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To be Undisappeared

The art(s) of violent outbursts against African migrants in South Africa

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“Being an artist is intrinsically going to be tied to a narrative of survival
and ‘finding your place in the world’”

– Hussein Salim (in Corrigan, 2021)

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List of Acronyms

AFAI	African Arts Institute
ALA	African Leadership Academy
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
HIV/AIDS	Human immunodeficiency virus and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
PR	Public relations
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders

Abstract

As a collection of five individual narratives, this paper goes behind the paintings, performances and poetry to understand how, not only migration and xenophobia, but lives are embodied and negotiated through creative mediums and should also be emphasised as important epistemologies. Here, a journey will be taken through understanding xenophobia and otherness from the indicator of language and will look at how the arts, being a type of language, are offering an alternative space and way of communicating and being. Accordingly, the research further investigates (self-) representation from the individual and community, how public displays of pain are really felt by the artists sharing their vulnerability, and also how creative practices create a space to negotiate between the complexities of 'home' and the violent state of xenophobia arrived to in and beyond South Africa. Consequently, the study explores how trauma and experiences are not sometimes visible on the body, but are carried through the mind, spirit and generations that come later.

Keywords

Xenophobia; Migration; South Africa; Art(s); Representation; Space

Relevance to Development Studies

Development Studies through the lens of the arts is a small but emerging approach. This paper is relevant for being one of those very pieces that diverges from traditional academic knowledge to be more focused and value-laden on the individual human experience, which at times is often not expressed through debates, theories, and paradigms, but pictures, tales, and music. Then, taking inspiration from Kindon, Pain and Kesby (2007), this research aims to generate and share knowledge that is relevant for the art and migrant communities in which the research was focused in and where current research has room to explore. On the other hand, Odiaka (2017, p. 67) reminds us that xenophobia “undermines the positive effects of migration on human development and international relations”. Hence, it is important to remember that this paper is dealing with a violent occurrence that has led to the loss of many lives and is something that continues to subjugate South Africa and her people. However, most do not stand on the margins without agency. There are just some armed with paintbrushes, with poems... with creativity.

To my sister,
Megs

Chapter 1

Prologue

“I will kill you like George Floyd!” is the opening line said by a South African police officer in *The Boy Who Never Gave Up: A Refugee’s Epic Journey to Triumph* to former Sudanese refugee, Doctor Emmanuel Taban (2021, p. 1). A first-hand account, but also written down through the creative storytelling of a book. Creative practices are also sites of knowledge generation and sharing about societal issues, like xenophobia here. Yet, this creative potential of the so-called global South has often gone overlooked. Considering, it is in these potentials that we may find a different understanding and bring forward different voices and produce different results. However, it is also about something more than acknowledging alternative forms of knowledge and communication. It is about placing value on them as we do on the mainstream, the things that we feel are ‘safe’ and the ‘norm’, such as academia, news reports and world leaders. As with everything, creativity also has its limitations and rather finds itself commanding (greater) space within this network. In doing so, these spaces are being used by people, such as migrants, to dismantle their position in the margins and to remind the world ‘hey, I’m still here. I exist’.

Rather than looking at creative and artistic endeavours as an approach to peace on a macro scale, this research really takes the conversation inwards, to the micro, to the individuals that make up these states of peace. So, let us paint a picture with the words of this story. South Africa’s state of xenophobia is all too well known around the globe for being one of the most hostile against African migrants (Claassen, 2017). Xenophobia is an action of othering, of lashing out based on this othering. Such procedures of exclusion and othering, as discussed by Foucault (1981), are present and practised in many aspects of life, for example, in knowledge production through discourse. Visual representation is another important example by Hall (1997). Art and other creative alternatives are not exempt from this. Nonetheless, art is a move away from mainly viewing discourses and top-down political, economic, and social approaches to social problems as the main sources of knowing and understanding of the realities of people who do not get much of a voice in these spaces (Sierra and Fallon, 2016). Also, it is about acknowledging agency in different forms, and how these overlooked mediums themselves have power as well as limitations.

Essentially, you, the reader, will be taken on a journey of understanding a social problem through the creative lens of those affected by the problem itself. By looking at xenophobia in South Africa from a perspective of art, gaps in knowledge may be overcome. It also moves the narrative away from the dominant and single view of migrants as helpless to people who are bearers of not only capability but also of creativity. But, it is also about recognising the humanness behind the paintings, verses and song, and that it is not the arts alone but community, space and healing.

1.1 Research questions and objectives

The problem lies in the fact that migrants arriving in South Africa are finding themselves fighting a war on two fronts: the one they fled from and the one they are arriving to. In cases such as these, my objective is to explore how migrants are creating a 'third' or 'alternative' 'space' to exist and express themselves, that is, through creative means and when entrapped in a multitude of constrained choices.

When one searches about migration and art or migration and representation, the majority of the time stories of migrant lives that come up are depicted by a third or external party, or creative practices are utilised in healing processes. Both have their pros and cons and are relevant. The curiosity here, however, lies in cases of creative self-representation, where migrants themselves are telling their own stories in their own way. Taking inspiration from the forward by Kgoleng (in Landau and Pampalone, 2018, p. xiii) in the book *I Want to Go Home Forever: Stories of Becoming and Belonging in South Africa's Great Metropolis* where thirteen oral histories were collated, this research believes that

[w]hen we tell our stories ourselves, rather than have them told by others, we maintain personal agency and therefore our dignity ... Stories in the first person can more easily inspire us to think about the social integration of migrants, and also help us to define a moral ground that will guide us in addressing their needs from a human perspective.

Simply put, one of the aims of this paper is to place emphasis on the agency that migrants have, but instead of exploring the mainstream and commended forms of knowledge, the lesser explored knowledge that the arts produce will be used in order to gain a lacking perspective in literature, with the specific case of South Africa. Another is to go beyond the simple production and reception of creative pieces to how this is a process that does not end with the audience, but how (and whether) the artist interprets the response from the audience and uses this to go beyond the boundaries of the artwork to incite and experience social and personal change. Hence, the research question posed is:

How are some migrants using creative means as a representational and spatial medium of communication and being when faced with a battle on two fronts, both in their home countries and the violent xenophobic conditions they arrive to in South Africa?

Sub-questions that follow include:

- (1) Why are creative practices being used and chosen as a medium by those affected by xenophobia?
- (2) How can creative expressions help in understanding the ways of embodying by those who are directly subjected to xenophobia in South Africa?
- (3) Are creative expressions being used as a medium to create an ‘alternative’ or ‘third’ space of being and how so?
- (4) How do artists feel about living and re-living personal suffering on a public stage?

1.2 To define is to limit¹

This research does not limit itself to one form of art and rather uses the concepts of art and creativities interchangeably. Art, like migration, involves something that goes beyond borders. Art is also an extension of the artist, a creation of space for storytelling and agency, as well as, in some cases, a tangible piece of history and empirical evidence. Creative documentation has been a part of human history from the beginning. From cave paintings to fables, there are always truths, stories and a claim to space behind these simple aesthetics that the viewer observes in a brief moment (Sontag, 2009; Chouliaraki, 2006). Nevertheless, the creative arts and these individual stories and interpretations have been less valued within discourses and academia, especially for being too subjective and open to interpretation. Rather, (Cotter, 2017) redirects this critique to the point that the arts embrace the unknowability that traditional research avoids. However, they should not be easily dismissed. As we are coming to learn, we need to value these alternative platforms of knowledge, for easily dismissing them reproduces hegemonic, impersonal, and unequal power structures and leaves us open to gaps in something more than knowledge and communication, that is, in *understanding*. On the other hand, this paper does acknowledge the power structures and inequalities that exist within art and its process, for art was once reserved for the privileged and, like most things, has its faults and limitations. Moreover, “creative approaches are not a magic bullet of peace, nor it is neither innocent or guilty” (Jeremic and Jayasundara-Smits, 2022, p. 344). What a life of creativity has achieved for these migrant artists will be addressed.

Nonetheless, acknowledging different creative forms allows an enrichment of art perspectives as one form of art is not practised and enjoyed by everyone. In addition, this allowed for a greater reach, especially in terms of the already small and relatively untouched research sample. These participants further stressed themselves that all forms of art are essential and where they may not

¹ Wilde, O. (2003). *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. London: Penguin Books Ltd.

be particularly versed in one, they find comfort in the talents of others. Similarly, Lederach (2020) assists in justifying the relevance of such a research sample that spans across from poetry to painting. Expanding this from the point of music, he states that these art mediums “evoke the voices and construction of meaning emergent in those settings” (ibid., p. 144). Just like this research is looking at an alternative to meaning- and knowledge-making through the arts, the arts themselves have diversification within themselves.

The different mediums used also account for the idea and link to the message meant to be conveyed in a “powerful discursive” way (Machona, in Yagiz, 2022). In other words, the mediums used are best fit in that moment for that individual, as stated above. Therefore, speaking on Lev Vygotsky’s *Psychology of Art* that brings together both the politics of emotions and art, Larraín and Haye (2020, p. 1) define art as “a social technique for (re)constructing life and transforming bodies” and Smagorinsky (2011, p. 326) details that the activities of art are not limited to the aesthetics of sculptures and paintings but also “an emotive text ... produced from a homely collection of words when they are orchestrated into configurations with a meaning potential”. Hence, here is where this research’s definition of *art* and *creativity* are built and discussed on a continuous line with other forms of narration such as journalism, advocacy, and academia.

That being said, the creative scene in South Africa was one of the inspirations for this paper. From the Pantsula² dance crews, mimers and art sellers stationed at robot³ intersections, to musicians throughout the metropolitans, South Africa is full of creative abundance. It is in these spaces where the country sees one instance of where both the native and migrant population meet. Yet, little is understood of how African artists work within the South African art scene amidst the chaos of xenophobia.

1.3 Xenophobia in South Africa: From the literature

Xenophobia in South Africa does not only affect the so-called ‘other’ as detailed by Landau and Pampalone (2018, p. 7) on the 2008 attacks:

While most victims were from beyond South Africa’s borders, a third of those killed were South Africans who had married foreigners, those who refused to participate in the violent debauchery or those who simply had the misfortune of belonging to groups others considered unworthy of a place in their neighbourhood.

