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Family stories:

Re-imagining family photography through Zanele Muholi's lens.

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Acknowledgements

I dedicate this work to uMama noRhadi.

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Declaration:

I, Vuyisanani Am, declare that **Family stories: Re-imagining family photography through Zanele Muholi's lens**, is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete reference.

Signature: V.Am

Abstract

This study examines Zanele Muholi's photographs in relation to the genre of family photography. This study questions whether we can consider Zanele Muholi's photos as part of family photography. Family photography documents events. It captures celebrations, birthday parties and graduations and rarely ever captures pain and sadness. This study questions the heteronormativity and patriarchy that is reinforced by family photography. This study also questions notions of identity and belonging through two selected works, *Somnyama Ngonyama* and *Faces and Phases*. Muholi photographs members of the LGBTQI community, capturing scars, funerals and celebrates same-sex tenderness. The study therefore questions the definition of what family photography is when considering the photographed LGBTQI community that Zanele Muholi portrays, and aims to expand understandings of this genre while simultaneously engaging it critically.

Keywords: family photography, LGBTQI, identity, belonging, heteronormativity, Zanele Muholi, blackness, patriarchy.

Prelude: Mihle and Silver

"She's writing about us," said Mihle to Silver.

"Who?" asked Silver.

"The person holding the pen. No wait, no one writes things down on paper these days. They all type on their laptops and iPads."

"Who are you talking about Mihle?" asked Silver.

"The person who chose us from an online site and stated in her mind that we are part of family photography," said Mihle, rolling his eyes.

"Really?! Is she crazy perhaps?" asked Silver (baffled).We are part of portraits though, nowhere near to be considered part of family photography.

"I know right! But no, she has decided that we belong to this category," said Mihle to Silver.

"She does know that we are part of the LGBTQI community, right?" asked Silver (still baffled).

"That's the thing my guy, she does know, and she's determined to prove everyone wrong and ensure that we have a spot in being considered part of family photography."

"I wonder what drives her and why does she need us to be recognized," whispered Silver.

"We have not belonged in any category in such a long time. The only category we belong to is the one that we created for ourselves."

"I think what drives her need for portraits and our portraits specifically to be recognized as part of family photography is how people shy away from looking at us in galleries and museums." said Mihle.

"But that's okay though", said Silver. "People shy away from us in public spaces all the time, why would they try and embrace us in such spaces now?"

"The thing is my dude, she has it in her head that pain is an integral part of what makes a human being and what surrounds families. She believes for that to not be part of family

photography is mad . She wants to know why humans can't consider pain in their family photographs. Why do we only capture the beautiful moments and not the painful ones? The crazy thing is, she answers her own question. Who would want to remember the sad moments in life, capture them and frame them and put them up on their walls," said Mihle.

"If she knows all this, why is she typing and writing about us? It does not seem that anyone would take her work seriously if she herself already knows what people will think," asked Silver.

"She writes about us, because the question why is always on her mind. Why is this image considered part of family photography and not that one. Pain draws her in, how it moulds and changes humans into different people. Why can't that change be reflected in images? Do you want to hear the craziest part?"

"I don't think anything else can top this one but shoot away," said Silver (looking skeptical).

"Brace yourself my friend. She has portraits of her parents and sisters on her home wall now. She put them up herself a few weeks ago," whispered Mihle.

"No way," said Silver

"Yes, way my friend. She started her thesis by stating that she did not grow up in a family that took images, two years later she has put up family images in her family home. But, to echo what she had said about pain and how it is a part of human beings, some of her family images are images of pain. Images of remembrance of what has already passed and what will never be. There is a possibility that she might be contradicting herself with her own writing about family photography."

"I can relate to her pain My parents still have images of me in what used to be my home even after my death. I gather those images of mine could be both a source of comfort and of pain at the same time. One of them is a portrait of mine that was used during my funeral service Double kill for them I gather. All they have of me are the images on their wall. My existence

is being kept alive by memories and images. I guess she might not be as crazy as we first accused her, our typing friend," said Silver with a crocked smile.

The End

Chapter 1: Introduction

I was introduced to family photography and Zanele Muholi in a Visual History module helmed by Professor Patricia Hayes. Family photographs have never been of particular interest to me which I have gathered stemmed from never having had a family photograph. It was an intriguing concept to come across and I decided why not embark on this uncharted territory, having no ties with it. In my visual history project, I decided to commence on the journey of *Family Photography with a Twist,* examining Zanele Muholi's photographs. It was a project that tackled themes of pain, visibility, invisibility and the private realm.

This Master's research was and still is governed by my search of a family photo and its meaning. It is research that pursues themes of belonging, family, community, blackness, identity and portraiture. In my visual history project, I discussed family photography and Zanele Muholi's images in broad terms. The focal point of this research instead are two collections by Muholi, *Faces and Phases* and *Somnyama Ngonyama.* These are two collections that embrace portraiture, and I wanted this research to demonstrate what portraiture has played and still plays in family photography. I explore how family photographs have looked for black families and their relationships with family photos. This is research that seeks to posit a divergent look at what has been known as family photography and what it can be. The aim of this research paper is to include these two collections by Muholi into family photograph, while at the same time remaining cognisant of the limitations set by this genre even in my exploration of Muholi's work. This is a research paper that pursues inclusion in a society that thrives on exclusion.

This introductory chapter pays attention to the genre of family photography, a genre that has been traditionally heteronormative. Drawing from scholars such as Gillian Rose, Marianne Hirsch as well scholars writing about family photography in South Africa, the chapter

focuses on how this genre has been constituted. It is a genre that can be viewed as indelible, especially in its rigidness to portray the nuclear family as the only form of what constitutes family photography. What defines a family photograph? What is family photography in black families? What does it look like?? To engage these questions, I pay attention to practices of family photography in South Africa, including Santu Mofokeng's collection called *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me:1890-1950.* Each of our families might be similar, but they look different. I did not grow up in a family that took photographs, perhaps the parents that I had also did not grow up in families that took photographs. They carried that into the little family they tried to create. Hence, we only have one photograph of my sister as a baby. My family consisted of my father, mama and two sisters. It also consisted of cousin brothers and cousin sisters that would come and go. My family album consisted of individuals I had never met including my mother's family, her cousins, brothers and sisters, and she was the last born out of eight children. We never stood a chance at meeting our grandparents, with a mother being the last born. I do not know what your family looks like. I do not know what feelings the genre of family photography conjures up for you. Feelings of loss and sadness spring to mind for me.

Performing belonging

I hold on to photographs that reminds me of death, knowingly and unknowingly. I hold on to images that remind me of loss and those missing in our lives. They adorn my home, hang on walls that refuse to move. My sister and I hung them in the hopes that they remember us. We hung them hoping and wishing to not forget. We also put them in shoe boxes hoping to forget. Some burn these family photographs attempting to move on with life, while others enlarge these photographs and use them at funerals. Without knowing it, we are holding on

to death while we are alive in the photographs that we carry in our school bags and wallets. They are a reminder of what has been and what will never be. They are a reminder to live.

This is suggested in Pierre Bourdieu's book *Photography: A Middle Brow Art*, whereby he discusses how photography is an activity that "one does on holiday and what makes a holiday."[1] Being on a holiday is an adventure that needs and warrants capture because as Bourdieu states, the practice of photography ends up "immortalizing the high family points of family life."[2] Family photography is guilty of capturing the happy moments that people would love to remember. It is a genre that is guilty of harboring hope and happiness. Similarly, Julia Hirsch in *Family Photographs: Content, Meaning and Effect* argues that "the family pictures we like best are poignant and optimistic."[3] This might be a generalization to make that most take happy photographs in order for them to look back at them fondly and try to remember the beauty of the time that has passed. Family photography, much like other kinds of photography allows the past to be traced in the present, displaying only smidgens of the past.

Family photography is a genre that operates within the limits of exclusivity, and it relies on positive relationships. Mothers taking their babies' first newborn images, when they first start to walk and when they start crèche. Gillian Rose in *Doing Family Photography* provides a useful framework for dominant tropes of this genre. She ascribes sameness in relation to "the photos of 'first': hospital visitors, first time home, first outing, first smile, first solid food, first tooth."[4] Rose states that family photographs have a sense of being similar and redundant,

[1] Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-brow Ar*t (Polity Press, 1990), p .99.
[2] Bourdieu, *Photography*, p .19.
[3] Julia Hirsch, *Family Photographs: CONTENT, MEANING, and EFFECT* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1981), p.118.
[4] Gillian Rose, ' Everyone's cuddled up and it just looks really nice': an emotional geography of some mums and their family photos, *Social and Cultural Geography*, Vol.5,No.4, December (2004), P. 555.

in other words, “it is in family photography that the most stultified and stereotyped repertoire of composition, subject-matter and style resided.”[5] In its redundancy, the taking and displaying of family photos performs and produces social formations, and as I will demonstrate later, mostly the heterosexual norm and the racialized family. It genders and creates the nuclear family.

This generic quality and banality that Rose discusses was based on interviews conducted with mothers who all cherished their family images. However, they symbolised more than sameness: they communicated love and hope. It did not take away the joy that taking these images and gazing at these baby images brought these mothers. Hence, Rose draws attention to the bond that is felt when one gazes at these images. In other words, going through these images “can evoke the most powerful togetherness for these mothers,”[6] which might be seen as an illusion. Similarly, Julia Hirsch discusses how family photography tends to “reduce the string of family life by sustaining an imaginary cohesion…creating images that real families cannot uphold,”[7]. In a sense, family photography creates an imaginary sense of belonging for all parties involved. Any brokenness in families does not feature into the positive family images. In other words, “Photography can more easily show us what we wish our family to be and therefore what, most frequently it is not.”[8] Even though family snaps display what they want us to see, that does not negate the mere fact that families can be happy and have happy moments.

Rose further reflects on how she found herself starting “to think about family photography not simply as a collection of images…but rather as something that people do…a social

[5] Gillian Rose, *Doing Family Photography: The Domestic, The Public and The Politics of Sentiment* (The Open University 2010), p11.
[6] Rose, “Everyone’s cuddled up and it just looks really nice’’, p. 561.
[7] Hirsch, *Family Photographs*, p. 7.
[8] Hirsch, *Family Photographs*, p.9.

practice."[9] Mothers still capture their newborn babies to date. This has parallels with Bourdieu's accounts when he argues that family photography can "capture behavior that is socially approved and socially regulated."[10] For Bourdieu, therefore, photography is sociological. To further cement this he gives the example that "the wedding photograph was accepted so quickly and generally only because it met the social conditions of its existence."[11] Getting married became a happy, positive occasion that needed to be remembered, and family photography followed suite. The sharing of wedding photographs with relatives strengthened the connection between family members and that connection maintains the illusion of togetherness. Apart from what they depict, the act of taking, posing and displaying photographs is also a function of this genre.

Moreover, "the photograph has its role to play in the continued updates of the exchange of family information."[12] The role of children revealed its importance in information collection. The mothers and wives were subscribed a role, namely that of being the archive keeper. These archival repositories became the shoe boxes, wallets, and photo albums that we keep our family photographs in. Children became the ambassadors of genealogy in families and their continued connection with other family relatives. Through these family photographs that mothers and family members take, Julia Hirsh echoes what Bourdieu and Rose have written about family photography. That the "picture…tells us only the barest of narratives."[13] She echoes the banality and repetitiveness of family photographs. Family photographs do not showcase the mundane, the everyday that families go through, because "they do not belong

[9] Rose, *Doing Family Photography*, p. 1.
[10] Bourdieu, *Photography,* p. 23-24.
[11] Bourdieu, *Photography,* p. 20.
[12] Bourdieu, *Photography* ,p.22.
[13] Hirsch, *Family Photographs*, p.6.

with the images we use among our own relatives to buttress family pride and sustain a sense of security."[14]

In other words, these photographs hide. Hirsch states that family photographs "continue to avoid marital violence and infanticide, family strike and dislocation."[15] Behind every positive family image lies an untold narrative. A narrative of siblings fighting, parents divorcing. These images that are "so generous with views of darling babies and loving couples…[and]do not show grades failed, jobs lost, opportunities missed."[16] They conceal. More than anything, one thing that Hirsch mentions is how as a society we are "more circumspect about disease, pain and death."[17] Death is part and parcel of our lives, family photography hides death as part of life. I have become wary of life in my family images.

