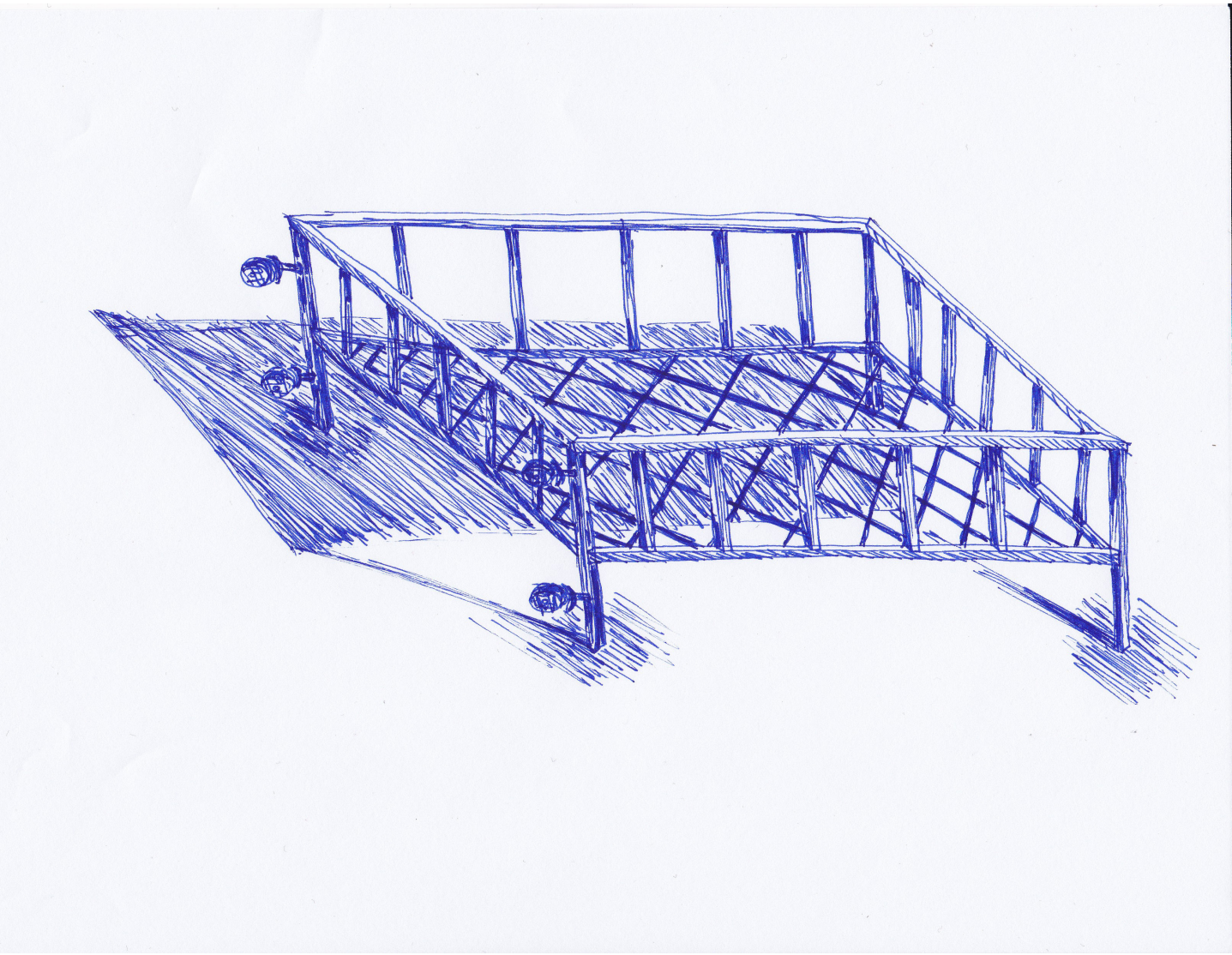


Figure 29 Siyanda Marrengane, *Untitled*, 2019. Ink illustration, 148 x 210 mm.