² A type of dance that emerged in the townships of South Africa during the Apartheid era

³ Word used for ‘traffic light’ in South Africa

For years, the narrative around South Africa has always concerned issues of race and processes of ‘othering’. With the abundance of literature and news-related pieces, xenophobia has been a topic for discussion in South Africa for some time now, with economic and crime narratives being at the forefront of the debate (Gordon, 2022). However, understanding its existence within the complex context of South Africa is not as straightforward. Analysis should be taken far back to conflicts before colonialism, the effects of colonialism and the post-Apartheid⁴ South Africa. While it is important to understand pre-colonial processes of othering and how natural boundaries such as mountains and rivers alleviated conflicts (Oviasuyi and Uwadiae, 2009), Mpofo (2020) really emphasises how conflict and othering was extremely and artificially exacerbated by colonial and Apartheid history and continues today through coloniality. It all has a role in what is being seen, experienced and felt by both sides of this narrative. Nonetheless, this is a difficult feat for a single written piece and, hence, this whole paper will be written with an interwoven exploration of understanding xenophobia, its causes and effects through an alternative perspective – through art.

Nonetheless, in the case of South Africa, xenophobia has specifically been associated with the (violent) actions taken based on the fear or hatred of foreigners (Odiaka, 2017; Harris, 2002; Solomon and Kosaka, 2013). Despite expectations, South Africa saw an increase of xenophobia with the start of democracy and subsequent end of the institutionalised Apartheid system of racism in 1994 (Odiaka, 2017). Notably, African immigrants constitute the majority of the non-native population in South Africa and are the majority group targeted in xenophobic attacks (African Centre for Migration & Society, in Tshabalala, 2015). There are differing explanations and theories into its causes and effects.

Mpofo (2020, p. 35) argues the necessity of understanding the underpinnings of what popular discourse captures of black-on-black xenophobia, but places emphasis on the understandings of how colonialism, and more so Apartheid, alienated the black body in South Africa. Subsequently, not giving immunity to the role of the minority white population in this. Besides, believing that xenophobia “conceals more than it reveals”, he (ibid., pp. 34-35) goes on to argue an important detail where, in the case of South Africa, skin colour is not taken as the main indicator of foreignness and discrimination here, but language, culture and nationality are. As one important indicator of foreignness in South Africa, language will be elaborated on further in the analysis (chapter 4, specifically section 4.1.3) with the investigation into whether migrant artists are using the arts to negotiate between these languages of the native and non-native through their own language of creativity.

⁴ Apartheid was an institutionalised system of racial segregation in South Africa that ‘ended’ in 1994

Chapter 2

Conceptual Framework

A large body of literature focuses on the representation of events of conflict and peace all over the world (Gibson and Mollan, 2012). These representations are challenged for which voices are heard, whose story gets told, by whom and what is remembered. In this paper, xenophobia is a case of an ongoing conflict in South Africa. While there are periods of calm, xenophobia finds itself making periodic headlines for violence on a macro scale throughout the country. For example, the 2008 xenophobia attacks saw around 30 000 people displaced and displacement camps created (Landau and Pampalone, 2018). Fast forward to today, xenophobia is still a widespread issue across the country. However, day-to-day occurrences of xenophobia are experienced at a more micro and individual level. The curiosity lies here in understanding how migrants are remaining and supposedly finding their own peace among the boiling pot that is South Africa.

Taking apart the research question, previous contributions that this paper will build upon need to be discussed. In my thought process, the three concepts are greatly interwoven but can also be understood as the object (aesthetics of pain), the action (representation) and the result (space). Of course, they all could be the other and greatly overlap.

Firstly, how art communicates and (potentially) transforms will be addressed. To do this, the aesthetics of pain will be unpacked. Thereafter, the paper aims to build further on the idea of representation to the notion of self-representation in areas such as conflict and peace. Here, the writings on representation will be looked into. The two go hand-in-hand as this paper looks into the complex idea of the role of the migrant telling their story in the first person. Lastly, this paper aims to explore how creative endeavours are one way for African migrants to negotiate a space to express, exist and be undisappeared through ideas on the 'third' or 'alternative' space. The research will also argue how this different form of communication through creative endeavours speak much to the nature of xenophobia in South Africa that alienates on the basis of (spoken) language.

These three interrelated concepts are important throughout this research because unpacking abstract notions such as space also regards who gets to use, create and be representative in these spaces, how different forms of meaning-making and communication such as aesthetics and the arts are also subject to limitations and abuses, despite their intentions to be used as a tool for some to step out of the margins and make a claim to and for space. What is essential here is understanding that, while the arts are viewed in a positive light throughout, and arguments such as 'pictures are universal' have been under debate for some time now, such definitions of universality are under investigation and disciplines such as *Bildwissenschaft* (image-science) are emerging to test whether these notions can be upheld (Gaiger, 2014, p. 204). On the other hand,

we need to go even further beyond this to the intentions of the artists and the circumstances that they find themselves in, as well as the power that they yield and the constraints they are subject to.

2.1 Aesthetics of pain

A 'beautiful' work is being created from a painful and ugly emotion to be displayed publicly. Beautiful in quotation here is a testament to the word 'aesthetic' where we have the expectation on the arts as a form of entertainment or culture, something we go and look at or experience, even if the story being conveyed is not a pretty one. However, these are, at the end of the day, embodied experiences.

Photojournalism, the aesthetics of pain and humanitarianism have often been critiqued, with creative representation of social problems by a third party often being labelled as 'humanitarian porn', insensitive and capitalising on someone else's pain (Expertise Centre Humanitarian Communication, 2022). Such coverage of migrancy and violence often depict the two as events (Landau and Pampalone, 2018). The case, however, goes beyond moments to marks that infinitely remain on the minds and bodies of all affected. Hence, debates point to the dangers and ethics of the power and obsession over storytelling, especially through visual aids (Grabska, 2022).

Writings in this field also put into question what these aesthetics are supposed to incite, often referring to emotion or action. It is not only about depiction, but the response that follows (Chan, 2010). Ahmed (2014, p. 4) states that "we need to consider how emotions operate to 'make' and 'shape' bodies as forms of action, which also involve orientations towards others". But Chan (2010, p. 378) reflects that "pain is distanced by the safety of the medium and the comfort of the viewer".

Thus, we have a juxtaposition. The viewer is situated comfortably behind the aesthetics' medium but uncomfortable in its message. Jandot (2019) describes another case in which viewers experience enjoyment when observing displays of hardship and how exhibitions should be actively finding ways to mitigate such and rather be part of a collective memory-making through strategies like self-identification. Chouliaraki (2006, p.13) further complexifies this in saying that this pity and emotion should be combined with a detached reflection "on the question of why *this* suffering is important and what we can do about it" but it is not that simple as we use our own private feelings as measures to "perceive and evaluate the world of others".

The message can also be understood in two instances. (1) The eye of the beholder and (2) how the producer(s) of the aesthetic aimed for it to be interpreted. Creative endeavours are both a representation and an action in itself. Importantly, Mercer (1994) reminds us that the intention could indeed remain purely for aesthetic (art for art's sake) purposes, but this has only been

reserved for the white, Western elite. On the other side, artists make aesthetic what is felt, all while claiming a sense of agency in storytelling and meaning-making. Witnessing these painful pieces “can be transformative and healing for everyone involved” (Walker and Oliveira, 2020, p. 199). Pain is an interesting notion as it “has often been described as a private, even lonely experience ... yet the pain of others is continually evoked in public discourse, as that which demands a collective as well as individual response” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 20). Again, we have a contradiction where those who are targets of xenophobia already stand out and for them to express their dismay puts them in a position of spotlight.

Then, what is the role of the arts in these processes of peace? Sontag (2009, p. 42) adds that artists are the ‘exemplary sufferers’ who “we look to be able best to express [their] suffering” because they have both experienced suffering and found a way to transform, make use of or sublimate their suffering. This also allows one to “disarm the power of suffering, [by making] it our own creation, our own choice” (ibid., p. 43). Not to mention Väyrynen’s (2018) notion of corporeal peace where the body is not only physical but multiple and in relation to other bodies and structures. So, to attain an extent of peace, one needs to speak to all these aspects; mind, body, community, etc. By turning a focus onto art practices we explore the “ways each individual carry the plurality of identities and existence with them”, with emphasis on *ways* (Edblom, 2011) and also how others are invited into these spaces, because we are not creatures of isolation. The question, then, is who gets to make these creations and represent these sufferings? The following section on representation will attempt to unpack and problematise this.

2.2 The notion of representation

This paper builds on notions of representation to specifically dive deeper into the idea of self-representation. The complex term looks at “how representation and the subject work. [How i]t produces its own kind of knowledge” (Hall, 1997, p. 58). It is important to be aware of societal representations of foreignness, its generalisations and stereotypes as these offer important insights into instances of hostilities such as xenophobia (Harris, 2002). The dominant narrative, however, has seen stories told and visualised through third parties all too often, where people and their experiences are objects of representation rather than doing the self-representing.

Art was once imitation, where the artist was a vehicle to describe the truth outside of themselves, but now art sees a turn to it being an expression of the artist’s own truth (Sontag, 2009, p. 45). While art and other political forms of representation are often discussed next to each other, they do have similarities. As Väyrynen (2018, p. 11) states, “art and politics are closely

related: both of them can reveal the contingency of the existing social order”. However, we need to approach those we are researching from a position of them being experts in their own lives (Walker and Oliveira, 2020) and “not victims of other people’s accounts” (Achebe, in Walker and Oliveira, 2020, p. 190). The media, development and aid agency discourse, as well as research, are a few examples of systems that disembody people from their own experiences (Clacherty, 2021). Taking a first account and representation of the self works towards dismantling power structures and moves away from the helpless, victim narrative to show that people are capable of self-empowerment (Hall, 1997), because “what about those who suffered, died and bled real unfilmed blood?” (Chan, 2010, p. 374).

Hall (1997, p. 228) notes the vulnerability of ‘meaning’ when asserting to not judge ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ meaning in representation, but instead to look at which meaning is meant to be privileged, as we cannot fully assert ‘a single truth’. In a similar vein, Barad (2003, p. 804) elaborates rather on the knowledge (i.e., representations), the known (i.e., what is being represented) and the knower (i.e., the person creating the representation). However, the legitimacy gap of the two independent variables (the known and the knower) are what create the debates of meaning, truth and objective of representations (ibid.).