At the same time, Marianne Hirsch in *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* discusses family images and postmemory in relation to the family images that Holocaust survivors have. Hirsch notes how "photographs promote forgetting…it's a confirmation of death."[18]Family images confirm what has been and the irreversibility of life, even though many try to hang on to the dead through images. She gives an example of Helen Epstein, who only had family photographs to remind her of her relatives and shows how these family photographs in a yellow envelope also included "…documents, evidence of our past…I could not take it in."[19] These family snaps are accompanied by pain. And for most of the Holocaust survivors and their children, these "family photographs are documents both of

[14] Hirsch, *Family Photographs*, p 12-13.
[15] Hirsch, *Family* Photographs, p.32.
[16] Hirsch, *Family* Photographs, p.118.
[17] Hirsch, *Family Photographs,* p.123.
[18] Marianne Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory (Harvard University Press, 1997), p.20.
[19] Hirsch, *Family Frames,* p. 21.

memory (the survivor's) and of postmemory (that of the child of survivors)."[20] Death and family photography as a relationship takes on a completely different route considering the Holocaust and its aftermath. The gaze shifts from a positive relationship to a relationship of pain even though its initial goal was positivity and optimism.

The Victorian trope, the gaze of optimism and *The Black Family Album*

The gaze of optimism when looking at family photographs was accompanied by the rise of Victorian invention of the royal family. At the same time, the rise of photography corresponded with the rise of the Victorian invention of the royal family "which provided the ideal and white universal family for photography and the ideal representation of motherhood as keepers of the past, while the father was seen as the ruler and the protector of his family."[21] According to Deborah Chambers in *Representing the Family*, "The white family photo album of the 1950s traditionally surveyed and displayed heterosexual, mono-racial familial identities. Its messages are, therefore, as much about absences, fragmentation and exclusion as about presences, unity and belonging."[22] This can be seen even in the work of the celebrated photographer Santu Mofokeng who collected photographs of black families in *The Black Photo Album* that had been taken approximately from 1890 to 1950. Here too, the collection is dominated by the trope of the heterosexual family which reflects some aspects of the Victorian forms of representations.

[20] Hirsch, *Family* Frames, p.22.
[21] Joan M Schwartz & James R Ryan, *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination* (Routledge: Taylor and Francis,2003) p. 112.
[22] Deborah Chambers, *Representing the Family*, (SAGE Publications. London. Thousand Oaks. New Delhi, 2001), p. 89.

According to Elisaveta Dvorakk the "classic Victorian portrait was reserved exclusively for photographic representations of supposedly 'white people".[23] The photographs in *The Black Photo Album* "closely follow the neo-colonial conventions established by Georgian and Victorian studio portrait painting in all facets of their execution…composition, posture…in rendering families and friends with accoutrements of marriage, sports, femininity and Christianity."[24] They did not distinguish themselves from other family images influenced by Victorian studio portraits. Thom goes on further and indicates how you will find "brides in whites, grooms in black, the stock standard family portrait with husband standing up, sitting wife…new addition to the family propped up on her lap,"[25]. The act of taking family photographs is one *The Black Photo Album* followed through and through.

Alexandra Dodd argues that the images in *The Black Photo Album* "reflect the sensibilities, aspirations and the self-image of a particular class of black South Africans at a threshold moment in history."[26] In a sense, these black individuals are taking a stand against the photographs that have portrayed them in dis-similar fashion. They aspire to be seen as more than just colonized black individuals. Dodd also notes how Mofokeng spoke about these photographs being "coveted as treasures …discursive narratives about identity, lineage and personality."[27] At the same time, these photographs carry with them change and resentment, they might be treasured, but they also get "destroyed as rubbish during spring-cleaning because of interruptions in continuity or disaffection with the encapsulated meanings and the

[23] Elisaveta Dvorakk, 'Santu Mofokeng's The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890-1950 and the Victorian Dispositive. Photographic Staging and Appropriation as Practices of Anticolonial Resistance', *Am Journal*, No.28 (2022), p. 97.
[24] Jahannes Frederick Thom, 'Embodied encounters: a performative, material reading selected contemporary artworks by Santu Mofokeng, El Anatsui, Willem Boshoff and Johan Thom', *University College London*, (2013), p. 74.
[25] Thom, 'Embodied Encounters', p. 740.
[26] Alexandra Dodd, '"Live Transmission" Intimate Ancestors in Santu Mofokeng's Black Photo Album/Look at Me;1890-1950', *African Arts*, Vol. 48, No.2 (2015), p. 55.
[27] Dodd, 'Live Transmission', p. 54.

history of the images."[28] Even though they have these aspirations and desires of being seen and recognized as educated individuals, God-fearing women and men, what remains true is the history that accompanies these photographs in the midst of trying to self-determine themselves as more than colonial individuals. According to Dodd, therefore, Mofokeng's "project is about negotiating the archive and constructing a counter-archive."[29]

The images in *The Black Photo Album* "depict the rise and fall of a class of educated, urban, Christian Africans in late 19th and early 20th century South Africa."[30] These images do not make visible what Dodd calls the "reneging on promised rights which culminated in the centralization of white rule, the unification of South Africa in 1910, 40 years of Apartheid rule."[31] In a sense, the self-authorship and self-determination of these hide decades of oppression.

Regardless, Dvorakk states that these photographs are photographs of resistance, in other words "the resistance of the photographed against the marginalizing, violent mechanisms of colonialism and colonial photography."[32] According to Thom, the individuals in *The Black Photo Album* "are performing the vision they have of themselves for the benefit of the camera."[33] Thom expresses how through this album contemporary individuals bear "witness to a catastrophic failure: these people could not be ' seen' for they were black; their aspirations and the details of their lives were considered unimportant."[34] When they took these photographs, they did not necessarily have failure in mind in that they were willing participants that had a say in how their photographs would be taken and the clothes they wore

[28] Dodd, 'Live Transmission', p. 54.
[29] Dodd, 'Live Transmission', p. 55.
[30] Dodd, 'Live Transmission', p. 56.
[31] Dodd, 'Live Transmission', p. 56.
[32] Dvorakk, 'Photographic Staging', p. 99.
[33] Thom, 'Embodied Encounters', p.75.
[34] Thom, 'Embodied Encounters' p. 81.

would be decided by them. This is similar to Muholi and the way Muholi takes photographs. According to Dvorakk one of the question Mofokeng had in mind was the question of whether these images were "evidence of mental colonization or did they serve to challenge prevailing images of 'the African' in the western world?"[35] Thinking about these questions in relation to this album, one has to ask whether this self-determination that Dodd and Dvorakk mention worked for the black individuals portrayed in this album.

It does work in displaying a different image of the black body for the other to see and recognize. The agency of being able to choose the clothes you want to wear and the kind of image that you want to portray. At the same time, Dvorakk asks us to consider whether the staging in *The Black Photo Album* is a testimony to intellectual colonization. Even though one might say that these black individuals were trying to assimilate, perhaps they were, and that intellectual colonization finally worked, what remains true is the self-authorship they displayed in portraying themselves as something other than colonial subjects. What they did though as well was to portray themselves as a black nuclear family. What *The Black Photo Album* does is to portray a united family, a family that consists of a father, mother and their children all posing for the camera. All of them are wearing their Sunday best, and not a single strand of the garments is out of place.

These family images differ from my family images. The only image that I can conjure up where everyone wore their Sunday best would be my graduation photographs. What they do have in common though is the presence of children. The difference, though, is that they are smiling. Mofokeng found these photographs hidden in shoe boxes, put inside plastic bags, some had been cherished, while others had been long put in the rubbish to continue with the

[35] Dvorakk, 'Photographic Staging', p. 95.

times. What remains is their meaning - they were and still are part of family photography. Even though they consist of portraits taken in a colonial-era studio, their meaning is not stripped away once they change location. What they do though, is continue the cycle of family photographs and their demeanor.

Arguably, they also disguise themselves as happy families. According to Dodd "beyond the myriad images of happy families proudly posing for the camera lies something dark and brooding."[36] They hide their fears of death and the tension of living under a colonial government by posing and smiling at the camera. The same camera that sidelines and others them. These fears and tensions do not belong, nor do they need to be at the forefront of the family album. For, Dodd "prejudice does not bow to assimilation"[37], a sentiment that can be applied to family photographs. Happy family photographs do not bow to pain, fear, anxieties, or tension as pulpable as those emotions may be.

Nevertheless, the joy and happiness photographed in these images leaves traces of sadness. Dodd goes on to argue that the images in *The Black Photo Album* "reanimate memories, which builds a bridge between the departed and the sentient."[38] Suffice to say that the resistance of the images lives on and their purpose is carried on from image to image and to the viewer as well. The dead and what they carried is able to be linked through these images. Ghosts and ghost traces of the past link the living to the dead, in other words, *The Black Photo Album* brings "into the present that which seems at a distance."[39]

[36] Dodd, 'Live Transmission', p .56.
[37] Dodd , 'Live Transmission', p. 57.
[38] Dodd, 'Live Transmission', p. 59.
[39] Dodd, 'Live Transmission', p.62.

Practices of family photography in South Africa at large

For the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on brief histories of family photographic practices in South Africa in much of the twentieth century beyond Mofokeng's collection. While Deborah Chambers in *Representing the Family* highlights the gendered and racial dimensions of the rise of family photography, scholarship in South Africa has sought to engage the significance of family photographs for black families. For instance, Siona O'Connell works with her own family photographs that depict those that were forcibly removed from District Six in Cape Town during apartheid. O'Connell states "The family album of the racially oppressed…speaks of a particular kind of knowledge, the subjugated knowledge of subjects who, despite being dominated, are able to speak of their lives, and it offers a glimpse of freedom in its struggle to break away from racial violence".[40] The family albums of the District Six residents award these individuals with an opportunity to speak about their stories, to express their feelings and emotions. Furthermore, O'Connell views the family photograph of the ordinary oppressed as something redeeming. It's as if the family photograph is something that provides an alternative narrative to the District Six residents being simply racially oppressed. These family photographs included wedding photos of her parents, of family members and children, and these she reads as a counter to the dominant histories of repression associated with forced removals from District Six.

Nwafor shares these sentiments in his account of the Van Kalker studio photographs. This studio was founded by Mr. J. G. Van Kalker in 1937, a Dutch immigrant in Cape Town,

[40] Siona O'Connell, 'Apartheid Afterlives: Imagining Freedom in the Aftermath of Racial Oppression in Cape Town, South Africa', *Third Text,* Vol 36 (1) (2018), p. 34.

South Africa. It was located in the Woodstock community on 47 Victoria Road. Nwafor states that "public depiction of blacks and coloureds in photographs became synonymous with poverty, violence and everything negative".[41] Hence, the family photographs of blacks and coloureds in the Van Kalker studio became a counter to exhausting and despotic modes of portrayal such as anthropometric photographs. He argues "Van Kalker was able to represent blacks and coloureds not as impoverished, suppressed, controlled and criminalized groups by the nature of their place within the Apartheid era, or as noble savages or anthropological specimens, but as people with dignity and exquisite sense of self".[42] He gave them a space and a choice, something that the apartheid regime did not.

These family photographs reflected "personalities and individuals with values, self-esteem…what cloth they wished to appear in and how they wanted to present themselves in either in traditional or modern apparels".[43] In the same note, the family photographs from the Van Kalker studio hinge on the concept of the nuclear family. In other words, an alternative 'positive' image of blackness rests on a depiction of a stable heterosexual family unit with multiple generations, ones that have been reproduced biologically. According to Nwafor, these family photographs "reflect how valuable children are in the lives of their parents and as such people keep photographic memories of their children in order to capture and recall their stages of development and achievements in the family".[44] Nwafor echoes the same sentiments that Bourdieu discusses with regards to children.