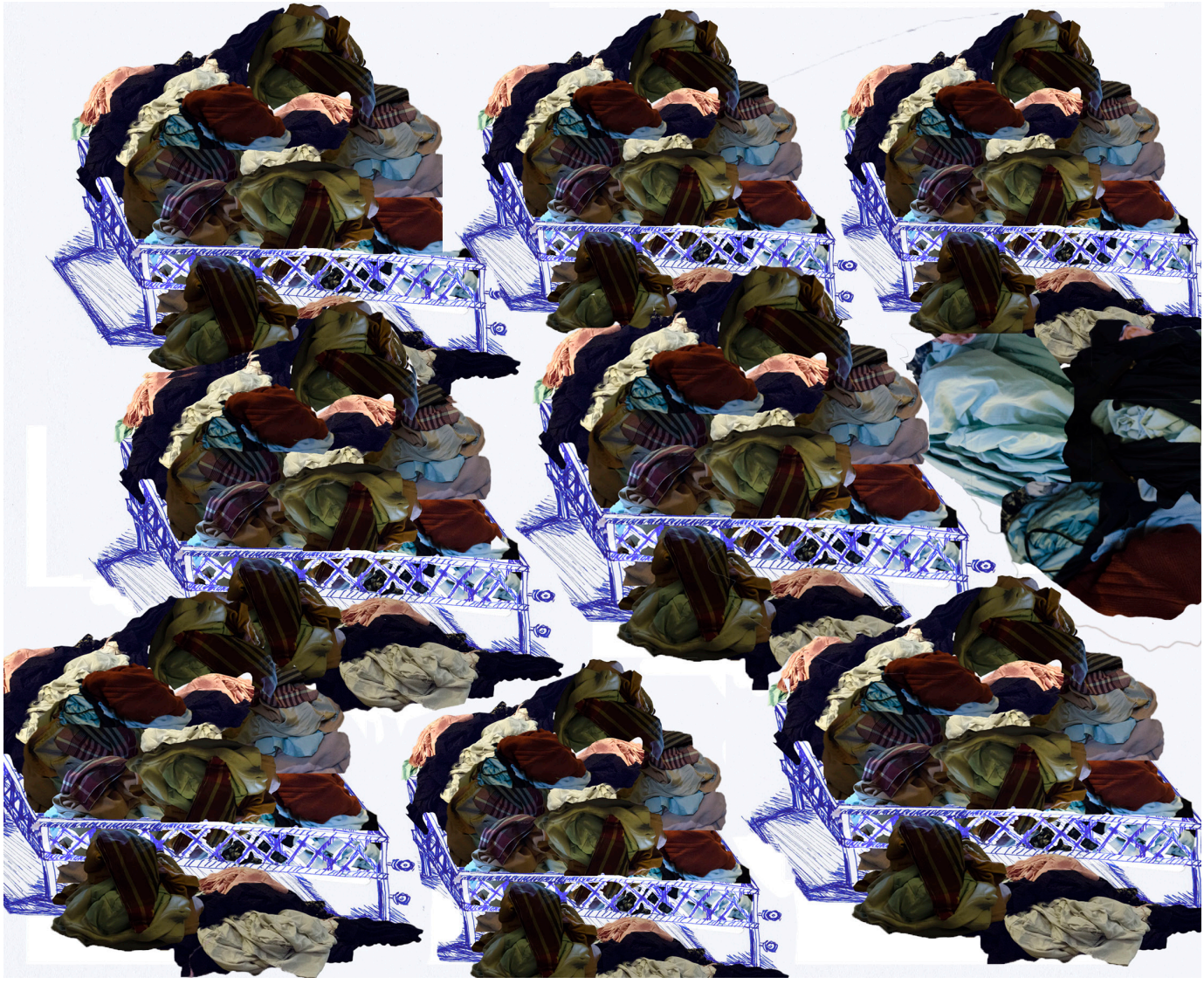


Figure 30 Siyanda Marrengane, *Piles on piles on piles*, 2019. Digital collage, 3m x 2m.

view the wares or pass, creating a maze of passages between the piles. Even the street and what is remaining of the sidewalk is overflowing with people walking in every direction with destinations unknown. At some point the clothes are piled so high that they spill over the structure onto the ground, and then you bend over and pick it up.

Going back to Dunuza during the COVID pandemic, it is interesting to observe how very little has changed. The space still operates the same way it operated pre-COVID. Large groups of people gathered very closely together, no social distancing in sight. People everywhere, walking and brushing against you as they pass. Men grabbing your bare arm with their un-gloved hands, as if this kind of harassment will suddenly make you fall in love with them and cause you to ignore the recommendations given to avoid contact. Treat everybody as if they have the virus, they said.

