

Rendered Passages



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Rendered Passages approaches the unsettling potentiality of migration by exploring its performative dimension, by giving back and restoring (rendering up) in an attempt at transcoding and rephrasing, instead of fixity and portrayal. The works join to share their sense of what Sara Ahmed terms 'uncommon estrangements,' aiming to open up blind spots around silenced narratives of migration that (un)settle grand narratives.

Collective curatorial statement

Rendered Passages opens up a nexus where the complexities of migrant experiences intersect, negotiating different definitions, objects, and notions as ways of challenging, expressing or simply observing the nuances of these concepts. 'Home' is a central theme in these works, yet if we consider ourselves as always being in motion, we are called to further ask: How do we actively refuse the implied trajectory of 'home(ing)' as well as of 'place(ing)', which remains 'towards something/some place' (Ahmed 1999)? This trajectory is enforced first by the colonial borders and barriers arbitrarily placed across the globe, maintained by the bureaucracy of documentation and policing, and finally embedded in people's individual conceptions of self-identification.

The works brought together in this group exhibition expand and interrogate the concept of 'migration' in an ongoing discourse as a rather fluid concept that traverses space, time, and social landscapes. Attempting to define people's experiences in different spaces and temporalities presents an (un)expected problem that turns us at times to language, naming, and narrative, and at other times to histories and place(ing). In most cases, the movement of people – accompanied by personal and collective conceptions of belonging, home, displacement, and (un)settling – is marred by the bureaucratisation of individuals and nation states. The granting of 'migrant status', as Sarah Ahmed puts it, 'erases and conceals the historical determination of the experiences of migration' (1999: 333).

In some instances, the question of refusal is answered by commentary on (m)othering. (M)other here serves as a word that grounds the notions of home, language, and displacement. Language, and the discomform of both its settled and unsettled state, is a central figure of this collective interdisciplinary expression, as can be seen in the installation *Home is a Far Away Place*, which visualises the disruption of home and identity, whereas spitting (mother tongues illustrates the struggle towards a fixed identity, limited to a singular narrative of self. The ambiguity of migratory experiences is raised in the happening titled *Migratory Ambivalences*. Through an open postcard/zine-making workshop, the audience is invited

Fouad Asfour

'this is not my language': spitting (m)other tongues

Inspired by Chilean artist Cecilia Vicuña's book *Spiral Temple* (2012), this performance explores discomfort in inhabiting a body and identity that are fixed, inscribed, named. It interrogates how language, as a symbolic form of communication, is enacted through canonised governance of national grammars. Drawing from the contested debate around decolonising language and the use of colonial languages, I refer to the practices of artists and writers who have declared war on the epistemic colonial as 'linguistic guerrilla' (Mohamed Khair-Eddine), or 'border-writing' (Gloria Anzaldúa). Using food colourant to spray my elocution onto suspended paper, I refuse the correct pronunciation of any language that roams my body, making the unhoming of my 'hand-to-hand combat' of accent (Derrida 1998: 46) visible.

In my spitting-writing practice, I want to make visible the performativity of language, re-enact the multiple forms of migration my family has experienced, and listen to the silenced unhome Arabic language of my father who migrated to Germany in the '60s. The performance activates the repulsive affect of spitting in public, in a bid to sound out borders drawn across my writing/body/self. Borders do not only appear as fleshiness, or grain, or 'the rustle of language' (Barthes 1989). I explore disappearing in a 'pure' form of elocution and accent-less-ness, erected as border against unhomeliness, against any language 'other', and how the performance of language erects and re-enacts physical borders against a perceived bastardised, creolised and deformed language. Similar to seasickness, this spitting is induced by standing still and being fixed in language by grammatically, driven by a desire to delimit, queer and other languaging to find new forms of estranged communities.

Matseliso Motsaone

Home is a Far Away Place: The Disruption and Unsettling of Family and Home in Letsema Matsela's 'Mohatsa Lino' and 'Good Morning Sir'

Home is a faraway place. It's distant, and beckons a deep search within; conjures longing. Letsema Matsela longed for home, lost it and found it again through his migrant experience.