[41] Nkiruka J. Nwafor, 'Re-presenting self: Reading some Van Kalker Studio Photographs', (2010), p. 169.
[42] Nwafor, 'Re-presenting self', p. 169.
[43] Nwafor, 'Re-presenting self', p. 169.
[44] Nwafor, 'Re-presenting self', p. 171.

A family portrait, Nwafor states, "could reveal a young and modest families strive to give their children proper care and education".[45] Similarly to O'Connell, Nwafor considers the family photograph and album as redemptive in the context of histories of anti-black racism. Interestingly, Nwafor found it intriguing that in one of the family photographs "there appears to be no father figure, and one may wonder why. Perhaps it signals how central black women are in the day-to-day affairs of the family"[46]. The heterosexual norm goes as far as questioning why a man is not part of a family photography, which takes us to Muholi's photographs and what exactly makes a family portrait.

Both Nwafor and O'Connell read these particular apartheid-era photographs in the context of debilitating experiences and representations of black South Africans and therefore hope to find something redemptive in them. On the other hand, in her engagement of family photographs of her white family in the Natal Midlands taken by her relative Fyvie, Tamsyn Adams in her article *Unpacking the photographic collection of the Natal Midlands Farming Family*, suggests that "questions of belonging - to a family, a community, a particular race and class - are an important theme in the collection, with photographs playing a role in how these different affiliations were imagined, given form, and reproduced".[47] This collection belonged to the Fyvie family, which was taken in the early parts of the twentieth century. It includes families that arrived in South Africa in the 1900s**.** Questions of belonging still plague LGBTQI individuals in regard to the dominance of heteronormativity and genealogy. This concern with belonging is arguably being produced and reproduced in what constitutes family photography.

[45] Nwafor, 'Re-presenting self', p. 174.
[46] Nwafor, 'Re-presenting self', p.176.
[47] Tamsyn Adams, 'Unpacking the photographic collection of a Natal Midlands farming family: ways of working with photographs', *Critical Arts* (2018), p. 39.

Furthermore, Adams argues that the Fyvie collection if considered "objects of history…it becomes possible to start considering why these forms of belonging took on a certain urgency here…the importance of family in the Natal Midlands in providing not only a sense of history and belonging, but influence, capital, jobs, friends."[48] Adams is aware of the racial dimensions of family photographs noting that "the extended webs of belonging enacted through the Fyvie collection were all white".[49] Belonging had its limits and exclusions, and black people were the limit. Adams speaks of the "underbelly of belonging, the way it rests on assertions of difference and exclusion".[50] The black individuals in the Fyvie collection appear in the background, while their white counterparts can be recognized and are known. Not surprisingly the black subjects "remain mostly anonymous, or known tangentially, despite efforts to identify them."[51]

I keep re-iterating the fact that I did not grow up in a family that took images and family photographs. Perhaps I wish that we had been one of those families that took images together and hung up on the wall. I grew up in what one would call a nuclear family, with a mom and dad. Nuclear as it was, we never took a family image together, apart from my graduation. Don't get me wrong, pictures were around, but 'family' pictures never existed. I might be contradicting myself with my own writing. My one wish perhaps has been able to say and point to that photography 'that's my mom and dad' in one frame. At the same time, it all goes back to accessibility and how one does not miss what they do not have access to. How Zanele Muholi makes it possible for the LGBTQI community to have access to a camera and to a gallery, as I will explore in subsequent chapters.

[48] Adams, 'Ways of Working with Photographs', p. 3
[49] Adams, 'Ways of Working with Photography', p. 40
[50] Adams, 'Ways of Working with Photographs', p. 40.
[51] Adams, 'Ways of Working with Photography', p. 15.

Moreover, I also must keep in mind that I was raised by parents that grew up under apartheid. Perhaps a photograph to them meant something else. I still have my mother's dompas book and it still has her photo when she was young. The person in the photograph that travels with me in my backpack is not the same as the person in the dompas image. The image in the dompas book is a mug shot of her face. I wonder what that image meant to her. I tried time and time again to bring up the subject that was apartheid to my parents, but neither one of them ever wanted to talk about what they had gone through, let alone have a conversation about images. It was a heavy subject to talk about and I had to understand that as much as I was a curious cat, they did not welcome my curiosity because to them it was accompanied by trauma. Which brings me to a question: what did images and family photographs mean to South African families that had lived under the Apartheid regime? I had to think about the fact that identities and how people were addressed and seen would play a pivotal role in how they defined photographs and family photographs. What did it mean to take a picture under discrimination, racism? Keeping in mind that a large number of black women went to work for white families as nannies and domestic workers, how did they define their roles in society and in their families that they had to leave behind and the families that they were raising for the sake of their own families?

Ena Jansen writes about her own family photograph album in *From Thandi the Maid to Thandi the Madam: Domestic Workers in the Archives of Afrikaans Literature and a Family Photograph Album*. She writes that in her "family's photo albums there are few, but nonetheless some, pictures of black women"[52] which I guess brings back my question about how these black domestic workers saw themselves when portrayed in these family images.

[52] Ena Jansen, 'From Thandi the Maid to Thandi the Madam: Domestic Workers in the Archives of Afrikaans Literature and a Family Photograph Album', *South African Review of Sociology*, Vol.42, No. 2 (2011), p. 104.

Do they feel as if they belong, are they part of these families even though they work for them? Jansen does mention how her family album consists of her and her twin sister and how each photo was written with lovely words. In a nutshell, your typical nuclear family photographs. Except for the fact that these family photographs also included domestic workers. What struck me about Jansen's paper is the fact that she mentions Thandi, who apparently was their "own Natal Thandi who had gone to the Free States with them."[53] That was not surprising. What surprised me is how she states "our life without Thandi continues in album number two"[54], that is, a new Thandi would be found in the next photograph. A new black face would join the family, and the old face will most likely not adorn the family photograph album. I wonder if Thandi was able to take photographs with her own family, that's if she had any. Was she able to at least take some of the family images with her, did she even want them? Was she asked? Did she cherish those moments, or did she perhaps resent them?

I ask myself if Jansen herself thought about Thandi and Katrina who replaced Thandi in the family album. Did it occur to her that perhaps Thandi and Katrina had their own families that they would love to see? Perhaps she did. Jansen writes that the "archive is a system of inclusion and exclusion, of laws and rules which give shape to what may and may not be said and heard,"[55] which brings us back to accessibility and how it creates opportunities for Muholi to build an archive for the LGBTQI community. The family photography archive is a system that does not include lesbians, pain, and trauma. It decides that the nuclear family can be included, and trauma can be excluded. Jansens's family archive made it possible for Thandi and Katrina to have access to a camera, but not for their children and their own

[53] Jansen, ' From Thandi the Maid to Thandi the Madam', p. 107.
[54] Jansen, 'From Thandi the maid to Thandi the Madam', p. 107.
[55] Jansen, 'From Thandi the Maid to Thandi the Madam', p. 111.

families. This archive included Thandi and Katrina as domestic workers, and not as black women worthy of being photographed. “Their presence was so obvious that nothing was done about it. Like the household furniture, they are presented as part of the family’ s possessions.”[56] Perhaps it’s not then strange to find random black women in white family photograph albums; they were and still are part and parcel of the South African history and political landscape.

Thandi and Katrina presented different faces to different phases of their lives. They were included, but at the same time excluded in both phases of their lives. They were included as domestic workers in Jansen’s family, but excluded as family members; there exists an invisible line that is visible. Do they have their own photographs that they cherish where they are included? These questions make me wonder about my own parents and what their reasons were for not even having a picture together, which also takes me to the trauma that is evident in South African families and their photographs.

John Peffer in his book, *Art and the End of Apartheid* speaks about South African “people’s history” in images and the stories these images try to tell. The black body has historically been left at the back burner, always to be forgotten, including its stories. Peffer therefore responds to this by focusing on the positive side of the black body through family photos. Some of these family photos are found in shoe boxes and some were found in gallery studios through his encounters with numerous black families. Peffer is interested in “considering the family, and the individuals within extended families, as the site of authorship and the creator and owner of the archive”.[57] As the rightful owners of these archives, the majority of the

[56] Jansen, ‘From Thandi the Maid to Thandi the Madam’, p. 118.
[57] John Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 74.

individuals that Peffer conversed with asked one thing from him: to not spread their family photographs because they carry with them, "traumas of domestic violence…disruptive race classification…degraded living conditions that resulted from colonialism and apartheid." Hiding pain and trauma in family photographs continues, as if to say trauma cannot be displayed for the world to see. But then again, the wish to move forward with life, especially regarding the historical and political landscape of South Africa is warranted. But what happens to those that destroy their family photographs? Peffer speaks of Ms. J who was from Soweto and who had a neighbor and how this neighbor told Peffer that "she destroyed everything after her husband passed away in 1990…she could no longer bear to see his face or them together in pictures."[58] One could deduce that she wanted to move on with life and not to be reminded of what had been. Those images for her are a symbol of trauma.

For others, though, taking and keeping photographs was an act of rebellion. According to Peffer "photographers were change agents."[59] They symbolized action and change for those souls that dreamt of being seen and not just looked at. They disrupted the norm by building trust with those being photographed. Photographs convey untold stories, narratives that one can learn by listening to the untold stories of the owners of these images. One will never learn of these untold stories in the international market where 'African Photographs' can be found which consists of images that were "retrieved, or were unable to be paid for."[60] Furthermore, Peffer has found that the act of taking "normal or middle class images"[61] was not just an act that South Africans chose to do for fun; rather it was an "attempt to create an

[58] Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid*, p. 77.
[59] Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid*, p. 81
[60] Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid*, p. 82.
[61] Peffer, *Art and the end of Apartheid*, p. 84

image of stability during a time of intense political and social turmoil."[62] One can take a photograph in times of distress to create the life that he/she wants.

I have found through reading Dodd, O'Connell and Nwafor's work that black and coloured families have tried to redefine themselves through their family images. The act of taking the image equips these black and coloured individuals to have a sense of self and being. The next two chapters discuss *Somnyama Ngonyama* and *Faces and Phases*. Chapter two discusses five self-portraits of Muholi and how they can be considered part of family photography. It is a chapter that touches on notions of blackness, the domestic and mothering. Chapter three discusses *Faces and Phases,* which includes a set of portraits taken by Zanele Muholi of lesbian, and transgender individuals, who are part of the LGBTQI community. It is also a chapter that examines five portraits from the *Faces and Phases* collection. Through an engagement with photographs that seemingly deviate from the convention of family photography, I hope to expand on how we understand this genre.

[62] Peffer, *Art and the End of Apartheid*, p. 84

Interlude: Ghost and Ghosty

"Hey Ghosty," said Ghost to Ghosty, "How are you doing down there?"

"I don't know Ghost, I've been down here, stuck in this box for 20 years now thinking about ham and cheese."

"Now Ghosty, don't kill yourself over ham and cheese."

"Very funny Ghost, I'm already dead remember," said Ghosty.

"I'm a funny man, have you forgotten already. Don't sweat it Ghosty, ham and cheese don't miss you that much, in fact they don't even know who you are," said Ghost to Ghosty.

Tears ran down Ghosty's cheeks, "That's a cruel thing to say Ghost, my kids still remember."

It dawned to Ghost that Ghosty was missing his children that he had left behind. He hurriedly said, "of course they do Ghosty, images of you surround their homes to remind them of you and that you existed."

"You think so?" asked Ghosty.

"Of course, my man, how could they not. They loved you and you loved them."

Ghosty sat in silence for a long time, while staring at an insect trying to crawl inside his body. "Thank you Ghost," he said after some time had passed while tears ran down his bony cheeks.

"Anytime," said Ghost, "anytime my dear friend."

Ghosty and Ghost had been friends for as long as they can remember. They both grew up in the small township of Samora Machel, where music plays for the whole neighborhood to hear. Where the sound of silence is a thing to be fearful of. They grew up in the busy streets of Samora, with other children playing and making noise. Unlike the boxes they found themselves in, the streets of Samora always have a buzz. Ghosty and Ghost found themselves

surrounded by wood and tiny insects that would try to strike up a conversation with them, making Ghosty and Ghost seem as if they were losing their minds.