Although seemingly unchanged, it is not hard noticing the shift in psyche of some people in the space, myself included. The precautions giving by healthcare practitioners are embedded in your brain and direct how you now act. You are even more aware of the person next you at the piles, whether they are wearing a mask or accessorising their chin with it, whether the person next to you will acknowledge the space you have opened as a sort of 'safe zone' between the two of you, or whether someone walking by will take it as an invitation to enter that zone, undoing your attempt at social distancing.

I explore Dunuza as a transitional social space that elucidates notions of migration, labour, informal economies, and perceptions of self. It is also located close to the Noord taxi rank, which is an integral transportation hub bringing people into the city, or those just passing through it to get to other destinations. The space displays an enclave of Africa; I have had the opportunity to strike up conversations with people from Springs to Mahikeng, Nigeria to the Democratic Republic of Congo. On the other extreme, it is also a hotspot for police to do random and calculated 'raids' under the guise of thwarting criminal activities. On different occasions, I witnessed that they were targeted and searched specific individuals in this space, who they believed were foreign nationals who did not carry legal documentation to be in the country. This is a deliberate strategy, as this area, like many other places in Johannesburg, is known to be a melting pot of many

different cultures and nationalities coming from across Africa.
The clothes in this space become a metaphor of suspended foreign objects. Performing their fugitivity, they come from afar, never fully settled in their new environments as they continue to exchange different hands, until they reach a destination, were they are bought, embodied again and shifted into a new purpose.

Moments on a Sunday

Like an organism, living and breathing and growing, Dunuza is continually morphing onto parts of the sidewalks that have not been authorized for use in that manner, as well as expanding further onto the paths of pedestrians. Passing through on a late Sunday afternoon however, you notice a sudden shift in the atmosphere of the space. Many of the brick and mortar shops are either closed and never were opened or they closed early at around one o'clock. Similarly, the vendors of the stalls either do not set up their stalls or were taking down the stalls rather early.
Dunuza is completely transformed, revealing its bare bones, the infrastructure that was covered up during the week by stalls with clothes and a noticeable amount of garbage. The vastness of the space is immediately noticeable. A complete opposite experience from a weekday, where there's so much noise and activity. Its emptiness is unsettling. It is as if the place has been deserted, if only for a little while. Momentarily resting, preparing itself for the hive of activity it will find itself amid the coming week.
The significance of Dunuza subtly expresses the underlying intricacies of Johannesburg. How it shifts and changes. How it is partly damaged and in construction. How this inherited apartheid infrastructure that strived to suppress a certain kind of people for the benefit of another, engulfs and then at times spits out.
Dunuza is a multi-sensorial experience.

Liminality is constantly transient and inconsistent.



TRANSGRESSING

EXPERIENCING

REVEALING CONTRADICTION.

Figure 31-33 Siyanda Marrengane, *Appendages*, 2018. Photographs.

INFORM[NATION] DESK



Figure 34 Siyanda Marrengane, *Untitled: Business as usual*, 2018. Image of zine.

Travelling Documents (2018) are a series of zines that mimic the state authorised and surveyed passport. The difference is that these zines only mimic the passport in size. The size is significant because of its portability, as well as its discreetness. Most of all, because of its associations with the ability to exchange hands and cross borders, hence the name, *Travelling Documents*. Another difference is that, the zines do not carry the same restrictions that the passport carries. In fact, zines pose no restrictions to the holder at all. *Travelling Documents* (2018) explored ideas around the body, homeplace, boundaries, belonging and in between. The series delves deep into ways liminality can be represented or translated, especially on a 2D surface through text and imagery, and how text and image relate to each other. Unlike the passport which marks and validates your presence in places, entry points or destinations, by checking the

document you carry in a large database of information, and thus momentarily leaves you vulnerable to the gaze, the Travelling Documents on the other hand touches on relevant and personal questions that one might have, such as one's perception of home and belonging.