This installation visualises the disruption of home and identity. Here, Matsela's lyrics are in constant motion, much like the man who frequently cried 'let us go home' in his songs. These ruminations of an artist, a legend of his time, are unsettled and disrupted to drive further the point of migration's effects on the human experience. Matsela's song lyrics are presented to depict the complexities of language and its ambiguity in the context of new and challenging places, encompassing messages of longing, homing and identity embedded in the processes and experiences of orators, musicians and artists of different kinds.

'Mohatsa Dimo' loosely translates to 'Wife of the Beast'. Historically characterised as loose beer brewers without any real 'family', migrant women in urban apartheid South Africa were mistreated, stripped of their dignity and any semblance of the maternal fabric so closely associated with home. In this song, Matsela laments the lack of compassion for these wives of the apartheid beast, and remembers the warmth of his own mother – a memory that serves as a kind of homing device in a world where conceptions of family, nurturing and stability have been unsettled.

In 'Good Morning Sir', Matsela paints the picture of a black worker unsettled by a new country, foreign language and challenging master-servant dynamic. In this three-minute soundscape, Matsela uses language as a vehicle for expressing the unsettled self, a powerful critique of the migrant experience in apartheid South Africa.

Dr DuZulie Ndlovu

presented a seminar on humanising migration research in/through poetry. This session introduced the various uses of poetry in migration research, with the objectives of exploring researcher identities and their influence on research, the opportunities that poetry allows for reflexivity and self-care, and the practice of using poetry in research.

Greer Vallej's research and practice interests include curatorial interventions in institutions and exhibition spaces focused on African colonial histories. She took students through different methods and considerations of the curatorial process, including speculative practice and affect, as well as exhibitions as social intervention.

Juan Carlos Orrantía, facilitated by Universidad de los Andes-Bogotá, presented his photographic works, which are concerned with questions of representation, perception and history. Embracing photography's uncertainty and contingency, through colour, the manipulation of archival images or the photobook form, his works seek a sense of destabilisation.

With a background in dance and performance art, **Nashlonweehipwe Mushaa'dja's** session engaged with various examples of artistic production from Namibia and southern Africa that pay attention to historical forced migrations of African bodies and art as a result of colonialism and apartheid. The session showed how contemporary artists have always relied on mobility as a strategy of intervening in these historic migratory injustices – delving into thematic territories such as colonial borders, and human remains collections by colonial scientists – and that this strategy of mobility is a vehicle of international solidarity, which is co-forged by artists on the continent and in its diaspora.

Dr Nicola Cloete explored how emotion and affect are conveyed in artistic practice and artworks. This session offered a reading of Berni Searle's work as an examination of migration and assumed identity and of how these issues take shape on the artist's own body, which is positioned in water and on land.

Nolan Oswald Dennis's talk, 'Irritations', looked at three interrelated bodies of his own work: 1) no conciliation is possible; 2) a black cosmography; 3) a garden for labour. Approaching these series in relation to other historical artworks, he reflected on an alter history of place and space beyond the horizon of recognition (or what it means to work from a place of misrecognition) and the transformative relations which emerge from conditions of being improperly, generatively (mis)understood (or the struggle to do whatever we need to).

Professor Noor Nieftagodien discussed the historical evolution of Johannesburg, from its founding in the late 19th century to the present, as an urban constellation defined by migration. Professor Nieftagodien noted that the city has always been the destination of migrants/immigrants from across the world, particularly black miners from the southern African region, who were the main labour force that built the modern economy. The second part of this lecture considered some of the salient factors behind the apparent normalisation of xenophobia that is tarnishing the character of the city of gold.

Pamela Sunstrum took us through a presentation of her exhibition, *There Are Mechanisms in Place* (2018). Taking its title from a speech responding to student protests given by South Africa's Minister of Higher Education and Training, Blade Nzimande, and thinking through the movements of homing pigeons, Pamela's installation/homing device set the tone for reflections on shifting ideas about home, place, and global navigation.