Death came knocking for both at the age of 30. It never announced its arrival, but it did announce its departure to their families. Ghosty had left behind his wife and two children, while Ghost had left no one behind. His family had refused to be a part of his life ever since he had told them that he was gay. His mom and dad had kicked him out of his home. He lived with Ghosty family for 10 years and they had come to be his own family.

"Do you think my mom looks at my pictures and remembers me with love Ghosty?" asked Ghost.

Ghosty looked at his friend with such love and said, "but of course my friend. If she does not, it is her loss because I know my kids, your nieces look at your image with love and consider you part of their family. I know for sure that they buy cake and celebrate your birthday along with mine."

For a long time, Ghost had questioned his position in Ghosty's family. Only 20 years later he realized that he had indeed been loved and that he had loved in return.

"Enkosi" he said to Ghosty with teary hollow eyes, he was a ghost after all, no eyes…

Chapter 2: Domestic Items Morphing into Family Heirlooms

This chapter focuses on *Somnyama Ngonyama*, which consists of Zanele Muholi's self-portraits. I have selected 5 photographs from Muholi's vast collection. I went into this section accompanied by doubt of whether I could incorporate *Somnyama Ngonyama* into family photography. I found it a challenging collection to work with asking how do I tie these self-portraits of Muholi into the intimacy of this genre? This is because they do not conform to its conventions unpacked in the previous chapter when you first look at them at face value. However, each portrait invokes identity, blackness and belonging and it is these concepts that allow me to think about such photographs through the lens of family photography, Moreover, the portraits I have chosen already have an identity fixed on them through their original captions. Muholi knew the kind of story that these portraits were going to tell. I went into this collection hoping to add to their already existing identities.

Blackness/Blackface

Somnyama Ngonyama is a series of self-portraits of Zanele Muholi in various cities and stages of life. It is a series that has been associated with blackface, blackness and black hair. Jackie Mondi in *Naming Rights* notes how "…the mnyama in Somnyama is an isiZulu word for black and for dark. Muholi chose the interpretation of the word as 'dark' for her titles as this enables her to explore the shades of black effectively."[63] Blackness is a concept that surrounds this collection of Muholi's self-portraits; they are in black and white which puts emphasis on Muholi's darkened skin because for them "it forces you to think about your perceptions of and towards blackness,"[64] even as a black person. It is a series that asks you to

[63] Renee Mussai, 'Zanele Muholi in Conversation with Renee Mussai, Archives of the Self' *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019).
[64] Renee Mussai, 'Zanele Muholi in Conversation with Renee Mussai, Archives of the Self' *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019).

confront your own prejudices towards blackness, even if you have been surrounded by blackness.

Nomusa Makhubu in *Performing Blackface: Reflections on Zanele Muholi's Somnyama Ngonyama* argues that "blackface is radically different when performed by black performers, than when performed by white performers."[65] Makhubu struggles with this because in some instances she feels Muholi is performing blackface, and that "the aestheticization of blackness locks desire within the consumption of the black body as material and object"[66] even though Muholi has emphasized that the darkening of the skin is a reclaiming of blackness. As they state "All I am trying to say is that I don't darken my skin. This is who we are, this is who I am 24/7."[67] Alexander Poulain showcases a different angle on how to view Muholi's darkened skin arguing that "Muholi uses their dark skin to instill movement and ambiguity in their photographs and refuses to be either cancelled on or boxed in."[68]

This is a collection that refuses the normative. It is a series that refuses to bend itself to fit in. According to Mbali Khoza ,"the use by black practitioners of the medium of the blackface is not new."[69] Muholi rather states, "I wanted to use my face so that people will always remember just how important our black faces are, when confronted by them,"[70] even if Muholi's skin has been exaggerated in its color. Khoza discusses how this collection of self-

[65] Nomusa Makhubu, 'Performing Blackface: Reflections on Zanele Muholi' *Somnyama Ngonyama*' (2021), p. 121. https://www.on-curating.org/issue-49-reader/performing-blackface-reflections-on-zanele-muholis-somnyama-ngonyama.html
[66] Makhubu , 'Preforming Blackface' , p. 116.
[67] Renee Mussai, 'Zanele Muholi in Conversation with Renee Mussai, Archives of the Self' *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019).
[68] Alexandra Poulain, 'Self-portrait as Epistemic Disobedience: Zanele Muholi's *Somnyama Ngonyama'* , *The French Journal and Media Studies* (2021), p. 12.
[69] Mbali Khoza, 'Seeing Blackness Through Black Expressive Culture: A Reading of Zanele Muholi's *Somnyama Ngonyama- Hail The Dark Lioness'* , *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts*, Vol. 8 (2021), p. 276.
[70] Renee Mussai, 'Zanele Muholi in Conversation with Renee Mussai, Archive of the Self', *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019)

portraits in *Somnyama Ngonyama* "draws our attention to how skin was and still is the primary medium through which the body is racialized."[71] Additionally, Poulain notes how *Somnyama Ngonyama* also seeks to challenge the way in which black bodies are both invisible, and paradoxically hypervisibilized by most conventional media which tend to represent them only within sensational narratives of spectacular violence and crime, while black female bodies are rendered visible only if they conform to extremely rigid system of norms.[72]

The Normative and the Domestic

According to Karen Alexander, "perhaps these images are an attempt at exploring the ambiguities pertaining to gender and sexuality; getting us to think about the identities that lie among the continuum of femininity at the one end and masculinity at the other."[73] In as much as this collection touches upon the normative, Muholi mentions how they "…try to create portraits without hypersexualizing my body, just to say, I have a voice, I have authority, and autonomy: Over anatomy."[74] Muholi in this collection is saying that black people can feel love and are loved, and they have also felt and still feel pain, which is the same fate that befalls black individuals that form part of the LGBTQI community. Hence, Muholi states that the "…most important task is to create a visual archive that lives on beyond us."[75]

Somnyama Ngonyama is a collection that draws attention to black history including how labor has been associated with the black body. As Poulain argues "…Muholi reminds us that

[71] Khoza, 'Seeing Blackness through Black Expressive Culture, p. 276.
[72] Poulain. Self-portraits as Epistemic Disobedience', p. 5.
[73] Karen Alexander, 'Beyond the Boundaries', *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019)
[74] ReneeMussai, 'Zanele Muholi in Conversation with Renee Mussai, Archive of the Self', *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019)
[75] Renee Mussai, 'Zanele Muholi in Conversation with Renee Mussai, Archive of the Self', *Autograph* ABP (07 January 2019)

domestic servitude is still the only status available to many black women in the present day."[76] Muholi reclaims this 'domestic' servitude that Poulain discusses through self-portraits of Bester and *MaID* who had been Muholi's mother and a domestic worker for forty-two years of her life. Poulain further mentions how the "…title *MaID*…connects it with a large archive of colonial objectifying representation of Black bodies, deploying a sophisticated dialectic of freedom and containment, agency, and objectification."[77] Fittingly, therefore, Makhubu states that "A typical blackface stereotype in South Africa is therefore the black domestic worker."[78] In the world of female domesticity and the labor of women, it is also associated with the nappies - before the age of disposable ones - where a woman who was nursing would often have several pins attached to her clothing, ready for fastening a child's nappy.[79] It is objects such as these that allow us into the terrain of the familial, and therefore, family photography.

Mokoena connects the safety pin self-portrait (for example *Fisan*i) where Muholi is surrounded by these safety pins to being a mother, a thought that is reminiscent of conventional family photography and their associated wishes for children. Furthermore, Mokoena states that "in her use of the safety pin, Zanele Muholi brings together these two traditions: Motherhood and Mothering."[80] This took me to the questions that Alexander has in regard to domestic workers, "Do we ever think about her home, her children, her life and her livelihood?"[81] The domestic workers that Muholi pays tribute to had families they had to leave behind because the black body was the face of black labor.

[76] Poulain, 'Self-portraits as Epistemic Disobedience', p. 4.
[77] Poulain, 'Self-portraits as Epistemic Disobedience', p. 4.
[78] Makhubu, 'Performing Blackface', p. 119.
[79]Hlonipha Mokoena, 'Iziqhano', *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019)
[80] Hlonipha Mokoena, ' Iziqhano', *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019)
[81] Karen Alexander, 'Beyond the Boundaries', *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019)

Muholi in *Somnyama Ngonyama* uses domestic objects that have been associated with black labor. These include safety pins, clothing pegs, port scrappers, latex gloves and masking tapes etc. to portray the labor of love that black women had to endure. Makhubu alludes to how "the objects used in the portraits then become the basis of a performance."[82] They perform black pain and black love in this collection. How Muholi's mother wore her labor in her hair, skin and black body, it became her identity. Similarly in reference to these Muholi states "All that I am wearing…has been traded and negotiated, a required capital. It's about the economy. It's about movement. It's about immigration. It's about import and export."[83] The movement of black bodies to the taxis, trains and buses still drives South Africa's economy. These black domestic workers travel between work and home to ensure the growth of their families.

Beauty in Black Hair

This collection of photographs also draws attention to black hair and politics of beauty. Poulain reads *Somnyama Ngonyama* as a series "…which actively challenges the forms of knowledge ingrained in received representations of Black female bodies and invents a language of its own to create alternative images and tell other stories."[84] This correlates with how Muholi wanted the series to be read. Other scholars read this collection in relation to black hair. Black hair has been a topic of conversation in the black communities, because of its entanglement with blackness. Alexander asks the question, "could this be about the center of contestation that black hair has become? What is it about black hair that makes it so contested?"[85] Relatedly, Khoza argues that "similar to black skin, black hair was and still is

[82] Makhubu, 'Performing Blackface' p. 115.
[83] Poulain, 'Self-portraits as Epistemic Disobedience', p. 5.
[84] Poulain, 'Self-portraits as Epistemic Disobedience', p. 2.
[85] Karen Alexander, 'Beyond the Boundaries', *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019)

subjected to anti-black prejudice, that privileges straightened black hair over "untidy" hair."[86] Through this collection you also question the prejudices you might have as a black person regarding black hair. What stereotypes have you adopted? Mine would be referring to my hair as *stiluli* (a pot scraper), because of how hard it gets and how it coils towards itself. Furthermore, Mokoena notes how Muholi "…uses her hair, face, skin and body to remind us of the many rejections and hurts that have been hurled at black women."[87] Black hair and Blackness have both been rejected. On the other hand, Muholi embraces both black hair and blackness and say to self that this is who we are as black people, an indirect response to Mussai who says that "all this stereotyping inspires a deep-seated hatred of the Black body, from head to toe: eyes, lips, everything, your features."[88]

Some might question how Muholi has used these domestic objects that people use in their homes and in their daily lives. Adriana Michelle Burkins in *Strands of Power, Tools of Resistance: Black Hair and Consciousness as Concept and Medium* notes, "Muholi's experimentation with hair is significant because her portraits demonstrate the ways in which she makes sense of reactions to her blackness abroad and to her observations of the experiences of black women in South Africa."[89] Similarly, Burkins further refers to how "one could argue that Muholi's use of "extravagant" hair adornments and portraits also questions the realities of a democratic South Africa and what a liberation of the self can mean,"[90]

[86] Khoza, 'Seeing Blackness through Black Expressive Culture', p. 279.
[87] Hlonipha Mokoena, 'Iziqhano', Autograph ABP (07 January 2019)
[88] Renee Mussai, ' Zanele Muholi in Conversation with Renee Mussai, Archive of the Self', *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019)
[89] Adriana Michelle Burkins, 'Strands of Power, Tools of Resistance: Black Hair and Consciousness as Concept and Medium', *University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill* (2019), p. 49-50.
[90] Burkins, 'Strands OF Power, Tools of Resistance', p. 53-54.

especially for Black women and members of the LGBTQI community, therefore, as argued by Bonneau, reclaiming black experience from oppression to beauty.[91]