There are also limitations and concerns in terms of self-representation. Detailing representation from a case of inmates, Cahill and Torres (in Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007) debate the self-censorship that comes into play when negotiating between ‘truth’ and survival. The climate and consequences in which representation takes place need to be accounted for because it is not the case of easily stepping into the spotlight and having a claim to space when, for example, policies and regulations can easily dismiss things like the right to citizenship and opportunities for funding. As much as people on the margins are nowadays given platforms to have their voices heard, they are under a considerable amount of surveillance for being model citizens, especially when thinking about the debate on migrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

On the other hand, this paper is dealing with instances of trauma and representations of such. Experiences are not gone through in isolation and narratives of these experiences are socially constructed and in need of interpretation (Väyrynen, 2018). Representation is then linked to these experiences of trauma and how such experiences are shaped, remembered and kept alive by the interplay between individual remembering and that which is shaped by collective/communal remembrance (Lederach, 2005). But, representations also become a way to overcome the trauma and claim the narrative, by not being a victim of someone else’s account as was stated earlier (Walker and Oliveira, 2020).

While important, aesthetics and representations are not generally the primary concern of those faced with conflicts on an everyday basis. Thus, we will move beyond these debates to see how they are used in actuality, what it means for the lived human experience, how they are utilised and in what ways they negotiate space between the binaries of ‘from there’ and ‘here’.

2.3 Space

Place and space are what we find ourselves debating a lot in terms of migration. Where one comes from, goes to, written rules that allow entrance, violences that question the ability to remain, etc. Processes read easy on paper: ‘if you aren’t happy in this place that is not yours, then leave’. However, life is more complex than that. “Stories of migration are more than just about changes in geography; they are about factors that drive us to survive and find our own corner in the world, however temporary, where we can make a meaningful life for ourselves” (Kgoleng, in Landau and Pampalone, 2018, p. xv). It is time to move within and beyond the battles that artificially created borders incite. However we cannot ignore them as, similarly, Said (1994, p. 6) states that

[j]ust as none of us is outside or beyond geography, none of us is completely free from the struggle over geography. That struggle is complex and interesting because it is not only about soldiers and canons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings.

Migration processes are more than the conflicts and subsequent peaces that often define them. How meaning is made to why we leave and how we remain or find peace elsewhere is not linear. As Lederach (2020, p. 141) adds: “To understand conflict and peace, we must find ways to account for the elements that go below and beyond the linear modalities of making sense of things. Rational thought cannot disembodiment itself from who we are as person”. It is in these ‘alternative’ spaces that this paper finds its curiosity away from the institutional and systemic responses to conflict and peace processes.

Simply put, Soja (1996) details that the objective of exploring this notion of the ‘third’ or ‘alternative’ space is to simply start looking beyond what we have taken as points of departure for spatial and geographical imaginations. We move past the material and physical, but here, where meanings and interpretations are involved, we are still talking about something that is relevant to physical place and the everyday life (Björkdahl and Kappler, 2017).

Spaces, physical or not, allow fluidity. This notion of the ‘third space’ is summarised well by Fraser (2019, pp. 38-39). The author moves from Soja’s 1980 definition of space, both physical

and social, and open to transformation by people, to Whitchurch's 2008 contribution of the third space that blurs boundaries, has a "fluidity of identity" and moves "laterally across boundaries to create new professional spaces, knowledge and relationships". Post-colonial theorist Homi Bhabha adds that it is "a site of resistance to more dominant, often colonial, cultures" (Garraway, in Fraser, 2019, p. 38).

However, spaces such as these are also bound by other spaces. Privilege, power, class, etc., all work within and around them, ultimately shaping them as well. For instance, existing (private) exhibition spaces, where creative works are given space, are also concerned with aspects such as politics, representation (diversity) and funding. Hence, the spaces that migrant artists are creating exist within and are affected by these 'formal' spaces.

Working on translating the notion of space into the everyday, Massey and Hajnal (in Björkdahl and Kappler, 2017, p. 13) remind us that, while space can be used for empowerment, it is always open to manipulation and co-optation. How "people relate to spaces ... can lead to empowerment or marginalisation, inclusion or exclusion" (Björkdahl and Kappler, 2017, p. 21). With Tuna (in *ibid.*) referring to the 'we-they' syndrome of inclusive and exclusive identities where only a few participants are in this space of meaning-making, one can see this in the association of class within the creative and artistic realm. While the experience of the arts within private spaces invites a certain type of class, being an artist within that space can personally transform one's class. However, these multiple identities such as migrant and artist overlap and provide tension, which will later be addressed.

Importantly, Soja (1996, p. 57) discourages against a single text that claims to "capture this all-encompassing space ... [as it can] invoke an immediate sense of impossibility, a despair that ... can never do more than scratch the surface of Thirdspace's extraordinary simultaneities". Therefore, this research will take into consideration the above notions on space and place but will investigate further into the individual understandings and experiences of 'space-making' and whether creative practices actually do so. Furthermore, the above will further be looked at when considering the effect of bringing private and personal experiences into public spaces.

Chapter 3

The Methodological Approach

Engaging with this specific, and yet abstract, topic required a fitting approach. As the research considers many themes, various disciplines were drawn upon, from migration to cultural studies, geography, politics and so on. In light of the research question(s), the answers sought for really required an in-depth understanding of personal takes on the circumstances surrounding xenophobia and the creative arts. Hence, a combination of qualitative data collection defined this process, with both primary and secondary data being greatly relied upon.

To generate primary data, a fieldwork period of around four weeks were set aside and took place in the winter months of June and July in Johannesburg, South Africa, with any additional fieldwork taking place online back in The Hague, The Netherlands. A series of semi-structured qualitative interviews and biographical inquiries were employed with research participants being both in person and online. The use of biographical inquiry was in place to emphasise the voices interviewed, because stories matter and the tangible pieces they create reveal something intangible. Yet, doing such an inquiry calls for careful attention to language and power, and how we use research to ‘story’ people (Merrill and West, 2009, p. 5).

Nevertheless, the difference between the two presences (online and in person) was definitely felt. For instance, in one of the in person interviews, the participant and I happened to have come across a previous interviewee who I had recently interviewed and they both knew each other, revealing a sort of informal migrant art scene that was made out to be absent. Comparably, one of the online interviews was conducted with the camera turned off. However, all senses were heightened and the participant being interviewed would often describe the busy and chaotic scene of the daily life of the household and the outside world.

Here, observation was key. This did not aim to be as pronounced as it did and the fieldnotes and recordings proved fruitful in reading between and beyond the lines of words and settings. Observing the scene of the interviews, be that the cups of coffee shared outside a locally owned artist’s café, to the community friendliness of an art compound, really enriched not only my understanding of the words spoken by the research participants but also the awareness – the *feeling*.

Initially, the research sample were selected based on a set of three criteria where (1) they live in or have lived in South Africa, (2) they expressed themselves creatively in a public setting and (3) they experienced xenophobia. Notably, South African COVID regulations that saw streets scarce of vendors and artists had just been abolished (literally the day I landed). So, I needed to revert to using online research tools. The preliminary search led to multiple artists who touched on themes of xenophobia and who were later contacted for interviews. Consequently, this online presence

reveals an important character of the research sample in that they are known and are part of a certain type of migrant-artist group. One cannot ignore the role of class in this and the creativity that lies behind closed doors of private exhibition spaces that are often only accessible to a very few. Especially, for example, when artists are managed and represented by such institutions. Throughout this research, observations flagged instances in which the participants could not speak freely about the institutions that, not only sustain them financially, but represent the spaces they are 'speaking' in.

The approach also made use of the snowball technique where some of the participants were referred to by those who had already been interviewed, not without its limitations though. By allowing the research sample to be informed by one another, there is an opportunity for the study to lack representation, especially in aspects of class, as the case here. However, the research is quite representative in other aspects, as will be seen throughout the paper.

Notably, to further enrich the study, gain multiple perspectives and delve into this notion of representation, the view of a South African artist was included. She was chosen particularly for a series of works she did in partnership with MSF which were informed by testimonies of the migrant experience in South Africa. It is important to be mindful of reproducing an 'us' and 'them' discourse and rather understand how the two can work hand-in-hand and what their shortcomings are. Trauma and pain are not experienced in isolation and as this is a widespread occurrence, it influences communities and the country's very social fabric (Cabrera, 2005).

To further add to this co-created piece, the participants were asked to reflect on the conversation and choose one of their works that they felt best encompassed the discussion. Visual aids have been used to help research better engage with experiences but where most research situates itself primarily using the produced art and moves away from essentialising the artist behind the work (Tolia-Kelly, in Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007), this research does the reverse. Employing their own type of method, the migrant artists have been able to create and share knowledge on their own terms using their own chosen medium of communication. This is a powerful accompaniment to the conventional research techniques employed where the research is used to setting the tone (Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007). Whereas, these authors (*ibid.*) are referring to participatory techniques employed by researchers, this research looks into how migrants themselves are using their agency and own ways of meaning-making through the creative arts. Hence, these works are viewed throughout the body of this paper. The pieces were also used as reflection tools to structure and argue my way through a thematic analysis which later divided the chapter sections. They were found to accompany the words of the conversations that were had with the participants, but are left unanalysed to allow the reader a space for reflection as well.

3.1 Ethics and limitations

While this research thrives on the existence of imperfection, it needs to be clearly stated that it is not perfect and does come with multiple limitations. Dewsbury (in Boyd, 2017, p. 33) refers here to the ‘mind in motion’ where “[w]e cannot hope to produce absolute knowledge ... [but should] plac[e] thought between the spaces of sensing and making sense, creating perspectives that vibrate, and giving ‘the right place to description’”. Notably, the paper explores a process of othering. By focusing on the marginalised voice in this story, it is easy to reproduce this othering for the so-called perpetrators as well as the victims. There, however, should never be a justification for violence, but the native South African population themselves have a history and a burden that weighs on the nation at its core and this should also be a thought while reading and reflecting on this small narrative to a wider ecosystem of structural pain.

In addition to this, there is the awareness that the emphasis on xenophobia reduces victims only to this experience. This paper cautions against such a dilemma and rather forms one part of their story. Just like they are more than migrants, they are more than victims of xenophobia and artists that sometimes represent such. They are aunts, friends, aspiring academics, dreamers and more. Furthermore, the paper does not dismiss that other non-native South Africans and even second generation migrants experience xenophobia. This was clearly prevalent during the COVID pandemic against Asian, specifically Chinese, migrants (DW News, 2020). Nonetheless, statistics show that African migrants are the main target of this violence (Tshabalala, 2015).

As one of the many limitations of this paper, gaining access to this small and specific research sample in limited time and with limited funding further reinforces that South Africa itself is a large country. No experience will be the same as another. Cahill and Torres (in Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007) express this well in questioning who gets the authority to represent a community and is there even a ‘we’ in terms of being a representative. The research attempts to minimise these limitations by really emphasising the in-depth narratives at work. While the sample size is small, the data generated is rich and in line with the aim of the research, which is to understand a social problem on their own terms of meaning-making. It starts off the conversation understanding that every voice is valuable and that nothing is experienced the same. Academically, secondary data is included and analysed to find patterns, critiques and gaps that can assist in the build-up of the argument. You will see a reference to other artists doing the same as well as quick links to some of their works in the footnotes. All narratives are understood as interwoven connections that give an overall understanding to the problem under investigation. On that note, my own narrative needs to be acknowledged.