The above image is an image of a zine that was created in 2018 but draws from images taken during the #FeesMustFall Movement protests which took place in 2015 and 2016. Pertaining to these protests were issues such as free education and the systematic racism that is still inherent in theses spaces. The conversations surrounding the protests were a call for the decolonisation of academic institutions, the baggage that these institutions carry which overburden certain types of students, and what these 'transformed' institutions might look like. The zine explores the academic institution as a border. How the fees are a type of requirement or restriction that either allows you access or denies it if you are not meeting their prescribed standard. That challenging these prescribed standards leads to potentially violent confrontation between the students and the institution, and the labeling of these students as 'undesirable', like a migrant transgressing a border is characterised. The students placed in-between wanting to achieve a better standard of life for both themselves and community but are confronted by an aggressive institution which is overly demanding. This can be seen playing out more recently during the COVID-19 pandemic with institutions going online and the difficulty some students were facing with being unable to have access to campus and its resources. The economic disparity once again, rearing its ugly head. *Travelling Documents* is a tool that can collate knowledge from different sources and experiences, that can then be disseminated, to stir up conversations around past and present events.

<u>On codeswitching</u>

Codeswithcing can be referred to, when a speaker switches between two languages or more during a conversation. Codeswithcing can be used in various instances, but one could be as a means for survival, a method of going in-between different situations,

almost like a kind of shape-shifting. With codeswitching, one's identity then is in flux, as you must switch between altered modes of existing. One's 'true' self is thus reconfigured depending on the environment. Codeswitching therefore is more than just a form of expression, but can also be considered enacting survival from a lived experience.

The *Travelling Document* foregrounds the notion of switching between languages or codeswitching as tool for examining the blurriness that can occur in-between switching languages and the 'lost in translation' that can transpire as a result. So, the *Travelling Documents* act as this field where language can be used to engage in questions like the use of language in academia as one of the manifold ways of decolonising, among others, as well as contesting perceptions that have come to be embedded in society, between language, class and education.

Wa' Thiong'o captured my thoughts concisely:

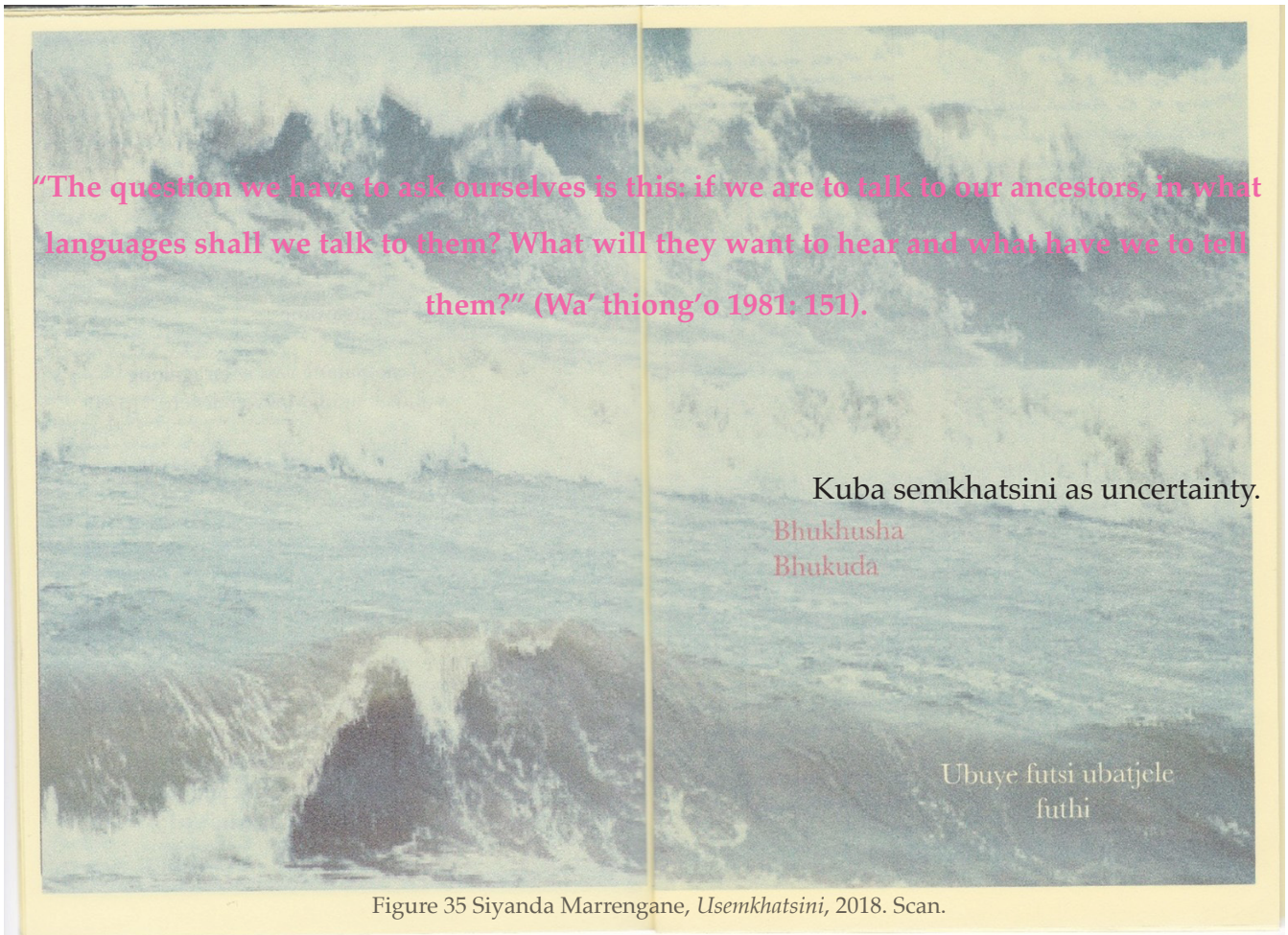


Figure 35 Siyanda Marrengane, *Usemkhatsini*, 2018. Scan.



Figure 36 Siyanda Marrengane, *Stop nonsense*, 2018. Screenshot of video still, 2 mins.

The state attempts to demarcate land through physical boundaries such as walls and fences as a way of putting the land under our control, whilst simultaneously restricting access and movement of people. However, no matter how much we try, the land does not 'listen'. It does not recognise the state- crafted enactments or react in the same way as people when they encounter a boundary that is designed to monitor their movement. Instead the land grows and spreads, passing through the cracks of walls, finding gaps in fences, or spilling over boundary walls. This demonstrates how borders are human (manufactured) interventions onto the land and not 'natural' occurrences.

The soil as such may be a powerful icon with a heavy emotional charge, but it does not 'speak' for itself even though autochthony's protagonists appear to think it does. (Paul Geschiere 2009: 212).

The grass growing through the fence, 'disobeys' the orders of the boundary, revealing inconspicuous, yet at the same time, evident gaps in the fence which are always guaranteed to happen. Comparably, there are those that also transgress these borders

exposing their arbitrariness and as a result, an economy is formed, thriving from people working towards contravening the infrastructure built to maintain some semblance of order.

What came first? The land or the fence?

A bizarre question, with a seemingly obvious answer. But I ask this because of how the fence, the border, the boundary line has been perpetuated as if it came first and foremost, and then everything else after. What appears like the naturalisation of the dividing line sets the tone for the defence and preservation of it. To keep certain people out, to maintain a nationalistic identity. The image of the work, *Stop nonsense* (2018) is descriptive of the porousness of borders and the historical absurdity that exists in the restructuring and the removal of groups of people from their land, resulting in their forced 'unbelonging'.

We have established such a heavy burden on the land because of the multitudes of meaning we have attributed to it, placing our ideas of identity, belonging, and ownership onto it. Which is one of the reasons why the subject of land is an immensely strong concern in Africa.

Autochthony as a device of state-craft

An appropriate introduction to understanding autochthony as described by Peter Geschiere is, "to be born from the soil", which apparently represents "the most authentic form of belonging" (2009: 2). However, once you start moving away from this basic description, the concept of autochthony becomes manifold, revealing its inconsistencies and ambiguities. What is intriguing about the concept of autochthony is how it is used or described depending on the context and the intention of the user. One especially significant and recurrent utilisation is as a political tool (or propaganda) to further a nationalistic agenda. Because of autochthony's inability to be specific and direct, it becomes fixed in a space of in-betweenness, shifting occasionally to suit the interests of the user. In addition to that, Geschiere's version of autochthony provides more complications. On the one hand it seems to imply indigeneity, someone who can trace their roots in that place back to their ancestors. However, on the other hand, what about a person who

was born 'from that soil', but can trace their ancestors from migrating or 'belonging' elsewhere? What about first or second, or more, generations of diasporic communities? What about amagoduka[19]? Nuances like these are not considered because when autochthony is evoked, amagoduka are singled out and labeled as strangers to that soil. The skewed vision of 'who came first' or 'who was here first' version of autochthony has become more prevalent especially in the setting of increasing migrancy and globalisation, and more pronounced when speaking about service delivery or allocation of resources.