Sinethemba Twalo is a practitioner and a founding member of NG0 – NOTHING GETS ORIG-ANISED. Drawing from the words of writers like James Baldwin to Dionne Brand, Twalo mapped migration through a sonic delivery, accompanied through a reading of their *An Imagination of Discontinuity: The Political Possibilities of Objects*.

to witness how nonnormative communities of refusal can frame moments of place-making as un-homing. *Home-being Within and Without* equally engages this notion as a process of concurrently producing, losing, and refining home within oneself and respective environments.

Another perspective is opened up in the work *Passing*, which looks at strategies that secure a sense of belonging and home, coping with experiences of migration that involve the 'splitting of home as a place of origin and home as a sensory world of everyday experience' (Ahmed 1999: 342). This gesture of reworking and reimagining oneself as part of an imagined social context is captured in the performance *Lived Languages*, which threads together how black middle-class women's lives change and become unsettled as they migrate for employment, forever finding a new 'home' to settle in. The narratives of women who are able to find some sense of stability despite the challenges of maintaining their livelihoods, is explored in *Uncharted*, articulating these women's hopes/prospects of returning back home forever. *Bakone: Practices of Homing* simultaneously navigates spiritual practices that host affective processes of homing, such as the enunciation of the sereto, or praise poem, that evokes home through ancestral lands.

In grappling with issues of (national, regional, collective or individual) identities pertaining to gender, race, class, sexuality, *Rendered Passages* proposes generative points of convergence that may unfold complex issues surrounding migratory processes in southern Africa and more broadly. Through this intersectional approach, we hope to engage the audience in reflections that affect and influence the formation of human identities in response to different forms of embodied and/or psychic migration and displacement.

Exhibition contributors:

Andiswa Molangathi
Fouad Asfour
Kamogelo Walaza
Maphuti Maboja
Matseliso Motsaone
Nomagwale Mofite
Rory Thomas

Kamogelo Walaza

Lived Languages

Memory and identity are at the centre of my installation and performance that explore the problems and possibilities experienced by a black middle-class woman migrating between different cities for employment. Are we aware of – and do we acknowledge – how consistently the past infiltrates our present moment? Bound to a forward momentum, in the installation and performance we are faced with the material realities of a black middle-class woman moving towards upward mobility; from the monumental (film and photography), to the everyday (scraps and receipts found in pockets), to the intimate (letters and diaries). How do we reconcile our living speed with the bygone symbols that surround us? In each layer of this installation and performance, memories of black middle-class identity, in constant upward mobility, emerge. The act of image-making facilitates both remembering and forgetting, both enhancing and obscuring the content of memory. No single object here is monolithic; the performance assaults the mind, details magnifying and then dissolving into the ether.

The impact of the performance and installation is instrumental in threading together the image of this body of work: each component prompts the viewer to consider the featured works as metaphors of our intuition. As human beings, we consistently rework and reimagine ourselves during our lives as people with sociopolitical issues; in this instance through the eyes of a black middle-class woman's identity as a migrant.

Performance: Kamogelo Walaza
Dramaturgy: Wezile Hamans

Nomagwale Mofite

Passing

My work is an exploration of identity negotiation in the everyday lives of migrants. I utilise the sociological term 'passing', which refers to the crossing of a social boundary by stigmatised or marginalised individuals. While this term is commonly used to refer to racially ambiguous-looking individuals passing as a person from outside their racial category, I use it in my work beyond the crossing of racial borders, to refer to the variety of ways immigrants (re)present themselves in order to pass as a local or someone of 'tolerable' identity, to secure a sense of belonging. I do this through a series of photographic self-portraits.

Immigrants face a multitude of microaggressions and develop tactics to try manage negativity towards them. One such tactic is passing. I use balloons to represent the diversity of identity traits that make us who we are, a similar artistic tool used by Athi Patra Ruga. I deviate slightly from Ruga, who once hung 250 liquid-filled balloons from his body, weighing him down, to illustrate how ideas of identity can be burdensome. Instead, I fill my balloons with air, putting them on my head to emphasise the fragility of these ideas we hold dear in our imaginations. I use the colour red to (re)present traits from the host nation that immigrants begin to embody in order to pass in the different spaces they occupy; or red and pink to indicate how immigrants may selectively pick out parts of themselves from their own backgrounds that conform to their environment in order to secure a sense of belonging and home.