3.2 Positionality

To position oneself within and beyond research is of the utmost importance when acknowledging bias and challenges. Position(s) do not only contribute to advancing or limiting the research but display important relations of power and how that power is used (Adebayo and Njoku, 2022). That being said, being born in and spending most of my life in South Africa, the context has been what occupies most of my thoughts. On the one hand, having trained as a visual artist by attending a specialised high school for the creative arts in South Africa and representing South Africa as a national figure skater, I have a creative background myself. This puts me somewhat in a position as an insider and someone who can relate to the woes and joys of the creative realm in question. However, this is not without bias to what creativities I enjoy and do not, and the privileged art spaces I have been able (and invited/included) to work within.

On the other hand, my positionality as a white female, second generation migrant who was born in South Africa and is studying abroad puts me on the line of an outsider, igniting a sense of Collins' (2000) 'outsider-within' notion. This was often brought to attention by the participants of this research who they themselves also questioned their own aspects of upbringing and class. The participants also often tested the power relations within the interview process by questioning the reasons for the research, the researcher's own positionality and power that research itself has. Nonetheless, putting together data that tells a story about a person who is an expert in their own life and, therefore, becomes available to be re-told and reproduced elsewhere, requires handling with care and the acknowledgment of the structures that put the researcher in the position in the first place.

Putting this positionality into action calls for reflecting on how such identity aspects shape what research sets out to do in terms of knowledge production and how it is received (Elabor-Idemudia, 2011). Here, many aspects could be attributed. However, sticking with the notion of language that has been pointed to as a main difference of 'otherness' (section 1.3) and problematised above, I found that this was an important aspect too in positionality. With the interviews being conducted in English (my native tongue) and utilising highly debated academic concepts, on the receiving end, the participants would respond in a calculated and even similar academic way, referencing to concepts such as 'intersectionality' and 'transmutation'. Reflecting on this and the way in which this research found these participants refers back to the element of class, who are outside of the margins but yet still defined as within, and who is excluded and unknown, such as the everyday artist most will come across on the streets of South Africa, all of which is embodied in this single written piece as I inserted myself into this particular world of the migrant artist and their South African experience.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Words and pictures, often pitted against each other or used to enhance the other. The following section takes you, the reader, through a collection of the individual conversations that were had with five artists:

Name	Place of birth	Currently based in	Artist's medium
Tatenda Chidora	Zimbabwe	Johannesburg	Commercial, fine art and fashion photography
Sarah Lubala	DRC	Johannesburg	Poetry
Sheila Chukwulozie	Nigeria	Lagos	Performance, installation
Ronald Muchatuta	Zimbabwe	Cape Town	Visual arts, mosaic, collage
Balekane Legoabe ⁵	South Africa	Johannesburg	Illustration, animation and visual arts

Table 1: Participant breakdown

As this paper concerns itself with issues of migration, gauging the background of each participant is vital in placing them within and beyond the narratives they conveyed. It finds itself among narratives of different migration motivations and current placements within and outside of South Africa. Having said that, in no way does this paper claim to be representative of all African migrant artist perspectives in South Africa and cautions the reader against this danger of one narrative. Other migrant artists are also out there tackling issues of xenophobia in South Africa with works such as the film *Man on Ground (2011)*⁶ by Akin Omotoso and *Conflict Resolution*⁷ by Kudzanai Chiurai. This story should be read as an ode to or opening of a 'space' for this conversation to all artists where there is a current gap in existing academic literature.

On that note, the following sections take you through the findings of the research question(s) seen above. The first section introduces each artist and works through sub-question one by detailing why the arts are chosen as a medium, as well as situating the artists in their experience of both home, South Africa and xenophobia. The second looks into how the arts are used as a different way of understanding as well as the opinions on representation by external parties.

⁵ Referred to as Bale in the rest of the paper

⁶ View the trailer here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aaVRJlmqnQA>

⁷ As one piece viewed here: https://www.goodman-gallery.com/store/shop?ref_id=23771

Thirdly, we reflect on the experience of the artists as they bare their soul on a public stage. Before presenting some limitations, the paper will look into the complex notion of space and the idea of the third or alternative space that the creative experience creates and how it can be interpreted as a testament of xenophobia in South Africa.

4.1 ‘Behind the scenes’

4.1.1 The call to art

The events that happen to people, whether the places we are born or reasons we need to leave, are not felt in a single moment. These are carried with us, through our bodies and minds and even the generations that come after us and within the communities around us. Väyrynen (2018, p. 35) elaborates on this by recognising “how people experience war, conflict and peacebuilding as felt and corporeal”. In other words, how marks of violence are not only carried physically on our bodies but also through our minds, spirit and through our relations and communication with other bodies.

Works of art, too, are always in states of communication. They tell us about the views of the audience, the message of the work, the space they are put in and also the artist behind the work. The call to question here is why the arts are being chosen as a medium of communication and how it helps us to identify how artists embody instances of xenophobia. At the same time, not much is known about how categories of being a refugee or migrant have influenced migrants’ artistic practices (Parzer, 2021). The investigation then is different to what most literature discusses along the lines of art-based approaches and art therapy through initiatives like *The Suitcase Project* (Clacherty, 2021) and *Mwangaza Mama* (Walker and Oliveira, 2020). While important and very valuable, these initiatives are somewhat established by an external agent to be utilised by migrants. Migrant artists are already their own researchers, healers and community builders. Of course, they do not exist in isolation, as Ronald, who you will meet soon, reiterated in our conversation: “We are affected by things just like everybody. It's just that we think much more deeper than people. We tend to weave and extract some of the things that people either ignore or turn a cold eye [to]”.

Unpacking why we as people become artists is another feat. Understandings look into art as an instinct; as something that is imitated and socialised through community; made artists versus born artists and so on (Hickman, 2010). This universality is met with scepticism (ibid.). Therefore, it really is about each individual’s journey into the arts and how, like here, they use these pathways to express their experiences of migration, xenophobia and the stories of others. Each story is different and in motion. This is a testament to the idea of the Thirdspace by Soja (1996, p. 2) that

is defined as a “purposefully tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances, and meanings”. This also mitigates the subjugation of the subjects to merely themes of migration and xenophobia in these creative practices, but a plethora of realities and imaginaries. These spaces for creative practice, therefore, are an approach for migrants to move away from moments of being victims, to other moments such as being artists, friends, observers, etc. However, these moments of victimhood are not to be dismissed, for their existence through art practices allow them to be carried through in different ways, be that tangible objects or a shared community exhibition experience, and brought to the fore in spaces of contestation. That being said, the following subsections give you an introduction to and idea of what shaped the characters of this story into the artists that they are today. However, parallel themes that we often see in conflict, peace and reconciliation align. That is, these artists were not shaped in isolation but generations before them and the situations they found themselves in played important roles.



Figure 1: *Soul Window* (Chidora, 2013)

Tatenda: Hands

You can see Tatenda's fascination with them throughout his works. When asked why he chose a life of art, Tatenda details that he has always been a vocational student: "[W]henever we had arts and crafts my mind was always ignited because I could use my hands to make things and it challenged [me]". Growing out of his path into the culinary arts, he admitted, "I had already been in love with images from a young age, looking at magazines, cutting out images from magazines and always having a heart to want to create". After buying a camera and experimenting, he ponders on being "captivated from small things and [how] they always subliminally add to where we would end up being or what we would end up doing". However, he does note the sceptical perception of photographers in Zimbabwe as compared to the other arts such as drama and sculpting:

[W]hen it comes to photographs, you are associated with people that take photographs of people in the park ... We always used to have people that used to come to the house and knock and say 'hey, can we take a picture of you?', and they will take the picture on film and then [disappear] for a month until they finished the roll of film, process it, print it and then later on [when] you have forgotten about it, they come back [with] 'oh, I'm coming back with your picture'. So that's the association of a photographer.

Sarah: Language

Sarah expresses that she "didn't really know what else to turn to" when asked about undertaking poetry. "I don't know that if I could stop writing even if I wanted to. I don't know how else to move through the world. I don't know any other way to be". She reflects on loving reading and literature from a young age. It was also an easy way to learn English and she even giggles on how she fell in love with Afrikaans poet Ingrid Jonker because it is uncommon liking anything that relates to the culture and language of the former Dutch colonial power. The Afrikaans language, despite Jonker's efforts against the Apartheid regime, serves as a reminder of the colonial embodiment that continues to exist in South Africa and its education system today.

She reverts back to "the question of being a migrant and those difficult kind of experiences [that] are ill-suited to everyday language" when deciding on poetry as her medium and speaking from her Congolese background, she asserts that "our cultures are rooted in art" such as oral history in performances.

Sheila: Survival

"It's just been my destiny to be an artist because it is the best way for me to combine light and dark. It's the best way for me to present important things in a way that's not boring". Sheila,

however, tells me that research is actually her first love but prefers presenting her findings in a show rather than writing an essay. In addition, she expands in saying that “art feels like a good use of [her] trauma” but also references back to the place she grew up in:

I think that Nigeria is such a mosaic of characters, values, principles and personalities. So, it's hard to be from Nigeria and not actually be artistic in a vein because you actually have to be artistic to survive the story. You have to make some kind of logic from the madness of what's happening here and only a good imagination can help you make it through.

Detailing the culture of storytelling in Nigeria, Sheila placed value on how her mom and generations before her led her into storytelling, but her mission “is to make sure that the arts [are] seen as a choice and not a condition of being” and that art is an opportunity to explore the notion of ‘self’ and “express a very unique imprint”. Despite this, she laughs recalling that a career in the field is believed to be a “waste of time” in Nigeria.

Ronald: Childlike

Sometimes our inherent creativity that we have from when we are children comes back to remind us in our adult lives that we are creative beings. This was the reflection from Ronald who was attending the interview over Zoom while at a friend's house back in Zimbabwe: “I wanted to be an artist since I was in primary [school] and this friend of mine, we [had] dreams of becoming artists from the 90s when we were in primary school”.

Despite going to South Africa to see what it had to offer to further his creative career, Ronald admitted that his upbringing was tough as he came from a poor background. At the age of seventeen, Ronald was sustaining living by himself as a ceramic painter in Zimbabwe with art being “a far-fetched idea” (Nyoni, 2018, p. 416). He reminisces being a slow learner in school, but that subjects such as history fuelled his passion. He feels that his work is more empowered by his fascination with history and he eventually gave in and “chased [his] passion”.