This has resonance too with the power of language, including the use of isiZulu in the collection. By giving each portrait a Zulu name Muholi is paying respect to the isiZulu language, Muholi's home language. In a conversation with Mussai, Muholi notes "In as much as I am doing (me) in *Somnyam*a, each portrait in the series has a name. And by naming each, I am respecting some of these unnamed human beings who all had native names…"[92] Muholi pays respect to their mother, Bester. We as the viewer are not privy to whether Muholi's mother ever used her native name while working as a domestic worker for those forty-two years of her life. Muholi further mentions to Mussai, "S*omnyama* is a living being, who deserves respect, who deserves recognition. It's about acknowledging that a person is worthy and to recognize that this person has a name."[93]

By using isiZulu in this collection, Khoza notes how "Muholi's work is a reminder of how and why images are created and understood differently to text."[94] Language has always been a tricky concept to maneuver, especially moving from one language to the other. Taking these names in this collection and moving them to English gives them a different perspective than the one they had in isiZulu. Hence, Khoza further argues that "these words for instance, like most words, have multiple meanings depending on their context."[95] Through using

[91] Philip Arthur Bonneau, 'The Performity of Zanele Muholi's *MaID* in *Somnyama Ngonyama* (Hail, the Dark Lioness)' , *Contemporary Art History* (2021), p. 5.
[92] Renee Mussai, 'Zanele Muholi in Conversation with Renee Mussai, Archive of the Self', *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019)
[93] Renee Mussai, 'Zanele Muholi in Conversation with Renee Mussai, Archive of the Self', *Autograph* ABP (07 January 2019)
[94] Khoza, 'Seeing Blackness through Black Expressive Culture', p. 282.
[95] Khoza, 'Seeing Blackness through Black Expressive Culture', p. 282.

isiZulu in this collection, Muholi redefines the relationship black people have with their mother tongues through portraiture, through the camera, which has been an object the black community historically had little access to. Through *Somnyam*a, they can associate their home languages with photographs.

Life and Death

Somnyama Ngonyama is a series that also explores death and loss. The loss of a parent, a sister or a brother. Alexander notes this collection is "…an exploration of everything that lies between the poles of life and death. It is about the complexities that make up who we are as people, black and white, men and women, rich and poor."[96] Family photography rarely ever broaches the topic of death, what it does though is demonstrate love in a family. Tamar Garb notes how Muholi "in her self-portraits as Bester, she performs her love and her loss, using her skill and herself to introject her mother so that their lives become one on the wall."[97] Muholi explores the ins and outs of loss, not only for their mother. Rather, "mourning, remembering, the dead is envisaged as an act of becoming, whereby Muholi's body becomes merely a portal for all ghosts that their work honors. Many of these ghosts were not familiar to her but are honored as anonymous subjects of pain."[98]

By drawing attention to black history, labour and issues of beauty the scholarship above allows us to imagine how the public and private intertwine, how the political intersects with the personal in such photographs and allow us then to enter the terrain of family life and therefore family photography. In the next section, I extend on this by paying close attention to select photographs in order to re-look at them as family photographs.

[96] Karen Alexander, 'Beyond the Lights', *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019)
[97] Tamar Garb, 'Bester', Autograph ABP (07 January 2019)
[98] Tamar Garb, 'Bester', Autograph ABP (07 January 2019)

Bester V

I first thought of *istiluli* when I looked at *Bester V. Istiluli* is what is known as a pot scraper. I call it istiluli because that is what I have always known it as; that is what my mama would call it. That is how I called it when I would go and buy it in the spaza shop. It is an item that has always graced our home, and it is what I would call my hair because of its texture and its curliness. I have stiff, curly black hair. Its shrinkage resembles a spinach when you put it in heat. *Bester V* is a portrait of Muholi in black and white. It is an image titled Bester, which was the name of Muholi's late mother. Muholi's mother had been a domestic worker for a white family. Her picture could have been found in the family images of that particular white family, much like Ena Jansen who discovered in her family photographs different domestic workers. The image of Thandi found in Jansen's family photographs could have been Muholi's mother, being a part of a family that was not her own. As she states "first Thandi, then Katrina, even Meisie during our Cape holidays, probably spent hours with us during the day."[99] Perhaps Muholi did not have images of Bester because she lived on in the family photographs of the white families she worked for. The revealing part in Jansen's article is how she reflects upon herself and comes to the conclusion, "What Thandi and Katrina did to help us as we grew up, I don't really know."[100] Even though they were part of her childhood and a part of her family photographs, 'Thandi' and 'Katrina' are two individuals that Jansen does not remember, meaning one can be part of family photographs that she/he/they do not belong to.

The background of *Bester V* is pitch black, highlighting the darkness of Muholi's own skin. Muholi's gaze and the pot scraper on top of their head stands out. The little pot scrapers

[99] Jansen, 'From Thandi the Maid to Thandi the Madam', p. 110.
[100] Jansen, 'From Thandi the Maid to Thandi the Madam', p. 111

resemble a crown worn with pride and courage. In this photograph Muholi's head is surrounded by pot scrapers that signify labour, domestic labour that has been attached to black domestic workers and women in their own kitchens This crown of pot scrapers on top of Muholi's head symbolizes the many pots of white families Muholi's mother had worked for. *Somnyama Ngonyama* is a series that "rotates to the concept of *MaID* ('My Identity', or read differently, '*Maid*' the quotidian and demeaning name given to all subservient black women in South Africa."[101]Having had a mother who had been a 'maid' for white families, Muholi takes that identity towards self and reclaims it on behalf of Bester by also reclaiming the identity of black women working as domestic workers. Muholi states that the Bester portraits are "…talking about abuse and the trauma that most maids experience at the hands of their employees."[102] Muholi takes that in Bester V using blackness, with Muholi and the wall submerging into one**.**

Bester I

Bester I, which was taken in Mayotte in 2015, challenges the viewer to look at this black and white portrait by directly gazing at the camera. What drew my attention to *Bester I* was the crown of pegs on top of Muholi's head which is comparable to *Bester V* with its display of a crown of pot scrapers. Muholi's shoulders are draped with tattered cloth held together by one peg. Two pegs decorate Muholi's ears, which reminded me of how I would put on pegs on my fingers and pretend that I had long nails. The whiteness of the image draws attention to Muholi's darkened skin and lips painted a color we cannot name. *Bester V* puts on display a white background with dark shadows around it, unlike the black background of *Bester I*.

[101] https://www.stevenson.info/exhibition/1440

[102] Renee Mussai, 'Zanele Muholi in Conversation with Renee Mussai, Archive of the Self' *Autograph ABP* (07 January 2019)

Pegs are an everyday use for a household, especially for families. We use them to hang clothes outside after having washed them. My mom used to seal open milk bags with pegs, I do the same. One could conclude that Muholi's mother and many black domestic workers sealed their family connections in order to provide for them. They hung the clothes of their white employers, while their own children had to hang their own clothes. It is an image that touches on the many hanged or forgotten dreams of domestic workers to go back to their families and be a part of a family, and not only on weekends. The scars left behind to dry and the many sacrifices made to feed their families. You use pegs to hang things or to seal them. Muholi is hanging a portrait of Bester that encompasses the black domestic workers in South Africa have had to hang themselves dry until they have nothing left.

Fisani

The dominant visual theme of *Somnyama Ngonyama* is the crown. Whether the crown is made of safety pins, masking tapes, clothing pegs or pot scrapers, they all form a crown that surrounds Muholi's head. *Fisani* was taken in Parktown in 2016 and is a black and white image of Muholi draped in safety pins. Muholi's upper body is bare, apart from the necklace of safety pins, that cover their chest and breasts. Muholi's darkened skin blends in with the background becoming one entity. Muholi's head is also surrounded with safety pins, forming a crown. In most of the portraits that make up *Somnyama Ngonyama*, Muholi is looking directly at the camera. In contrast, in *Fisani* Muholi has decided to look away from the viewer, making the viewer question why they are looking at this image, what drew them to this image in the first place.

What drew me to this photograph were the safety pins. I grew up in a household and community that called safety pins *ispeliti*. My mom would use *ispeliti* to clip her clothes or

our clothes together. I have also used safety pins to attach name badges in seminars and conferences. Safety pins forms part of the domestic items that Muholi has used in *Somnyama Ngonyama*. An item that a mother, sister, an aunt, and a domestic worker has used throughout the years. These domestic items form part and parcel of family use, and they bind mothers and domestic workers into fixed identities. Family photographs have fastened and pinned a fixed identity for themselves, nothing mundane can be shown, the ordinary does not belong in photographs. Much like these safety pins in *Fisani*, they have pinned themselves into one way of looking at family photographs. They do not try to weave different identities, pain and trauma into themselves, even though they are shaped by such even though these pains and traumas are hidden.

Dodd refers to the self-determination that the individuals in Santu Mofokeng's *Black Photo Album* mastered to take their family photographs and portraits for themselves. Arguably, their family images hid what Muholi chooses to display. When talking about *Fisani* Muholi notes how thoughts of "unity, humanity and also connections between people and how they are connecting like those safety pins if they speak of a certain or common language"[103] when creating the safety pin image. This made me think of the connections that we have as a people, as families that use safety pins, and the connections that bind domestic workers together, their connection of missing out on their own families , seeing their children grow up without them while having to raise the children of their employees. According to Jansen "like the household furniture, they are presented as part of the family's possessions".[104] Much like the clothing pegs and safety pins, these domestic workers are metamorphosed into these

[103] https://www.instagram.com/p/B3LjbAFDcfg/?hl=en
[104] Jansen, 'From Thandi the Maid to Thandi the Madam', p. 118.

domestic items they have used in their daily jobs, invisible but there. Expendable, ready to buy and sell, resembling the portraits.

MaID

The image *MaID* pays homage to domestic workers including Muholi's mother. Taken in Brooklyn, New York 2015, *MaID* is a self-portrait of Muholi looking away from the camera, which I found surprising. Muholi's upper body is naked, patched up with long and short strips of masking tape. Their neck is decorated by a makeshift masking tape necklace/choker. It goes in a cyclical fashion around their neck, with three strips of masking tape taped on it. Muholi's head is also adorned with masking tape, acting as a makeshift crown, which bears a resemblance to the makeshift crown in *Fisani*. Muholi's body seems to weave and connect with the background. It is as if the masking tape strips connect with the leaf-like background. The background of *MaID* resembles a tiny bush trying to connect itself .

What drew me to *MaID* was essentially the masking tapes. I kept on asking myself why someone would choose to tape their body and hair with masking tape (it being very painful to take out). I wish I could say that I came to a concrete conclusion as to answer the why question, but it left me with more questions. If we were to take the literal meaning of masking tape, we would conclude that masking tape is used to mask (cover). I have used masking tape when I needed to lock two wires together (perhaps that could be a different tape). Masking tape is used in painting, when one is drawing. I took the masking tapes strips that cover Muholi's body as strips that cover the unseen scars of having to taking a taxi in the morning. It is a tape that covers the scars that domestic workers had in leaving their families behind to take care of their white employer's families. Black labour is often invisible. Living black people having to mask their hard work. The Apartheid regime was a system that treated black

labour as a given, which rendered black people invisible, covered in scars hidden by the masking tape. The domestic workers Muholi pays homage to had to find means to sustain their families. In the act they were masking their own existence in their own families.

Moreover, Muholi's neck is surrounded by a makeshift necklace/choker that is choking these domestic workers that Muholi is trying to represent. They have no choice but to be estranged from their families to provide for them. They might have urges to scream, but those urges choke them into silence. They portray the pain of being othered, but these family photographs do a great job of othering the pain and masking it with an invisible/visible masking tape, a smile. A smile hides. And perhaps they were happy, or perhaps they had to force themselves to smile. I could go further and say that family photographs form another part of masking tape. They mask, in their mundaneness and banality of the everyday. Muholi puts that into the forefront and demands you to look at this pain. I am reminded of Minkley who argues that the pass photograph "was figuratively a visual wound and an image of violation, indicating a future of body searches, invasions."[105] A wound that the family photographs in *Black Photo Album* conceals by masking these invasions and searches. The portrait of my mother inside the dompas book expresses no signs of a young lady with tears in her eyes having to take a portrait for a dompas that would allow her to move around Cape Town. Muholi showcases the chokehold the invasions plaguing black individuals. The attempts made to patch up and mask a bleeding wound.