"…autochthony trope is part of the production, reproduction and performance of political identities, which are an inherent part of contemporary state-making processes" (Kevin C. Dunn 2009: 115).

Autochthony's more problematic concerns is that it hinges on the assertion of having been in that place first, and with this claim, comes the assumption of having the right to be first when it comes to resources from the state (*ibid*: 121). Looking through the lens of colonisation, preferential treatment and political rights to land and resources were forcefully taken away from those who were there first (the indigene) and apportioned and retained by the coloniser (those who came after) for a very long time, and to some degree, this has remained unchanged.

The application of autochthony in politics is unreliable because the concept is "inherently slippery and unstable" (*ibid*: 114). It is a weapon that can be weaponised and therefore should not be trusted as a reliable concept, especially when brought up during political rallies.

Autochthony brings forth more questions than it can definitively answer. With respect to diasporic communities for example, people who have come from other African countries and have lived in South Africa for many years, establishing communities that go beyond the first generations, means that one can go as far as having citizenship and therefore a sense of belonging. Why is it that they still continue to be treated as 'outsiders' in these

19 A migrant, a 'stranger'.

communities? Is it because they are not defined as being born of that particular soil? Can autochthony differ from the state's description and application of it and why does autochthony seem to only be invoked during times of political campaigning or strife?



Figure 37-41 This image was taken on the Re Vaya bus, on Rissik street. The billboard was put up at Park Station, in Johannesburg, during the 2019 elections. Photograph by Siyanda Marrengane.

"I've lived in South Africa since 1994, I live in Alexandra; it's my township. The lights of Johannesburg's great expanse are our sky, the starry sky of our hopes. I always liked Alexandra.

Here, I am John Matsolo. It's my South African name. In Mozambique, I am João Matola. I always believed that I was John Matsolo" (Khosa 2013: 5).

The establishment of discriminatory legislations that rendered natives, foreigners in their own land by apartheid, further entrenched exclusionary legislations through severely segregating people along language groups, as "an attempt to de-nationalise", and making that the norm " (Neocosmos 2006: 2).We still see remnants of these exclusionary practices in postaparthied South Africa.

Bona fides vs amgoduka, a brief example of Alex

The township of Alexandra demonstrates the slipperiness of a concept like autochthony when it comes to notion of 'insider' and 'outsider', especially when it comes to deciding who has the rights to resources.



And this evoking might have been one of the many complex reasons that led to the afrophobic attacks that took place in 2008, and other years. The way the 2008 attacks were handled in the media was far more noticeable than previous afrophobic attacks, and subsequently extensive research was produced.

The notions of bona fides [20] and amagoduka were distinctions created and enforced by apartheid, through the legislation referred to as, "section 10 of Urban Areas Act", which determined the rights of Africans in the cities (Nieftagodien 2011: 114). Those who qualified were allowed to live and work in urban areas, "where they were given access to public housing" (*ibid*). With the entrenchment of the 'insider' and 'outsider' dichotomy by the apartheid government through its policies, also came the distinction between legal and 'illegal' directed towards black bodies. This categorization consequently led to the development of the politics of exclusion (*ibid*: 118). Similar to autochthony, the notion of bona fides in the context of Alexandra is a slippery one, persistently shifting depending on the context (more especially being influenced by the political climate at that time).

20 In the context of this research, it refers to 'insiders', however it usually refers to real or true. When further unpacked, the term bona fide is a Latin for 'with good faith'. Therefore it is morphed and changed by people in various contexts as a sort of validation of their presence.

A short mapping of the term bona fides:

1930s

Bona fide first was associated with the first property owners believed to be the "authentic" residents of Alexandra (*ibid*: 113).

1959-1963

The term then shifted to consider those who were given Section 10 rights and managed to remain in Alexandra after the early 1960s removals, including both owners and tenants (*ibid*: 115)

Bona fide was then redefined as length of stay and affe
township (which you can imagine could prove difficult
(*ibid*).

There was a modification of the term around the 1980s, in the attempt to control the proliferation of squatter camps in Alexandra the state regarded squatters who arrived before 1989 as bona fides and provided them with very basic resources. Any squatters arriving after 1989 were therefore designated as 'outsiders' and were targeted for removals (*ibid*).