Bale: Fate

Using the terminology of one of her other many passions of running, Bale found herself “always running into [art]” and really enjoyed drawing and music as a child. After attending a specialised high school for the creative arts in Johannesburg, she went on further to study visual communication, majoring in illustration, and later film, with a major in motion design.

Bale, like most of the post-Apartheid generations, still feels the effects of the internal displacements that took place in South Africa. That being said, she is not a migrant herself but has the tools and gifts, and therefore opportunities, to represent what happens in the world. Asking her about the process behind representing the collected stories of the migrant experience in South Africa in partnership with MSF⁸ she expressed how much of a privilege it was and that she did her best to treat them with respect. In addition, when conversing on the topic of the dynamics between art and other professions such as advocacy and academics and even within the diversification of the arts itself she reflects, “[w]e’re communal creatures ... It becomes very powerful when each one does their own thing, but also when we come together and do it together”.

4.1.2 Home in abundance

People move from one place to another for all sorts of reasons. When asked where home is, all participants mentioned their place of birth at least once. The above table summarised their origins but when asked where they identify ‘home’ to be, what led them to South Africa and to remain (or not in one case), we are reminded that migrations are nonlinear and complicated processes.

These notions of being at and leaving home are negotiated by created communities through “collective acts of remembering in the absence of a shared knowledge or a familiar terrain” that in turn form multiple identifications (Ahmed, 1995, p. 329). Upon these lines, this research has identified a community of diaspora artists who use artistic mediums to memorialise and express characteristics of a shared identity. However, such a community or ‘migrant art scene’ are not formally established. In the interview process, the participants denied that a migrant art scene existed but throughout our conversations they would unknowingly mention each other or others in a similar situation. Also, the artists were often mentioned in the same secondary resources this research utilised, such as art magazines. Furthermore, documents such as *The Migrant Artist’s Handbook: A guide to living and working in Cape Town & Johannesburg* exist. The preamble starts off with “[i]n understanding that one is a human being first before an artist” and it gives resources that speaks to both the artist condition as well as the needs of the migrant, such as documentation, legal and financial matters (AFAI, 2011, p. 3).

Nonetheless, exploring themes of migration concerns issues of space, place and what defines them and how these definitions change and are problematised overtime. The answers found here exemplify this in a way that there are different motivations and reasons for migrating. However, when it comes down to it, trauma is carried across bodies, minds, generations as well as space and

⁸ The series of works can be viewed here: <https://www.msf.org.za/MigrantTestimonies>

place, even if one is not, for example, physically in South Africa to experience the effects of xenophobia. These are also embodied in the aesthetics, representations and space. In spite of this, many of the participants have identified a space for themselves in South Africa, but need to be understood from the beginning of their migration journey.

To begin, Sarah found herself in South Africa after fleeing the unrest of the deposition of Mobutu Sese Seko in the DRC. Having generations of a mixed family and moving around most of her life to finding herself back in Johannesburg and married to a South African, she adds to the problematisation of *rooted belonging* by Ahmed *et al.* (2003) in remarking that

home becomes a complicated question ... home is much less a place now than it is a practise and I think if home is supposed to represent belonging, then I belong much more to moments and people than I do to any place.

Furthermore testing the notion of space(s) and referring to inspiration from Gloria Anzaldua's *la mestiza consciousness*, she adds to its temporality, feeling and history:

Home is also about the places where parts of you are left behind ... There's a part of me that only exists when I'm there [DRC], just like there's only the part of me that exists when I'm in South Africa that doesn't exist elsewhere. It's a thing you discover. It's a thing you can invent and create, which is fortunate but it's also what you do out of survival. But I suppose survival is always a creative act.

Lederach (2005) touches on this idea of the creative act as well. He (*ibid.*) puts forward that such aesthetics show that creating adaptive and responsive processes, as well as the process of sustaining them over time, requires acts of creativity.

On the other hand, time and the relationships that accumulate test these notions of home. Following his then aspirations of a career in the culinary arts, Tatenda moved from Zimbabwe to South Africa to only find himself without funding and taking up a waitering job. Later, he rediscovered his vocational passion for commercial, fine art and fashion photography and has established himself in Johannesburg. When asked about home he said that “[i]n a way I call home South Africa now... As much as I say I'm Zimbabwean-born, Zimbabwean-bred, I tend to say to them that I'm actually part of the system”. Similarly, Ronald, went seeking for what South Africa had to offer to expand his creative profession. Being in Cape Town with his family helps him identify South Africa as home, but maintains that “home becomes a complex thing, especially if you migrate” and that Zimbabwe will always be home to him.

Sheila, on the other hand, never really wanted to go to South Africa. Opportunities through the ALA, and later Watson Fellowship, saw her placed among the “overwhelming [South African] culture, but in the best way possible”, as her words praised. She detailed that there is a PR culture in Nigeria that markets Europe and America as the worthwhile places to go to but South Africa “had all this darkness tied to it. This idea of teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS...”. Subsequently, she states that “storytelling is [her] home”, which relates back to her mother and the storytelling culture in Nigeria that was mentioned earlier to define her art career. Although, she finds herself back in Lagos, Nigeria. Significantly, xenophobia still reaches her when she is outside of South Africa’s borders. Regardless of her extremely unpleasant experience trying to obtain a visa to get to South Africa for her opportunity with ALA, Sheila was later part of a protest by other fellow Nigerian galleries and artists against an art exhibition in Johannesburg amid the 2019 attacks, without physically being in the country (Rea, 2019). Again, the xenophobic attacks in South Africa had reached her and others back in Nigeria, going beyond the physical dimensions of space.

Lastly, Bale. Based in Johannesburg, she is the South African of this story, included to balance the perspectives on representation in this paper. While Bale describes her story of migration as “not in the formal” sense, she reminds us that we need to equally consider migrations that occur within the artificial borders that have been drawn and beyond the experience of the individual. She pinpoints what the introduction to this research considers where native South Africans themselves have an unsettled internal migration history, with some of the most intense internal migrations happening where native black South Africans were no longer subject to living within the Homeland system (now townships) and could move into white suburb and urban areas, in the case of Bale’s parents. With regards to this ‘first space’, ‘place of origin’ and ‘home’, Ahmed *et al.* (2003, p. 3) challenge *rooted belonging* and the nationalistic idea of ‘home’. Tackling this in his own way, visual artist Gerald Machona (in Yagiz, 2022) engages with xenophobia and the notion of universal experiences of foreignness by removing facial identity in his works ‘Ndiri Barman’ and ‘Ndiri Afronaut’. He (*ibid.*) accompanies this by saying that

[w]e are all foreign to someone, somewhere at some point in our lifetime ... With global trends of migration and naturalisation, we are now faced with rapidly diversified notions of collective identity, where traditional concepts such as nationhood are no longer simply about where you are born.

Here, (Parzer, 2021) provides an important caution against using categories such as ‘refugee’ and ‘migrant’ when representing migration experiences through the arts as it can often oversimplify and group people from different places, making it seem as if their experiences are homogenous as well as subduing the uniqueness of their different cultural traditions. As a result, we find ourselves

in Edward Said's 'state of homelessness' where place and identity are difficult to discuss as naturally given but need to be understood as hierarchically interconnected (Edblom, 2011). Furthermore, these spaces that the arts create allow for these re-definitions as Soja (1996, p. 35) explains: "[A] space for collective resistance ... that is also a meeting place for all peripheralized or marginalized "subjects" wherever they may be located. In this politically charged space, a radically new and different form of *citizenship* (*citoyenneté*) can be defined and realized".

Thus, the arts here further open and test the nature of xenophobia that defines 'our home' and 'yours'. In themselves, creative practices transcend and challenge physical spaces and places of 'home' that are demarcated by borders. In doing so, we are really edged into the ideas of (self-) representation and how meanings are made at an individual and collective level. Albeit, the ideas of identity, foreignness and xenophobia in South Africa are less concerned with physical appearance and lean more towards how one speaks and sounds as a sign of home.

4.1.3 Xenophobia: The language we use

Being a foreigner in any place advances question of 'but where are you from?' and 'why are you here?'. It is these notions of 'foreigner', 'migrant' and 'other' that are violently mobilised and acted on through xenophobia. Instead of detailing too much of what is already known about xenophobia from the abundance of literature that already exists, I wanted to leave space for the participants themselves to reflect on this occurrence that remains a tenant in their lives. From here, I have chosen to discuss only one, but an important, identifier – language – that appeared throughout the interviews.

The arts are another type of language that communicates and gives an important insight into how one can negotiate around spoken and unspoken forms of communication, from mother tongues to body language and appearance. Importantly, Cotter (2017, p. 3) points to the need for attention on "*how* artists create [these] epistemological possibilities" in their "desire to hold open space to think something differently [that] calls for a different way of being in the world" by using art as another form of language.

Xenophobia in South Africa is often associated with the use and lack thereof of language, with language being a key identifier of 'you are not one of us', next to physical appearances and attitudes. As Sheila recounts, "they ask them to say elbow in Xhosa⁹, which I think is one of the most complicated words" knowing that a non-native speaker will be unable to pronounce it correctly in most cases. In another instance, Ronald found himself not being forced to speak but to listen: "He

⁹ One of South Africa's 11 official languages, with South African Sign Language set to being added

just started saying stuff in Xhosa. I'm not very fluent at speaking but I can hear and this guy was saying 'I hate foreigners' [and] '*kwerekwere*¹⁰'.

Subsequently, Sarah calls it a “literal silencing” of migrants who defer to a survival tactic of not speaking in order to avoid further investigation and provoking violence. Participating in an oral history collection, Rwandan genocide survivor Alphonse Nahimana (in Landau and Pampalone, 2018, p. 159) gives an explicit account:

One day I saw some men throw this guy off the train. He did nothing to provoke this. I heard them use the name of *kwerekwere*. I was thinking if they find out that I am a foreigner, I might be next. I was scared of losing my life. That's why I pretended to be deaf. I knew if I spoke, you will know I am not South African.

Nahimana (in Landau and Pampalone, 2018, p. 160) goes on to further detail that it is silencing on both sides with “the scariest part [being] that everyone was keeping quiet and no one would intervene. All somebody said was, ‘Ah, *kwerekwere*’”.