[105] Minkley, 'The Pass Photograph', p. 114.

Mfana

This is by far the simplest looking portrait in *Somnyama Ngonyama*. It is a portrait of Muholi gazing at the camera, without any accessories or domestic items. Muholi's hair (dreadlocks)has been let down, past their shoulders. The white part of Muholi's eyes draw you in, as much as the darkened skin. All your attention as the onlooker is focused on Muholi's face and eyes. Muholi accounts that "I wanted to pay tribute to my brother who was killed in a car accident at the age of twenty…As I look in the mirror, sometimes I can see my brother…There are images where I see my mother …Then I look at different portraits in which I am mix of my mother, my brother and my sister."[106] Muholi through *Mfana* is a mixture of a brother who has long since passed and a mother who had to work as a domestic worker for 42 years of her life. *Mfana* is a very mellow portrait as if it harbors no struggles of grief. Grief of a life lost young, a peaceful image that does not wrestle with questions of identity, belonging and family. Its background gives *Mfana* the calm effect, a calmness Muholi challenges by looking directly at the camera. Mark Gevisser, a South African author and journalist in a magazine article comments on how Muholi still "seemed to struggle for family acceptance,"[107] that despite gaining all this success, Muholi still craved family acceptance, especially from their mother Bester. According to Gevisser, " Bester had never been to her daughter's show" and cites Muholi who states, "I don't know what my mother would have thought of the work that I do even though she understood what I am."[108] Through these self-portraits, Muholi is perhaps trying to come to terms with the many faces looking through the mirror. Gevisser cements this thought by stating that "Muholi has used the

[106] Renee Mussai, 'Zanele Muholi in Conversation with Renee Mussai, Archive of the Self', Autograph ABP (07 January 2019)
[107] Mark Gevisser, Zanele 'Zanele Muholi: dark lioness' accessed at https://m.blog.naver.com/PostView.naver?isHttpsRedirect=true&blogId=withrosa&logNo=221324562748, on 05 September 2024.
https://www.economist.com/1843/2018/06/05/zanele-muholi-dark-lioness
[108]Gevisser, 'Zanele Muholi: dark lioness'.

camera to construct a surrogate family,"[109] the community/family that would accept Muholi's different identities that are shown in *Somnyama Ngonyama*; a surrogate family that would show up to Muholi's shows and be present.

Conclusion

These domestic objects that Muholi uses in *Somnyama Ngonyama* can be found in most households where they form part of the family and the everyday. The photographs *Bester*, *MaID*, *Fisani* and *Mfana* demonstrate the ties of family and the longing for a mother and brother that have long passed. What family photos do often is showcase love in its happiest form. What Muholi does is display love, death and longing in their naked forms. These portraits and domestic objects are stating that these individuals loved, and they were loved. By making use of several domestic items like pot scrapers, pegs and masks, Muholi has demonstrated how these objects have suffocated black domestic workers and how they have endorsed black labor. This resonates with Minkley who has argued that even though pass portraits were burdened with trauma, they were still embraced as personal photos. Similarly, these portraits in this collection can be looked at through the gaze of family photography, as an ode to Muholi's mother and black domestic workers, recognizing their humanness outside the confines of being simply black labourers, as beings that had and still have families

[109] Gevisser, 'Zanele Muholi: dark lioness'.

Interlude: Pegs and Speliti having a conversation

"Speliti' whispered Pegs, inside a pink wardrobe.

"Yintoni Pegs?' (What is it Pegs?), asked Speliti annoyed. Speliti was also inside the pink wardrobe. Both Speliti and Pegs occupied the same place in Sihle Planga's wardrobe, their owner. Pegs left the wardrobe almost every day, Speliti left the wardrobe on specific days, depending on what Sihle would wear that day.

"Your owner is looking for you," whispered Pegs, she was glad that it was Speliti's day to see the sun. Sihle and her two kids, Pluto and Mars used Pegs almost every day, while Speliti lounged around gloating, the little, tiny stick she was, thought Pegs to herself.

"Jonga wena Pegs,"(look, you Pegs), said Speliti threateningly at Pegs. "I'll make you mincemeat, one of these days."

Pegs laughed, brown wood that she was. Speliti and Pegs had occupied the same pink wardrobe for 20 years together. They were old friends Speliti and Pegs, having been part of the Planga family for so long. "Loosen up my old friend" said Pegs to Speliti, "you will be back today still."

Speliti glared at Pegs. This little woody thing is making fun of me, thought Speliti to herself. Who would have thought, two household items would be friends. 'Not me," thought Speliti. Pegs are used to hang clothes and seal close packets. "As if I am not used for the same things," whispered Speliti, shaking her head at her silliness.

"Speliti, we need a new family my old friend" whispered Pegs. Still laying on her side inside the wardrobe full of pink clothes. "Urgh" said Pegs, the sight of pink annoyed Pegs. All her Madam wore were pink clothes, Pegs always dreads Sihle picking her to hang her clothes.

"You traitor!" shouted Speliti not shocked at all, shaking her head at Pegs. She liked to joke around, thinking that she was funny when she was not. "Leave me alone Pegs, Sihle might hear us talking, now that would give her a heart attack," said Spelitii.

‘Yah, yah, spoil sport,” mocked Pegs. Speliti was getting old thought Pegs to herself. Old age was getting to her friend. She was always grumpy; she might break thought Pegs,and that would break Sihle’s heart. Speliti was her favorite domestic item to use. Pegs and Speliti awaited use every day, always hidden in the wardrobe.

Chapter 3: Forms of Belonging

This next chapter focuses on *Faces and Phases,* which too is a collection of portraits. While my discussion of *Somnyama Ngonyama* drew attention to domestic items, here my attention is on how these portraits allow us to reflect on notions of inclusion and exclusion, loss and love, in other words, the covert *experiences* that relate to family-hood. I begin by engaging with the work of various scholars on such a collection and conclude with an analysis of a selection of images from the collection.

Citizenship and belonging

The South African constitution prides itself in being open minded and it is. Muholi and the queer community have all looked to the police and the constitution for protection however to no avail. Muholi states that the gay, lesbian, transgender and queer community "experience rape from gangs, rape from so-called friends, neighbors, and sometimes even family members."[110] Their reports to the police and their cries for the world to listen to them go un-noticed. This is one of the many other reasons why Muholi ventured into visual activism and why this series exists. Muholi believes that it is "important to mark, map and preserve our movements through visual histories."[111] This is an opportunity for the next generation of black lesbians and trans community to know and to learn that black lesbians and transgender beings existed before. They were part of history and that there is no shame that accompanies such. *Faces and Phases* is a series that speaks of resistance and the power of access that accompanies Muholi. Muholi goes on to state, "I showcase our aesthetics through portraiture, which historically provides memorable records for lovers, family and friends."[112] Muholi is

[110] Zanele Muholi, 'Faces and Phases' , *Indiana University Press* (2012), p. 113.
[111] Muholi, 'Faces and Phases', p. 114.
[112] Muholi, 'Faces and Phases', p. 114.

part of this community that is being photographed. It's a shared experience that they have made visible for the world to see and be a part of. This is a series that "commemorates and celebrates the lives of the black queer."[113]

Belonging for members of the LGBTQI community becomes increasingly hard, especially as the "…rising tide of violence against local homosexual population reveals an increasingly hostile political environment and a culture of impunity that allows for these hate crimes to go unpunished,"[114] as argued by Ernst Van der Wal in *Skewing the nation: Mobilizing Queer Citizenship In South Africa*. Van der Wal notes how images can become "…a beacon, of sorts, that suggest a space of acceptance and membership towards which a subject can move."[115] Muholi in *Faces and Phases* opens a conversation surrounding belonging and family. A conversation of acceptance for people that refuse gender norms. Van der Wal notes how "images of belonging potentially allow for the interplay between imaging and imagining, and are thus crucial for mobilizing, in a productive sense of the term, a sense of belonging amongst LGBTQI subjects."[116] Muholi through *Faces and Phases* draws attention to belonging for these individuals in these portraits and for any black queer individual struggling with their identity. Van der Wal further argues that "to belong is not always an easy thing, especially when ideas surrounding a person's ability to fit in, join in and be in, is dependent upon normative codes of gender and sexuality."[117] Family photographs have traditionally been gendered in their approach, rendering it difficult for members of the LGBTQI community to fit and belong.

[113] Muholi, 'Faces and Phase', p. 114.
[114] Ernst van der Wal, 'Skewing The Nation: Mobilizing Queer Citizenship In South Africa' , *Leipzig and Halle* (2018), p. 7-8.
[115] Van der Wal, 'Skewing the nation', p. 5.
[116] Van der Wal, 'Skewing the nation', p. 5.
[117] Van der Wal, 'Skewing the nation', p. 2.

The first time I came across the series *Faces and Phases*, the first thought that sprang to mind was the green South African identity book. The little green book came to mind because it identifies an individual. It is proof that you exist, whereas a death certificate is proof that you have passed on.[118] Ingrid Masondo in her article, "Unstable forms", speak about how the identity document in the 1950s "was intended to be part of the body, regulating movement, where and when one could be and always anticipating inspection"[119] for African people. Your face and your ID document identify you, but for some in the transgender community, their identity is more than what one can see. The person that looks back at them in their identity books might not be the same person they are now. Some could have gone through gender affirmation surgeries which takes them through a different phase in their lives. Van der Wal argues that "…the experiences and embodiments of trans masculinity is drawn upon to demonstrate how gendered movement and change is visualised…"[120] Trans gender individuals might go through this change from male to female and from female to male, or identify as non-binary but, their identity documents leave them no choice but to choose either or in order to belong. Van der Wal further discusses how "the South African ID book can be seen as a severely disciplined form of recognition,"[121] which fails to consider the individuals that no longer identify with the portraits in their own identity documents. That sense of belonging in a country, a community, and a family is lost for these individuals, because the ID book portrait is "required to gain access to various institutions and services…a document that officially recognises a subject as a national citizen."[122]

[118] Van der Wal, 'Skewing the nation', p. 10.
[119] Ingrid Masondo, 'Unstable Forms: Photography, Race, and The Identity Document in South Africa', *Ohio University Press* (2019), p. 82.
[120] Van der Wal, 'Skewing the nation', p. 10.
[121] Van der Wal, 'Skewing the nation', p. 11.
[122] Van der Wal, 'Skewing the nation', p. 11.

The ID book portrait also limits accessibility for transgender individuals. In its power to determine access and mobility, it can resemble the dompas and how it othered black people under the Apartheid regime. Van der Wal further mentions how John Torpey "argues, identity documents enhance the state's control of, and ability to discriminate between, its subjects in terms of rights and privileges,"[123]especially in the case of transgender people. I am reminded of Minkley who states that in "…the Defiance Campaign, the burned, abandoned, rejected pass, as opposed to the identification portraits, became the alternative political antiapartheid liberation image…"[124] To burn one's ID book though is to compromise belonging as a citizen. Nevertheless, for Van der Wal, even though the ID book "… captures them in a gendered way,"[125] they are able to look at their portraits and potentially see themselves in a desired way. Van der Wal mentions Charl, a trans person who participated in his research, and spoke about how "of all the photographs that I ever had, of all of those photographs, the one I would choose to identify with is the ID photograph."[126] He cherishes his portrait in part because of his transition to being male, just as most mothers cherish their family photographs. It defines who he has become and gives him access to spaces that he might not have had access to before.