We would like to thank the Open University Network (OSUN) for their generous support, as well as our partners: La Universidad de los Andes (Bogotá, Colombia), Bard College (Berlin, Germany), and The Forge (Johannesburg).

Andiswa Molangathi

Uncharted: Looking at the Experiences and Physical Factors that Arise from the Unforeseen Circumstances of Displacement and Migration.

This artwork is a narrative on women, specifically Chichi Ngozi, Esther Khumalo, Tia Rebbecca and Nomisa (anonymous interviewees), as they take us through their journeys of migration – forced or voluntary; how they have been affected by their migration; and how migration speaks to their sense of identity, both before and after their displacement. It looks at the ideologies that govern their identities, such as race, gender, sexuality and religion, how their understanding of these have changed, and how some ideologies continue to affect them even after they migrated.

These women narrate their stories, representing their experiences of migration and the things they have had to do to get to where they were going in order to adapt and make a living, from finding love and making families, to engaging in sex work, or being objectified in order to survive the situations they find themselves in. They also look back at where they have come from – their memories and hopeful wishes of 'going back home forever'. The rough, harsh environmental conditions they have had to endure, with the addition of xenophobia to contend with, all come together to create the resilient identities they have become.

* These women's stories were sourced from the book by Loren B. Landau & Tanya Pampalone (eds), 2018. *I Want to Go Home Forever: Stories of Becoming and Belonging in South Africa's Great Metropolis*. New York: NYU Press.

Maphuti Maboja

Bakone: Practice(s) of Homing

This work is a reflective experiment navigating cultural practice(s) of homing – to evoke a feeling of home when home is no longer a location that is enable one to manifest a somatic feeling of home.

Ancestral veneration is an intimate practice of connecting to your ancestors by performing various acts that pay them homage. This installation positions the shrine/altar as a space where ancestral veneration can be performed or practised, a tangible place of reflection and refuge; a shared *home*. An offering of tea at the altar signifies a gesture of reverence to the ancestors, in appreciation of their ongoing protection.

Sereto sa Bakone is a Pedi clan praise poem for all family names that belong to the Bakone clan, and its recitation is deeply rooted in feelings of nostalgia passed down to Bakone descendants. The poem is integral to rituals connected to ancestral veneration, to activate the altar, enabling the ancestors to recognise you, hence the poem's opening greeting, 'Thobela, Bakone!'

The praise poem includes stories about Moleletje, the ancestral land of the Bakone, functioning as a requiem both to the land and the people that once occupied it. Through this acknowledgement of the land and the people, the reciter awakens or manifests home, allowing the Mokone descendant to inherit these memories.

As a Mokone grandchild with no access to the physical home of the Bakone ancestors, I write my own sereto (poem) – a conversation between myself and my ancestors, tackling feelings of estrangement, dissociation with the mother tongue (SePedi), and addressing the complexities of preserving these homing practices.

Rory Thomas

Migratory Ambivalences

The migratory experience is often saturated with ambiguity. A not-yet-here or -there, migration stands as a process which troubles the perceived solidity of borders, bodies, and the nation state. In this way, it could be said that migration, in its manifold material and conceptual manifestations, productively *queers* the strictures of normative nation-building and (inter)subjectivity. To evoke such a disruptive notion is not, as Sara Ahmed (1999: 333, 344) warns, to 'construct an essence of migration in order then to theorize that migration as a refusal of essence' in aid of an idealised migratory discourse, but to explore how this process constructs nonnormative communities of refusal and sustenance that 'come to life through the collective act of remembering in the absence of a common terrain' (ibid.: 344). In this context, community building as a socially conscious (artistic) practice stands as a fecund device to navigate the potentialities of a world made otherwise through queer articulations.