On the other hand, language is also used to spike xenophobia. “It is the fastest way we have to connect and disconnect from each other, so we have to be very conscious and very cautious”, Sheila exclaimed. With nationalistic and very anti-foreign media, as well as political sentiments, a narrative around migration is exacerbated in the everyday, but especially around key moments in South Africa. For instance, Ronald elaborated that there is a pattern in large-scale and violent xenophobic attacks usually around national election time or the beginning of the new year. Politically and economically, these periods are where South Africa finds herself vulnerable and at the mercy of political rhetoric which often capitalises on anti-immigrant rhetoric.

It is important to note, however, that not all xenophobic occurrences are spoken out loud and are violent (to the body) but do leave a scar on the mind and spirit as Sarah described:

You only need to live in a place where you know that kind of violence is possible as a migrant to feel that hatred. I don't need someone to come up to me and say 'African foreigners are not welcome here'. I already know that. I am aware and that doesn't go away whether or not someone directly attacks me or not.

Ronald adds to this in saying that “you are always in a state of paranoia. For example, in Zimbabwe, there is a paranoia of the authorities. In South Africa, it's a paranoia of everybody you know”.

¹⁰ Kwerekwere “is the derogatory term that black South Africans use when referring to unwanted foreign blacks” (Uzoatu, 2017)

The above speaks to Gunew's (in Ahmed *et al.*, 2003, pp. 41-42) statement that "language remains the most portable of accessories, one which has carved out a corporeal space ... and [goes on] to remind one of home in palpable ways". Drawing from this, how representations and the creative practice are affected will be discussed in the context of South Africa and suggestions on how migrant artists use their mediums as a way to negotiate around spoken language to embody their experience and create a space (of communication) for themselves will be elaborated.

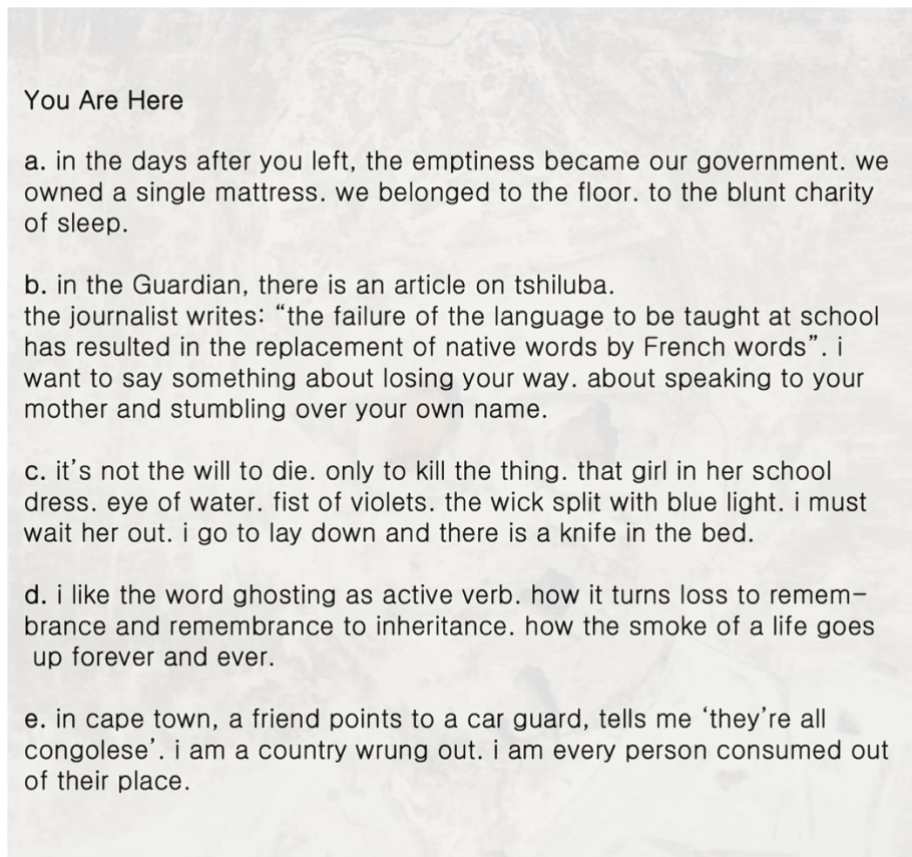


Figure 2: *You Are Here* (Lubala, 2022, p. 40) and *The Leopard's last monument* (Harneis, 2008)¹¹

4.2 On understanding

What is it, then, about how creative pathways communicate differently and make one search for understanding. In another interview, Sarah starts off this discussion quite strongly with how she has a love for "poetry not only because it produces new and alternative knowledge but also because it disrupts the established and already legitimated" and she later gets into how, through her poetry, she prioritises decolonial feminist thinking (Sarah, in Magak, 2022).

¹¹ Cover image of Sarah's book

Alternately, giving examples of sapeurs¹² from the DRC, Mbikayi (in Latar, Lev-er and Wind, 2020) shows us that “in presenting [through the arts] a more positive yet subversive approach to conflict resolution, the human body becomes a site of reimagining cultural and political identities” where this subculture, like the Skhothane in South Africa, uses “self-expression and bring together communities in creative and festive competitions”.

Using tools such as the arts allow us to examine issues, such as migration and xenophobia, through anti-oppressive practices while also placing emphasise on ownership and moving the focus away from the result as “knowledge generation [to] a community response to a community issue” (Potts and Brown, in Kindon, Pain and Kesby, 2007, p. 153). It is a further testament to collective resilience and history as Sarah rejoiced:

You can step into this chorus of voices that have for a long time said ‘we will not be disappeared’ ... It oddly connects you to history in a different way as well. There’s a fraternity that exists there I think, not just in terms of people who have been forcibly removed or not, but also in terms of those who have used art to work through it.

Ronald too believes that art “is community-driven and can be used in a way to unify people when it is done the right way”. The “right way” here is what we find problematic with the creative arts because, as was argued earlier, there is no single truth and it is subjective. Just like Lederach (2005) considers that there is no single technique to art, there is not a single pursuit to peacebuilding. On the other hand, Rogoff (2006, p. 2) argues that, in the production of meaning, participants who project and complete meaning onto these works of art “produce meaning through relations with one another and through the temporality of the event of the exhibition, or the class, or the demonstration or the display”.

On representation, especially in Africa, Mbembé and Nuttall (2004, pp. 351-352) propose two strategies: (1) To rely less on arguments of differences and even originality and rather the “fundamental connection to an elsewhere”. (2) To take more seriously that Africa is also concerned with “space and discontinuities” and that it does not only have “a function of circulation and circuits” and is a space that is “produced”, but it is also a space that circulates and is in constant motion as well.

Building on the above understanding, Sheila gives us the opportunity to simply consider matters in a different light:

¹² A brief look into the sapeurs of the Congo: <https://www.voguescandinavia.com/articles/the-incredible-fashion-of-the-ladies-and-gentlemen-of-the-congo>

It tells people that it is okay to think differently, that it's okay to consider something else. It's just a consideration. You don't have to do anything more than consider that somebody else's logic or somebody else's madness has a method to it.

However, this places less emphasis on the action after the viewing experience that is present in the great debate of the aesthetics of pain (Chouliaraki, 2006; Sontag, 2009; Chan, 2010; Ahmed, 2014). Contrastingly, comparing it to a physical ill that needs to be treated Bale describes:

Like shit is happening and then you go to the doctor and they break it down. Like, 'these are the symptoms' and then you get a diagnosis. That diagnosis doesn't make that illness go away. But understanding what it is that's going on does something. It can help you prepare, because I know what's going on I can take action and take the steps, try and figure out what are the steps to try and resolve this thing because now I am able to articulate it and I am able to understand it to some degree. And I think art does that.

It is also about making strong claims against unjust experiences migrants have to go through as Sarah elaborates: "I found words were the things that could help me not just say I refuse to be disappeared but also to point to the act of being disappeared itself and to talk about the very particular kind of violence [it is]".

This is not met unchallenged, but according to Ronald, art allows people to meet halfway. It becomes a bridge. But, he also reminds us that "[a]rt is complex. Art is not like a gun that you can use. Art is complex in the sense of the viewer, the space ... there's so many layers". With artists being people too, Sheila warns against the layer of the ego in spaces that do not welcome it:

There is a very slim difference [between pride and dignity]. If the dignity of an artist is upset, then I think the ego comes out full force and that's also very not creative because then you're just insisting to meet them at their level.

Unlike Sontag (2009) who requires the writer's journal to understand her ego, Sheila shows us that the integrity of the art and dignity of the understanding trying to be conveyed can be plagued in real time and be seen to affect the piece created.

As an accumulation, beyond the knowledge and understanding, the arts present a "whole rather than the parts, a capacity and pathway that rely on intuition more than cognition" (Lederach, 2005, p. 69). Watts (in Lederach, 2020, p. 142) notes that to achieve understanding, we often use repetition in varying ways and delineates from understanding as comprehension to understanding

as “feeling it in your bones”. Simply put, to properly gauge something, we exercise repetition through different mediums such as music, emotive words and pictures, which often give off that more spiritual and ‘speaking to the heart’ touch. We replicate and reproduce experiences in different ways in order to take them apart and understand them.

These acts of pointing to violence are carried through time. Tatenda and Ronald both mentioned the duty of the artists and the art to preserve and translate time. Lederach (2005) reiterates that through history, he cannot remember things like speeches or proposals but can remember an image and the feeling of music. Accordingly, from whose understanding of which experience needs to be considered, for history has shown documentation, and the manipulation of such, to lack and distort representation.

4.2.1 The role of the many: On (self-)representation



Figure 3: *Jewels* (Legoabe, 2022)

The image you see is Bale’s reflection piece, a South African perspective. From the above, I have argued how discourse today is really asserting the transition to highlighting the voices and

representations by the people who are experiencing social ills, such as xenophobia, in order to gauge and be informed by the actual and lived reality. On the other hand, the above arguments also looked into how experiences and events are not experienced in isolation, and while, for example, xenophobia may directly affect a certain group, entire communities and generations are touched as well.

Said (1994) comments on this in relation to Gramsci's belief that research, such as this paper, are then made invalid if we are to believe in such analyses around exclusions of not being able to understand and relate to social experiences. This further reduces it to the experiences itself (although unique and riddled in power relations) and promotes polarisation, ignorance and the "experience of others to a lesser status" instead of full knowledge that is dependent on the relation of multiple knowledges and our relationship with each other (ibid., p. 36). Hence, it was important for this research to gain a deeper understanding between this grey area of those being represented and by whom when the case is not self-representation, inciting questions on whether these were invited spaces and the complexity of it being a space in a foreign place to which some would argue that migrants have no claim to. Yet, the negotiation of space may take on a different argument.