Love and Loss

The faces in *Faces and Phases* are in different phases with different faces in their journey of life. At the same time, some of the faces we gaze at in this series have gone through another phase of life, death. They have gone through the afterlife phase, which we do not get to see. *Faces and Phases* is a series that encompasses the living and the dead, it is a continuation

[123] Van der Wal, 'Skewing the nation', p. 11.
[124] Minkley, 'The Pass Photograph', p. 108.
[125] Van der Wal, 'Skewing the nation', p. 12.
[126] Van der Wal, 'Skewing the nation', p. 12.

even after death. Thomas states, "the rhetorical force of this pairing of the living and the dead powerfully refuses the dehumanization of black lesbians that led to the deaths of the women memorialized"[127] in this series. Thomas goes on to state we as the viewers "read each portrait in the series as haunted by the possibility of violence, rape and murder."[128] Even though positivity accompanies each portrait, the viewer must not forget the atrocities that plague lesbian individuals on a daily basis.

Gabeba Baderoon draws attention in addition to mourning with regards to this series of photographs. Baderoon states that one can "discern a simultaneous assertion of presence and a sense of mourning"[129] in Muholi's photographs. Referring to the ID book she also states it "indicates your gender and is thus an important and often tense point of contact for transgender people with the state." As mentioned by Van der Wal, the ID book functions in a way that "one has to be gendered to be known."[130] Both Thomas and Baderoon draw attention to the fact that Muholi is photographing their community. According to Baderoon, Muholi "knows everyone individually; she knows their narratives and also the history and shifts that have brought them to the present."[131] This leaves Muholi vulnerable, alongside a community surrounded by vulnerability. Muholi is the participants in these portraits and in turn they become Muholi by virtue of being human and sharing the same struggle and experience.

Furthermore, through this shared experience, there are those still sceptical and have a hard time with transgender identity. Baderoon brings light to what many fail to highlight noting,

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[127] Thomas, 'Photography and Post-apartheid Lesbian Lives', p. 434.
[128] Thomas, 'Photography and Post-apartheid Lesbian Lives', p. 434.
[129] Gabeba Baderoon, '" Gender within Gender": Zanele Muholi's Images of Trans Being and Becoming' , *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 37, No 2 (2011), p. 403.
[130] Van der Wal, 'Skewing the nation', p. 12.
[131] Baderoon,'"Gender within Gender"', p. 407.

"some in the lesbian community have complicated and often strained relations with transgender identity and politics."[132] This is accompanied by the question of rape and patriarchy; how some transgender men look down on lesbians. Even though this might not be a dominant narrative when looking at this series, it is one that needs more attention. The unrecorded calls for presence to be recognised and the gaze of those invisible to be met in their attempt to be visible. As Poulain states ,"the subjects in Muholi's shots do not merely claim visibility but, crucially, return the viewer's gaze,"[133] which returns us to what Muholi stated about the right to look and the right to be seen. She goes on to say that this series "uses photography to critique the way of looking."[134] By gazing back at you, they are breaking the fourth wall, and their gaze dares you as the viewer to look back. According to Poulain the "right to look entails the right to be recognised as a subject."[135]By gazing back, they dare to look and see another human being, including individuals that might have long since passed from this realm. For Poulain, Muholi in this manner is creating an "illusion of a reciprocal gaze…we construct a narrative of who they are from what we are given to see in the picture".[136] The gazes looking back at us invites us to form our own narratives, while maintaining the gaze of resistance.

Similarly, Leora Farber speaks of subversive resistance which is a "metaphor for strategies primarily used by black photographers to produce visual images that challenge dominant, hetero normative, racialised and sexualised representations."[137] This statement at its core encompasses what Muholi intended *Faces and Phases* to do. It challenges and questions

[132] Baderoon,'"Gender within Gender", p. 408.
[133] Poulain, 'Gazing Back', p. 2.
[134] Poulain, 'Gazing Back', p. 3.
[135] Poulain, 'Gazing Back', p. 6.
[136] Poulain, 'Gazing Back', p. 9.
[137] Leora Farber, 'Beyond the Ethnographic Turn: Refiguring the Archive in Selected Works by Zanele Muholi, *Critical Arts* , Vol. 32, No. 2 (2017), p. 22.

these normalised representations, whilst giving positive light to the lesbian and trans community. Farber takes us back to the gaze by arguing that *Faces and Phases* "empowers individuals to assert a sense of personal agency in their confrontation with the camera/viewer"[138]. By being active participants in their own fight, returning the gaze of the viewer is a form of asserting that the individuals in this series are not helpless beings that need saving. All they are asking for is a space to recognized and seen as a human first before anything. To not be labelled and plagued by "celebrating the individuality and distinction of each participant."[139] There is no uniform look for lesbians or transgender individuals. This series highlights this fact, that those photographed might belong to the same community and share experiences, but each person has their own opinion and individual style.

Anna Stielau also takes note of how Muholi's participants return the gaze of the viewer in *Faces and Phases.* Stielau states that if "these photographs depict the phases of life experience, sexual object choice, or transition, then the viewer's gaze is invited to phase in turn, travelling freely between states and across surfaces."[140] The viewer is invited to more than gaze back, to also remember to value the next human being despite their sexual orientation. Stielau discloses how Muholi "nudges us to remember that lives are not novels…They do not have to have intentionality to be meaningful. Some bodies do not do or cannot do."[141] This is further proven by the fact that some of the individuals that look back at us as the viewers have long since passed. Some from hate crimes, while others passed away due to diseases.

[138] Farber, ' Beyond the Ethnographic Turn', p. 22.
[139] Farber, ' Beyond the Ethnographic Turn', p. 22.
[140] Anna Stielau, 'Radical Decomposition: Unravelling Agencies in the Art of Zanele Muholi, Jean Brundrit, and Nolan Oswald Dennis' , *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change* (2022), p. 4.
[141] Stielau, 'Radical Decomposition', p. 4.

Rael Jero Salley speaks of how Muholi "documents the challenges of black LGBTQIs in South Africa, while being equally concerned with locating and reproducing the beauty and fragility of a community, the constituent's experience of everyday life, and the dreams of a developing nation."[142] Salley goes on further to state that Muholi's *Faces and Phases* "offers information and evidence of ways of life."[143] Each participant is gazing at the viewer, but each one has a different style, which showcases how different they are, never mind this shared experience. Sally is one of many that mentions Muholi's intimacy with her participants. I gather it shocks them or fascinates these scholars how close Muholi is with their participants. Muholi identifies with them.

The scholars above have similarities in their reading of this collection however Michelle M Fikrig in her article, *Haunted by Solitude: Isolation and Representation in Zanele Muholi's Archive* finds drawbacks and contradictions. Fikrig boldly states that the "isolation that is inherent in the solo portraits of *Faces and Phases* seems to go against the goal of community representation that Muholi notes as their objective for the project."[144] The sense of community, shared experience and collective pain are not conveyed effectively. Instead, they leave the viewer seeing different individuals left to fend for themselves. These portraits isolate the individuals. In a sense, Fikrig is stating that Muholi is contradicting themselves with this series. She does state though that Muholi succeeded in marking and mapping a place for the queer community, noting "it's impossible to deny the existence of the queer community when confronted with them in such a manner."[145]

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[142] Rael Jero Salley, ' Zanele Muholi's Elements of Survival' , *African Arts,* Vol. 45, No. 4 (2012), p, 3.
[143] Salley, 'Zanele Muholi's Elements of Survival', p. 64.
[144] Michelle M. Fikrig, ' Haunted by Solitude: Isolation and Representation in Zanele Muholi's Archive' , Africana Studies Student Research Conference (2018), p. 3.
[145] Fikrig, ' Haunted by Solitude', p. 2.

Fikrig still feels as if the women in the portraits are isolated, even though they have been made visible in this series. Each participant is a lone wolf, in a sea of other lone wolfs. One could even go on to say that Fikrig is a bit harsh in her critique. With each photograph that Muholi took, they went to great lengths to protect their participants, which for Fikrig is insufficient, because that still renders the individual being photographed in isolation. Even though Muholi has an intimate relationship with these participants, Fikrig still feels as if there is an isolation that accompanies these portraits. She speaks of the stance the individuals being photographed have chosen. It does not invite the viewer in; it's not welcoming. Even though the participant is protecting herself by folding her arms, that still pushes the viewer away.

This next section extends a number of observations made by the cited scholars through an analysis of five images from the collection. My intention is to extend such discussions in order to consider how the images also draw attention to key aspects of family photography.

Jordyn Monroe* and *Nosizwe Cekiso

What drew me to these photographs was how similar they were. Both in their postures and how the individuals positioned themselves in front of the camera. The portraits were taken in opposite parts of the world. *Jordyn Monroe* was taken in Toronto, Canada whereas *Nosizwe Cekiso* was taken in Gugulethu, a township in Cape Town. The individuals in both figures are respectively named Jordyn Munroe and Nosizwe Cekiso. Jordyn Munroe has an exacting look in her eyes, as if daring you as the viewer to look back at her. Alexandra Poulain notes that "with very few exceptions, all the other subjects in the series gaze back at us with

enigmatic gazes, and claim not just the right to appear, but crucially, "the right to look.""[146] By looking directly at the camera, they preserve the right to look back as most family photographs do not. Family photographs are looked at, without having the conversation to look back. Munroe's background is a body of water (could be the sea or a river). She is wearing a black top and an earring on her visible ear. What attracted me the most to Jordyn Monroe's portrait was the afro comb situated in Munroe's afro hair. It felt familiar, as if asking me if I knew it. How it stays in her hair is how mine positions itself when I am combing my hair, trying to untie the knots I had made to it.

Nosizwe Cekiso's portrait has a softness to it in contrast. Nosizwe Cekiso's eyes look gently at you as the viewer, willing you to smile back at her. According to Poulain "the right to look is not about seeing. It begins at a personal level with the look into someone else's eyes to express friendship, solidarity or love."[147] Perhaps Cekiso's gaze is one that invites friendship and solidarity to a community willing to embrace her as she is. *Faces and Phases*, much like family photographs, encompasses love and family. Cekiso is wearing a t-shirt with big polka dots, her hair is relaxed and styled in a ponytail with a few strands let loose. Unlike Monroe with the body of water as her background, Cekiso's background is a worn-out zinc roof, telling a story of the rains it has weathered. According to Poulain South Africa has "consistently denied inclusion to black LGBT+ people, sustaining the myth that homosexuality is un-African."[148] This worn-out zinc symbolizes the rains and storms members of the LGBTQI community have weathered and they are still able to rally behind love and the importance of community. Cekiso has a gentle smile on her face and a calm look around her eyes as if nothing can take away her gentle strength.

[146] Poulain, 'Gazing Back', p. 5.
[147] Poulain, 'Gazing Back', p. 6.
[148] Poulain, 'Gazing Back', p. 5.

While Monroe asks you the question of why you are looking at her without her permission as if mimicking the gazes Muholi embodied in *Somnyama Ngonyama*, Cekiso pulls you in further to look at her. I am reminded of Rose's work on family photography based on interviews with mothers who were always willing to share their private photographs because of their enchantment and ability to pull a person in.

Paballo Molele* and *Nosi 'Ginga' Marumo

Strangely enough, these two photographs are also similar in their poses and postures. They were both taken in Yeoville in Johannesburg in 2007. The individuals are respectively named Paballo Molele and Nosi 'Ginga' Marumo. Both ladies are beautiful while looking at the camera. Both bear the same gentleness and softness around the eyes as Nosizwe Cekiso. Paballo Molele is depicted with her short spiky hair looking at the camera, wearing a collared jumpsuit. She has on dangling star earrings; she seems to be smiling slightly. The background of Paballo's portrait is mostly made up of the sky, and there seems to be a field on the left side of the portrait, while the right side is filled with what resembles tiny houses.

She is posing for the camera, as I do when taking photographs with friends or family, in a manner that is reminiscent of family photography including the black individuals in Santu Mofokeng's *Black Photo Album/Look at Me.* Marumo wears round dangling earrings. My older sister has the same ones. She has short hair, and her top has a wide collar that reveals her collarbone. Her upper body is slightly tilted to the left small pose, similar to the pose found with Paballo Molele. Marumo is surrounded by the sky. Both portraits could have been taken on the same day. Marumo's pose is familiar, one that I have seen many times. Writing about the family photographs in Van Kalker's studio, Nwafor states that how "one chooses to present oneself is a matter of choice or as a consequence of how he or she personally was

able to interpret the immediate environment."[149] Both Molele and Marumo chose how they wished to be presented while directly looking at the camera. Knowing that Molele and Marumo were given such agency adds more meaning to the community Muholi has created.