Inspired by the insistent refusal of migration to be ideologically or conceptually restrained, *Migratory Ambivalences* works to problematise the relational connectivity of queerness and migration through arts-based research in order to consider how each of our contemporary articulations of sexual and gender identity are produced within, and in relation to, globalization' (Wesling 2008: 45). My contribution to the exhibition comprises a postcard/zine-making workshop facilitated in collaboration with the GALA Queer Archive and The Fruit Basket organisation, along with an arts-based research presentation from the African Centre for Migration & Society (ACMS).

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Figures from Matseliso Motsaone's *Home is a far away place: the disruption and unsettling of family and home in Letsema Matsela's 'Mohatsa Lino' and 'Good Morning Sir'*. Photographs by M.T. Ramakatlane.



Figures from Matseliso Motsaone's *Home is a far away place: the disruption and unsettling of family and home in Letsema Matsela's 'Mohatsa Lino' and 'Good Morning Sir'*. Photographs by M.T. Ramakatlane.

Open Society University Network (OSUN) and Wits History of Art's Forced Migration and Art

The Wits History of Art department recently presented Forced Migration and Art, a cross-campus course supported by Open Society University Network (OSUN) taught in collaboration with Universidad de los Andes (Bogotá, Colombia) and Bard College Berlin (Berlin, Germany), exploring the ways in which research-based artmaking generates new kinds of knowledge about migration and displacement as urgent global challenges.

Building on a Research-Creation approach to teaching migration history in dialogue with the arts, students developed individual or collaborative open-media artistic projects relating to the (im)materialities that speak to migration.

Thematically, the course revolved around the bureaucracies that have been created to curb and control migration and to react to asylum claims of those made stateless. They mirror a fundamental dilemma in all attempts to find responses to forced migration, throughout the 20th and 21st centuries: on the one hand, nation states and the international community based on nation states have forged institutions – legal provisions and procedures, agencies, NGOs, etc. – to mitigate, alleviate, control, hedge, and even 'solve' the humanitarian, social and political consequences of forced migration. On the other hand, these institutions never intended to address the political causes that produced, and to this day produce, forced migration in the first place. Not getting to the roots of the underlying political and social problems, the institutions failed to keep the promise that every displaced, stateless person would eventually get on a road to state citizenship, through integration, repatriation, or resettlement. Instead, national and international policies and administrations have focused predominantly on combating migration as such, a futile endeavour that leaves a trail of bureaucratic failure in its wake. The Johannesburg course focused particularly on how artists have observed the ways in which different communities have navigated the limitations and

possibilities of migration. Centring artistic practices as a starting point, the 'research' dimension of the course addressed the materialities of increasingly digitalised migration regimes.

We invited a rich array of artists and academics to engage us throughout the programme:

Ayron Hericilto is a visual artist and curator from Cachoeira and Salvador, Brazil. His work comprises installation, performance, photography, and audiovisual media, incorporating elements of Afro-Brazilian culture, and has been featured in exhibitions, festivals and biennials throughout Brazil, as well as in Europe and Africa. His works incorporate themes and material elements such as palm oil, fire in the Brazilian colonial era, jerky, sugar, fish, sperm and blood, body pain, ruptures, apartheid, and dreams of freedom.

Dr Bernard-Akol Jackson took students through examples of his work, including REDIAP(EB)D TLENECK, highlighting the pitfalls of the practical administration of immigration law and the language used in this context. His performances point at state administration procedures as a form of national self-protection against migration.

Professor Brett Pyper explored migration as a network that has resonated in the contestative narratives and representations of Johannesburg, with a focus on the forces, such as economic, ideological and physical, that have led to migration being so integral to Johannesburg's cultures and identities throughout its history.

Charissa Diniz is a curator, writer and art teacher from Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Diniz is the Arts Research Africa (ARA) curator in residence at Wits History of Art. Her talk, in collaboration with artist Ayron Hericilto, looked at the history of slavery between the African continent and Brazil, with a focus on the ways in which art and spiritually can address the relations between Brazil and the African continent.