Firstly, this evaluation should be done on a case by case basis, as stated by all research participants, even Bale herself. There are different questions to be asked in relation to this and different elements and perspectives to consider, as put forward by both Tatenda and Ronald. In this line of thought, being well-informed is one of those important elements. Ronald expands through his own experience of being questioned on representing outside his own experience:

For somebody to make work about xenophobia, they may have to do extensive research. They need to live with migrants. What are the politicians saying? What is going on in the country? What are other African countries saying about xenophobia in South Africa? What is xenophobia in other countries? How does it look like? Somebody has to go through the most to get to that point where they say 'okay, cool. I'm gonna make work about xenophobia because I've done the research'. I'll give you an example. At one point I was challenged by a fellow artist who said you can't make work about women. And I'm like, 'well, I was born by a woman, so why can't I paint my mother, you know?'

His thought here is that those doing the representing have "to go through a process where they're being conscientised in a certain way to understand what it really means to be a foreign national".

This is Bale's thought process as well. She explained that you cannot separate yourself from being informed by the stories you are using to create a piece, but there is a difference and a different type of connection between the person and the piece. Her process, then, centres around emotions. She becomes well informed by the situation and then deduces it to its emotion, especially in cases

that she cannot relate. In an example she says that “I don’t know what it feels like being trapped in a dark truck that’s hot as hell for 24 hours, but I do know what it feels like to be in agony”. She, however, emphasises that agony is not the same for everyone and we shouldn’t take away that intensity, but we all know pain.

Intensity here is important in representation for both Ronald and Tatenda. Tatenda affirms that representation and being a voice and a tool is okay, but it the situation being represented should be accurate and not toned down. Ronald reiterates that it should be in the truest form and not at surface level.

Similarly, Sheila does not consider herself part of the (art) scene in South Africa “for respect to people who actually work in South Africa, work through South African laws, work through South African principles, work with South African stories”. However, having experienced migrant life in South Africa she does not believe that “if anybody else tells the story they connect with they’re wrong. I just think that it would be nicer, more like lucrative to the economy of the people who actually went through the thing to be able to own the right to tell the story”.

Zimbabwean artist Dan Halter who is also white, tests these notions of representations of the (African) immigrant, which, despite actually seeing him having to flee Zimbabwe during Robert Mugabe’s agrarian reforms, his whiteness and privilege situates himself between being a migrant and not, only experiencing mild to no xenophobia (Fikeni, 2015). Responding to the despair of having to flee a country you just arrived in due to xenophobia, Dan Halter and Adam Davies created a piece titled *Shifting the goalposts*¹³ in which they swapped a set of goalposts in South Africa and Zimbabwe to reflect the political contestation between the two places (Halter and Whatiftheworld, 2015, p. 98).

Furthermore, collaborative arts-based research projects really highlight the negotiation with the positionality, vision and self-interests of both the researcher and participants, as well as the compromises that need to be made in order to produce the final product (Grabska, 2022). Hence, even by looking at visuals that have already been produced without the intervention of the researcher, visuals are still subject to many interpretations and the power dynamics that accompany such interpretations (ibid.).

Nonetheless, our poet of this research, Sarah, summarises the above arguments quite poetically:

Isn't it the highest kind of compliment you can get for someone to be so inspired by a piece of your story that they want to represent it in some way and share it with others? I certainly don't write poetry

¹³ <http://danhalter.com/category/work/shifting-the-goalposts/>

just so I can read it you know. [Laughs]. The hope is that it will reach someone out there. I know I'm doing that all the time. I mean I wrote my the entire book to different songs that inspired it and I had a conversations that inspired it and I have images... So, it's a bit like the *country of words*¹⁴, we're the country of art. It also exists.

4.3 Publicly exhibiting pain¹⁵

Reflecting on the choice to publicly display one's emotions of pain and frustration, the narrative tends to highlight the experience of the spectator. Ahmed (2014, pp. 20-21) explores this as a way of empowering the spectator, creating a relationship between the experienced and viewer or invoking a response. On the spectatorship of suffering, Chouliaraki (2006, p. 200) adds that "to go beyond communitarian commitment" and the beliefs that reinforce practices of "caring only for those like 'us'", we should utilise mediation between the spectator and distant sufferer. Turning inwards, this paper aims to understand the person who has opened their experience of suffering to the public:

"Very much bleeding on the page", Sarah details, "but it is also about witnessing and I don't just mean as a writer the things I witness ... but also the experiences of other migrants like me, and witnessing such a sacred space also happens in reverse. The reader who is reading my works". However, she notes, that this "does not feel depleting or exploitative, or like it's taking away from [her]. It feels very much like holy, sacred work. It feels, if the goal is to... what's the opposite of being disappeared? ... Undisappeared".

"[W]e have all been through this collective trauma and I want people to feel understood, I want people to just catch a breath", as stated by Bale on the aims of these public displays of pain. Whereas, sticking with the theme of the physical body, Sheila gives an analogy:

I always think about a scar on the skin. Usually, if you leave it up to nature, the scar clearly heals. Like a scar is programmed to heal, and I feel like art is sometimes that exposure to nature, that an experience in your life needs to actually be healed where you can see... [where] you can build a story where you finally understand something that happens because I think the big thing about trauma that keeps people stuck is the confusion and the wondering why it happens and why it happened to me... For me to be able to expose myself actually is a sign that I'm doing better because when the wound is fresh, I actually don't want anybody to see it.

¹⁴ See section 4.4 for her first reference

¹⁵ We find ourselves going in a full circle as the opening lines of this paper lead to a further coincidence: "'Taban' means 'suffering'" (Taban and Crofts, 2021, p. 124)

In another interview, she quoted the late Toni Morrison: “This is precisely the time when artists go to work. There is no time for despair, no place for self-pity, no need for silence, no room for fear. We speak, we write, we do language. That is how civilizations heal” (Rea, 2019).

For some, the arts offer a sense of protection. Tatenda expressed this by stating that the emotions used to bring together a body of work protects whatever vulnerability the artist had at the time and separates whatever people will say and any criticism that may occur. On the other hand, Ronald believes that his “body of work doesn’t start and end with [him]” and invites others to unpack what his work means to them. However, this is not always met with open arms as he expresses:

There are people who resonate and know and want to support the truth and there's some people who feel like you can't do that because you are now messing up with our bread and butter, because they feel like I would be a radical artist who is bad for business.

Bale brings back the discussion of how negative emotion are often handled in private, in loneliness. So, it is “important for us to have those things that resonate with us that we feel understood by and connected to because it just kind of rehashes the fact that you are not alone”. Almost as if her and Sarah were in conversation together, Sarah accounts that, while she does go to therapy, her writing is a type of therapy in that

[y]ou spend your time writing this poem by yourself. I think of the poem ... I think it was June Jordan, she described it really beautifully. In one of her poems¹⁶ she says, ‘these poems, they are things that I do in the dark, reaching for you, whoever you are’. That’s exactly what it's like.

Thus, while public displaying ones pain can be a way to bring us out of dealing with emotions alone, there are these series of considerations, a sense of duty, to help others (the public) through similar fates. A building of solidarity perhaps? Bale notes that through various mediums “there’s again that opportunity to make it not super violent and abrasive. It can become a sort of visual poetry in a sense that it’s not a newsclip. It’s an artwork”. Similarly, pondering on Sarah’s reference to June Jordan’s poem, we are reminded of how the arts are used as self-soothing, trauma-healing tools by the artists themselves. Then, the creative experience allows us to be soothed, both the viewer and the artist.

¹⁶ Poem titled *These Poems*

Yet, “[w]hen artists are positioned on the margins of the institutional spaces of cultural production, they are burdened with the impossible task of speaking as ‘representatives’, in that they are widely expected to ‘speak for’ the marginalized communities from which they come” (Mercer, 1994, p. 235). Such displays of and focus on suffering are further questioned on their potential to be transformative and are often linked to the reality of pressure to be the ‘good’ or ‘deserving’ migrant that needs to surrender to and capitalise on these narratives of suffering (further reducing them to such) in order to gain assistance and legitimacy throughout the immigration procedure (Jandot, 2019). These formal migration procedures further point to the spaces of creative practices that emerge to negotiate real livelihoods that exist within these constraints of heres and theres.

4.4 Engaging with the ‘third’ space



Figure 4: *Thanks, Xenophobia* (Chukwulozie, 2019)¹⁷

The need to explore these alternative notions of space comes from the need to theories space more in the social science realm (Boyd, 2017). The space you see above in the image was both not

¹⁷ In collaboration with Stevenson Gallery as Sheila was not physically in South Africa

intended to be an empty space and was at the same time. Earlier the paper mentioned that Sheila helped protest an art event in South Africa due to the xenophobic attacks. The above art piece takes place in the booth space that was intended for Nigerian artists. The empty space says something, but filled with words, the space takes a different shape and meaning. On the opening day of the fair, a newspaper with the headline ‘Nigerans flee SA’ was laid in the empty booth space (Rea, 2019). Without stepping foot on South African soil, Sheila was able to make this piece take place. With that in mind, we are introduced to the power that creative endeavours have in terms of space.

“Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached” (Ahmed *et al.*, 2003, p. 1). Migrations are, more often than not, associated with binaries of space, that is, the one left behind and the one fled to. When we talk about migration, we talk about physical spaces and artificial borders that were drawn. However, the new encompassed space is not always welcoming and these situations cannot be reduced to simple ‘heres’ and ‘theres’. Migrants have all sorts of (constrained) options, such as third country resettlement for refugees, but the case here specifically looks at migrants who remain in a space so violent as South Africa. On that note, however, it is important to note that resettlement is made difficult due to factors such as the insufficiency of South Africa’s immigration system, policies and laws, to start with (Kgoleng, in Landau and Pampalone, 2018; Odiaka, 2017). Additionally, we see cases of migrants who do leave, such as Sheila, but are still faced with the effects of xenophobia outside of South Africa.

The arts create a different perspective and experience in daily life, and in terms of issues of conflict and peace. Notions of these third or alternative spaces have been theorised and debated in various literature, as recognised above. These discussions go beyond the abstractions of spaces that are not physical to incite the debate that we as humans do not only live in physical dimensions but also within these abstractions. Lederach (2020, p. 153) provides an example by stating that music, as a process, allows “us to place or locate ourselves and respond to events and experiences that surround our lives”. Said (2003, p. 55) relates space (and time) to which “acquires emotional and even rational sense” where meaning is made up.