Busi Sigasa

This next image symbolizes what *Faces and Phases* encompasses at its core, celebrating lives of LGBTQI members. This image of Busi Sigasa was taken in Braamfontein, Johannesburg in 2006 at Constitutional Hill. She is also looking away from the camera, wearing a beanie with stripes and a plain jacket with a collar and a jersey underneath it with one stripe. She is surrounded by a field of tall grass with the Constitution Hill prison visible. Melanie Nathan describes Sigasa as "a proud lesbian mother, poet and writer, as well as actress, singer and lyricist."[150] Sigasa allows the viewer to see her as more than just a rape survivor, a glimpse into what and who she could be outside the confines of what society had deemed her to be.

In her poem titled *2013 March: Remember Me When I'm Gone*, she writes, "I was a big sister to my younger sisters. I listened to my mothers' teachings. I became friends with father. I'D DIE FOR MY FAMILY."[151] This suggests that she had been a person who had loved and had been loved, as a daughter and a sister.

Conclusion

Faces and Phases is not a collection one might think of when considering family photography. Poulain notes how "the life-size shots in public shows give an eerie impression

[149] Nwafor, 'Re-presenting self', p. 172.
[150] https://oblogdee.blog/2013/03/09/remember-me-when-im-gone/
[151] https://oblogdee.blog/2013/03/09/remember-me-when-im-gone/

that you are facing real people rather than photographs; individuals, each of them photographed in a way that enhances rather than reduces singularity, but also a community with clearly traceable identity makers (race, and often gender nonconformity)."[152] Even though *Faces and Phases* individualizes its members, it also showcases a community and a family. It is a collection that portrays loss and mourning. Muholi notes how "the series articulates the collective pain we as a community experience due to the loss of friends and acquaintances through diseases and hate crimes."[153] Again, I am reminded of Rose who found it "…useful to treat family snaps less as meaningful images, and more as objects embedded in practices that produce various effects."[154] These portraits produce joy, happiness, belonging, sadness and community for those photographed and those not included, but are a part of the LGBTQI community.

[152] Poulain, 'Gazing Back', p. 3.
[153] Muholi, 'Faces and Phases', p. 114.
[154] Rose, 'Doing Family Photography', p. 17.

Coda: Portraits in a closet

"Yoo-hoo," whispered Portrait A, from the grey wall to Portrait B who occupied the same grey wall.

Annoyed, Portrait B was also a black and white portrait like Portrait A. They belonged to an art gallery called Lwazi Gallery in the township of Samora Machel. "What, Portrait A?" asked Portrait B. She always had to say something, thought Portrait B to herself.

"My owner is coming to see me today, perhaps she might come with your owner," said Portrait A. She was excited to see her owner. It had been a month since Lungi her owner had come and it had been three months since Portrait B's owner, Lundi had come to the gallery and that was unlike her at all. Portrait A stole a glance at Portrait B, her round brown eyes were swimming in unshed tears.

Portrait B looked head on - she dared not look at Portrait A. She knew that her tears would fall, and the onlookers would be shocked by a crying portrait. "She's not coming Portrait A, she will never be able to come again," whispered Portrait B, her throat tightening with her unshed tears.

"But why Portrait B, she must come and see you. She would come every month just to gaze at you," said Portrait A puzzled by what Portrait B was saying.

Portrait B's unshed tears slid down her round, brown cheeks. "She died, she was murdered by her father for being a lesbian," whispered Portrait A, pain written on her face.

"Noo! You're lying Portrait B!" shouted Portrait A furiously. Portrait B had no other person that came to see her apart from her owner, Lundi. My poor Lungi, thought Portrait A to herself, she must be in so much pain.

"I wish I was Portrait A; I wish I was," whispered Portrait B to herself. What had happened to Lundi had been horrible, being murdered by her own father must have been a shock to her. Mind you , a father that had pretended to embrace her for who she had become.

“Xolo Portrait B” (I’m sorry Portrait B) said Portrait A, not knowing what to say. Essentially Portrait B had lost herself, now she was forever stuck on a grey wall with no one to understand her. Portrait A could not imagine the pain that Portrait B must be in.

“It’s okay Portrait A, I still have Lungi your owner who will come and see me” said Portrait B, trying to console herself.

“Yes!” shouted Portrait A, relieved that Portrait B had had come up with a solution to disperse the awkward silence. “They had been good friends, Lungi and Lundi, for twenty years. Of course, she will come and look at you just to remember her long lost friend. They were family, they only had each other to lean on and they loved each other,” said Portrait A. Portrait B smiled a sad smile because what Portrait A was saying gave her heart warmth and a reason to go on. Someone would come and see her, even in her darkest days. Lungi will come to see her friend, Lungi even though she was in a gallery. Someone had loved her and cherished more than a family member ever did. ”Enkosi, my friend,” (Thank you, my friend) said Portrait B with a sad smile on her face.

Conclusion

What is a family photograph? That is the question I had when I finally chose to write about family photography. Not everyone has the traditional family photograph. Others have in their handbags portraits of their loved ones, as do I, while others decide to get rid of their family photographs that remind them of pain. As much as family images are banal and repetitive in their existence, there exists in them stories of love and affection. Even though there are elements of pretence in these family photographs, they do bring families together to reminisce about certain happy experiences. Family photographs are not always cherished; not every single individual with a family image wants to remember what has transpired.

They seem to tell the same stories of weddings and graduations. Seemingly showing a happy family, hiding the everyday and the mundane. Zanele Muholi's photographs do not show the everyday; instead, what they do show is what is *hidden* in family photographs such as the pain and resilience that each individual has gone through in *Faces and Phases*. Even though these portraits might not be seen as part of family photography, what they do as photographs to the individuals in the frames renders them as family photographs. What Muholi does in *Faces and Phases* is showcase belonging and notions of different identities in families. Essentially the LGBTQI members in this collection are a community, a family that knows each other. They chose to tell their stories through portraiture, exhibiting a sense of belonging to those that relate to their stories. *Somnyama Ngonyama* is a collection that pertains to blackness, race and the self. It is a collection that enabled me to look deeper into these self-portraits of Muholi and try to pinpoint the family in each portrait. The domestic items Muholi used in *MaID* and *Bester* gave me leeway in how I could connect these portraits to family photography. They were items that I have used, my mama had used and so many families still

use in the townships and beyond. I resonated and found them familiar even though they held a different meaning in this collection.

Throughout my writing, I wanted to explore what shapes family photographs and how notions of belonging look for black individuals in these photographs. I did not grow up in a family that had access to a camera. There used to be a man that would go around the Samora Machel township and he would always shout “photo, photo, photo” while riding his bicycle. That was the only access I ever had to a camera and Muholi made it possible for the individuals in *Faces and Phases* to be photographed how they chose. I came to no conclusion about this genre. Rather, family photographs should encompass more than weddings, children and vacation photos. My aim was to give a different view to family photographs because pain, sadness, and anguish are part of every family. Our ideas of what a family is and should look like is different for members of the LGBTQI community. I looked at family photography through a black lens, hoping to lend a different view to the dominant notions of what family photography is and how it looks.

Afterword: A little story of Image and Chicken

"*They put me under the bed,"whispered Image (looking about the closet) filled with yellow, green and red coats.*

"What?! No way," shouted Chicken. Do not ask yourself how Chicken had gotten inside the closet. Madam Smith had a tiny baby named Olivia that loved to torture Chicken, and he went along with it. Little Olivia was only four years old after all. Chicken and Image were in Madam Smith's walk- in closet. Image in the image was holding little Olivia when she was only two years old, sitting under a green tree with the sky blue in color.

"Yes way, I only managed to get out because little Olivia decided to rampage through Madam's Smith's bedroom. Madam keeps me under the bed," said Image, still whispering.

"At least I get to breathe and roam around. They even call us free range chicken when they sell us at woolies. Can you imagine, FREE RANGE CHICKEN!" shouted chicken in his squawky voice.

Panicked, Image looked around, praying that the door does not open. Madam Smith would die if she ever saw an image and a chicken talking, let alone to each other. "Tone it down," whispered Image, "Madam might hear us and put me back under the bed. I do not want to go back there, it is dark and frightening," said Image, shivering just thinking about it.

"The drama Image, the drama," said Chicken looking at Image with a silly, goofy look on his face. "Anyway, you will have to go back soon, you do not belong in this family, you cannot afford to be seen out in the open. You are a domestic worker after all, with Madam's child that calls you mama," said Chicken , shrugging his shoulders.

"Jonga (look) you Free Range Chicken sold at woolies! Mind your manners" whispered Image aggressively at Chicken with an angry look in her eyes.

Chicken, huffing said "At least I am sold; they fire you and your sisters without a thought. You take all these family images with these white families that you have worked for, 40 years go by and still you do not belong. At least I know where I belong, free or not."

Tears welled up in Images eyes. She knew what Chicken said was the truth. She had a family of her own, but she felt like a stranger visiting on weekends when she went back to her home in the township of Samora Machel to her two boys that no longer called her mama. She cried every time she thought of the time she had lost with her boys, Thando and Thami were 14- and 15-years old, old enough to make their own decisions. They called Image Sisi, which broke her heart, but she understood that her mother (Nosimo) had raised them, and they called her mama. It pained and thrilled Image whenever Olivia would call her mama, she had raised four of Madam Smith's children, three in their early twenties. They called her by her name now, no longer mama.

Chicken looked up at Image, tears had welled up on her brown eyes and fallen on her cheeks. Feeling flustered, Chicken quickly apologized. "Xolo Image (I'm sorry image), I did not mean to hurt you with my words. I was just joking around," said Chicken, trying to remedy the situation.

Image gazed upon Chicken, with his red and white feathered wings with teary eyes and a sad smile. "I know Chicken, but you were telling the truth. I miss my boys and my mother. I miss them calling me mama, how I would love to hear them call me that just once. I work for them, but at what cost Chicken? I do not even have one image with them as a family, but I belong in dozens and dozens of images in this house that will never see the light of day. I would rather be a Free-Range Chicken and sold at woolies than be what I am," said Image, tears still running down her dark cheeks.

"I also miss my family Image," said Chicken with a sad face. "I miss roaming around the yard and chasing after my mama and my siblings. I am a chicken I know, but I still belong to

a family, not some shop that labels me as Free-Range Chicken! Imagine! Being called a Free-Range Chicken your whole life!" shouted Chicken, getting angry just thinking about it. "Keep it down you Free-Range Chicken!" whispered aggressively Image shaking her head. This crazy chicken never listens. "Please Chicken, you know what you will be in the next few days, try to not worry about it," said Image, with a smug look.

"Mxm, stay in that image. I hope Madam finds you and puts you back under the bad, I have more freedom than you. Imagine that! A chicken with a pointy mouth has more free-range than you," whispered Chicken smugly at Image, with his pink, tiny tongue out at Image. The door was a little one. Chicken ran away in his tiny legs from Image knowing that she would skin him alive.

"Chicken uzokhala late, tshongentloko apha!" (You will cry later chicken, with your tiny head) shouted Image at Chicken disappearing back. She smiled slyly, knowing that she will skin him later for real, pour hot water to the feathers that he cherishes so much. "Should I roast him or fry him tonight?" thought Image cruelly, that's what he gets for making me cry, you Free-Range Chicken!!

The End

APPENDIX (all photographs are copyrighted by the Stevenson Gallery)

Somnyama Ngonyama

Bester V

Bester 1

Fisani

MaID

Mfana

Faces and Phases

Jordyn Monroe.

Nosizwe Cekiso

Paballo Molele.

Nosi 'Ginga' Marumo

Busi Sigasa

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