1989

1979 became the new timeline where the meaning of bona fides shifted once again, resulting in anyone arriving after 1979 being automatically labeled as an outsider (*ibid*:119).

1979

ction of the
t to measure)

Alexandra's story of 'becoming', illustrates the constructed and destructive nature that the apartheid government enforced through its formalisation of the notion of 'insider' and 'outsider' through its polices. Its implementation of laws sought to suppress a large, predominately black population. Such categorisations of belonging or non-belonging are fragile, flimsy terms because of how easily they can be changed and used to validify certain outcomes.

6.

Endless In-betweenness

"Burial place, in the specific sense of a particular location of human remains, has been identified as a fundamentally important category in African cultures" (Moyo et al 2016: 277).

Shall we rest here?

When a loved one has passed, within the SiSwati culture, their send-off and where they are buried is of significant importance because it affects how one (be it the deceased or family of the deceased) is perceived by the extended family and the immediate community from which the deceased came from or the community from which they resided. Amongst other things, I have witnessed arguments, disagreements and tensions that come to the surface, arising from where a person is to be buried and driven by how best to honour them by burying them in either one place or the other. These disagreements occur especially when a death occurs unexpectedly. Whilst the disagreements continue, the body and spirit wait in limbo… Usemkhatsini.

In-betweenness has a way of percolating through many aspects of our lives, becoming an embedded and personal experience, from crossing borders to the intensity of walking through the city. To be in-between is an all-encompassing state of being, although ambiguous, that can be invoked even in death. Even in passing on, for those who lived in-between, difficulties of belonging are amplified because our idea of home is subjective and therefore, the impression of home of the deceased may be completely different from that of the grieving loved ones (especially when there is no will involved):

"They dismissed Johannesburg – where my cousin and his immediate family had lived for two decades – as a foreign place" (Mhlongo 2015: 159).

A notable paradox of death is that, on the one hand it signals the end, and yet on another, simultaneously gestures towards an endlessness.

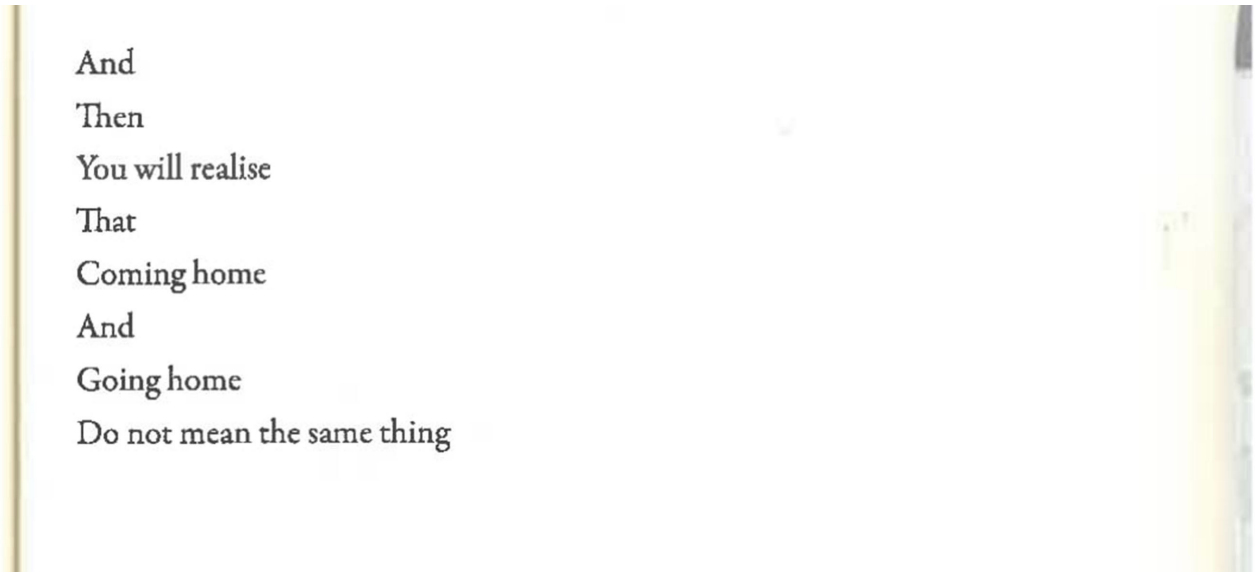


Figure 42 Koleka Putuma, *Collective Amnesia*, 2017. Page 37. Scan.

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