In discussion with Tatenda on this idea of space, he said that “whenever you get to create, you escape into a different space and a different space of thought that is close to perfect because you are in your own brain and everything else around you doesn't make any sense”. However, these spaces are still bound by administrations, such as deciding on titles for works and how much to sell them for. Additionally, Tatenda understands such a space as still bound by time: A temporary space “to escape and imagine and dream and then come back to reality”. Whereas, Ronald adds

that it is subject to money, but states that money cannot stop people from hating you despite guaranteeing your safety. That element of hatred in xenophobia will still continue to exist.

Bale takes the question quite literally and ponders that

it's not perfect and unless it's like an installation or whatever, and even that has its limitation, it's not an actual physical space that you can exist in. But I think it helps. I really do think there is an opportunity to realise and manifest and try and visually understand the liminal space that you are in when you are in that position.

Whilst, Sheila believes the “big purpose of art is congregation, gathering...” and that we are bound to be connected to each other in these creative spaces “even if by interest alone or by curiosity alone”. This is powerful, as Bale exclaims, as it allows for people to bring their experiences and own context, therefore opening up room for conversation and exploration. Where, in contrast, we see other mediums, such as the academic lingo of research papers, disengage or make readers feel far-removed as well as preaching ‘so-and-so’ state this, but it is critiqued here by ... instead of starting at the point of departure from the reader as seen in most cases.

Meanwhile, answering a comment on how space is being reproduce through his creative works, Machona (in Yagiz, 2022) believes that his performance art “has a confrontational nature with public space” and therefore has an element of risk to it. While Maurice Mbikayi (in Simbao, 2011) literally took his performance art piece *Intersection*¹⁸ to the streets of Grahamstown and involved public bystanders in his performance by handing out post-it notes that read comments like ‘Are you at home?’ and ‘You are under arrest’ and ‘arrested’ bystanders with the bandages that he was wrapped in. This experience also touched upon the complex relationship between the South African police force and migrants with compromised cooperation from the police by saying ‘yes’ to providing a horse, but with the fact that a police escort was to be had, while there was even a volunteer to wear a gas mask (Simbao, 2011). This ambiguity speaks to the role of the police in the context of xenophobia in South Africa, as it is often found that law enforcement is inconsistent between protecting migrants from and during xenophobic attacks, to being xenophobic themselves (Landau and Pampalone, 2018).

Moreover, like Tatenda and Ronald’s comments on the existence, or more like dependence, on these spaces to others, the above performance piece reveals that these spaces are still controlled and regulated by the rule of law and continue a form of migrant surveillance. We see the negotiation between these different spaces with xenophobia really come to play here. A dilemma

¹⁸ Images of the performance can be viewed here:
<https://www.ru.ac.za/artsof africa/galleryvideos/artslounge2011/intersection/>

as well. As we have come to understand, xenophobia tries to disappear migrants from the South African scene, and if not completely, silences them at the bare minimum. To survive the sporadic violent attacks, migrants keep their heads down but what in the case of when they display themselves and their disdain on a public stage in South Africa? While the creative realm has allowed them to express themselves in another language that is a bit more ambiguous, bringing their art to a public stage reveal their identities as foreigners and give them a spotlighted stage.

Contrastingly, Sheila brings us back to point out that this third space is where the mind can flee when the body cannot. However, this too is a luxury, but within this space it allows people to go further and even define what their place of freedom is and how they want to go about with their lives. Likewise, and ending on a positive note, Sarah believes that art allows many to negotiate around conflicting places and exist through these spaces and refers to Chinua Achebe's *country of words*:

It's the universe that exists just in writing, in books and poetry and you get to live there and you can live there with others if you want or by yourself and you get to choose when you enter and exit. So yes, in very real ways it has, but also in even just describing the witnessing and people holding space is literally created space and it's made so strange the writing of it and then being out in the world and being seen in that very particular way also means that I take up space differently now than I did. I find myself feeling a lot more assured of my belonging than I've ever been before and I think it is due in large part to having people make space and hold space for me. It is so great because that place, you can take it anywhere and it exists no matter what country you're in, no matter what language you speak. The hope is hopefully that it also creates space in the reader.

Chapter 5

The Limits to Creativity and Beyond



Figure 5: *Visa* (Muchatuta, 2017)

While bringing such knowledge and power of creative endeavours to the fore, there are various limitations. The problem with creative expressions of social problems is that it is often temporary. Sontag (2010, pp. 376-377) tells us that passing around a photograph of a depiction of actual pain and suffering desensitises the viewer, makes them aware and collectively provides a consensus among the audience that such experiences are awful, but nothing is done beyond that. It draws the onlooker in the moment, but once the exhibition has ended, the music faded or the poem finished, the audience leaves, more often than not, unchanged or without further taking action. On the other hand, Robert Sinnerbrink (in D’Arcens and Waldek, 2021, p. 4) remarks that these mediums create

an ‘ambiguous space of encounter between perpetrators and witnesses’ where complex and often extremely uncomfortable emotions can facilitate transformative social engagement with the long-term traumatic consequences of politically motivated violence.

This temporariness is not entirely negative and not entirely temporary. Lederach (2005) details how this points to how we link to the past and restore important narratives, how people heal and communities are sustained.

Speaking on the art scene and changing nature of ideologies in South Africa, Dreyer (2008, pp. 113-114) recommends a ‘discursive space’ where art spaces need to continue being “a public space and platform for interpretation, comment, protest and community involvement”. However, the participants themselves were reflexive on the shortcomings of their own professions with Tatenda stating that

this is always the conscious part [of art]: that the people that actually look at the art are not the everyday humans ... There’s an element of access ... Unless if I am to be intentional about bringing the art to the people so that they can see exactly what this effect does.

Here, Tatenda proposes “to bring art into a place where people actually never had access”. Notwithstanding the potential access has, Ronald problematises the system that creative endeavours still exist within, regardless of the other issue of accessing funding as a foreigner:

The only issue I have with the art is that sometimes the message gets watered down due to the elitist agenda. Because of the economics behind the selling and purchasing of art, it tends to water down the subject or what’s being said in the work because of the prominence and the provenance behind the art or the person who owns the art.

Viewing creative practices that speak to social ills as a type of agency is not entirely bulletproof. We should not be confused with agency and victimisation because the agency that migrants possess does not take away “the rights violations and economic deprivation that motivated their move” (Landau and Pampalone, 2018, p. 5). It can also be as simple as the danger of obsessing over the arts as a form of knowledge because it can take away from “aesthetically valuable artistic work” (Sievers, in Parzer, 2021, p. 2461). All things considered, all things flawed. Processes to peace are not one track and the arts are not singular, but such limitations do need to be accounted for and conversations such as these need to be continued.

Chapter 6

Epilogue

This study had the objective of exploring different knowledges and spaces that creative practice has to offer in understanding complex social problems such as migration and xenophobia, but starting from the point that those taking part in such a study are already experts in their own lives. We looked beyond the words and pictures to the people themselves, who indeed exhibited their own traumas, but also connected with those of the communities around them. Subsequently, this called for looking into how such experiences differ in representation and self-representation and delves deeper into the action of representing these often negative experiences to a public audience, as well as how all of this results in a spatial dimension of communicating and being. To do this, the research employed qualitative methods of interviewing, biographical inquiry and observation to gauge an in-depth look into and understanding of the complexities and multi-layered lives of five artists and the spaces they inhabit.

Negotiating space(s) and its claims is a concern that migration deals with on a day-to-day basis. However, spaces are subject to inclusions, exclusions, violence, peace, policies and so forth. To find a space within these spaces, not only for livelihoods, but for meaning-making, is something the literature is becoming more attuned to. We are moving beyond these long-held notions of citizenship and integration to how individuals have been finding and making their own spaces in the world. This becomes especially important when the spaces we find ourselves in after having migrated are unwelcoming or overrun with violence and their own problems. No space and place is exempt from this.

From here, the research situated itself in a creative space that exists between, within and around physical places. The first, where some have migrated from. For differing motivations, individuals, families and people are finding themselves needing to leave home. This paper has shown that we should not discriminate outside the categories of refugee and asylum seeker, because other seeking motivations are just as valued and constraining, especially within the context and history of Africa. The second is where migrants find themselves in. In this case, it is South Africa, a country plagued by common occurrences of xenophobia that are primarily directed at African migrants. However, agency does exist. Migrants are never fully subject to the 'here' and 'there'. They have the capacity to refuse the situation in South Africa and move away from it, but this is not the case for all.

Nonetheless, this paper looked at how language plays an important role in xenophobia and how migrant artists are using their own language through creative means to embody and communicate their lived experiences. While experiences of migration and xenophobia are not the primary reason for choosing the medium of the arts, migrant artists use this as a tool, not only of expression and

protest, but for trauma healing, remembering and connecting to communities within and beyond their own. These actions are not exploitative but do have the potential to be when utilising and revealing a painful experience. Yet, artists feel more as if it is their duty to connect others and bring them out of private loneliness and suffering, because they too have been comforted by confronting their own traumas and lack of given space.

In doing so, these practices open up a world of different understandings, not only for us spectators but for those in the experiences themselves and those who find themselves going through something similar. This provides a missing link that other knowledges are missing. As notions of identity and citizenship are changing, we have neglected to place emphasis on the alternative ways that people who have not fallen within these definitions have negotiated a space for themselves and continued their livelihoods. Spaces such as these which are not bound, but are influenced by, geographical, physical and temporal dimensions speak to how conflict, peace and its subsequent traumas can also move across and beyond these dimensions. Hence, they are not as straight forward as a one-time Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a tribunal or even therapeutic practices, because they themselves are always in motion. However, they are spaces in which we all sometimes try and gauge through our own representations and further understandings with. These, on the other hand, should not take away from those who find themselves at the forefront of adverse instances, such as xenophobia.

Importantly, as people have been managing to exist in the margins for time on end, we should not be using these spaces of creativity as an excuse to ignore the structural and systemic issues that preserve xenophobia and the social problems associated with migration. We should be looking to them more to see if there are solutions, or considerations, that point to acts of being undisappeared.

To end off, I would like to leave you, the reader, with a very paraphrased quote from my former visual arts teacher, Mr Walter Daniels, that inspired this piece. He used to always say in our sessions that once you have made a mark on canvas, paper or whatever surface, it will remain there forever. Even if you try to cover or erase it, it never disappears completely, even if you cannot see it. Not knowing it then but now, this is an analogy that I think is very important in understanding experiences of conflict, peace and trauma, as well as the act of being undisappeared.

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¹⁹ Artworks sent in by the research participants that were not available online are indicated with 'no place'

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