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### **Tierney Fellowship Exhibition “Ke Lefa Laka”**

Using self-representation to question and define our notions of self, we relate to later selves, thereby constituting personal identity; we also relate ourselves to others, thereby constituting collective identity. In relating earlier and later selves to each other we seek to make sense of our experiences. [...] But we also relate earlier to current selves in order to place ourselves in the present. (Coullie, et al 2006: pp.1)

Lebohang Kganye’s project is about a search for identity, identity not only on the basis of race, but also through her ethnic genealogy and the complexes of living in Johannesburg, a hybrid society, as a young Black woman in a post-Apartheid period. Through her family history Kganye maps out where she exists within this family and community, which in turn relates to her identity. Judith Coullie, Stephan Meyer, Thengani Ngwenya and Thomas Olver’s above quote offers an important understanding of how self-representation is a critical underpinning method of self-insertion and how this search for Self is invariably imbedded in the framing of individual identity. This idea of self-insertion also speaks about a space of collective selves and the notion of community. In that way, the position of an individual is firstly connected to a family, then to a clan, a community, and thereafter to a nation. What Kganye’s project proposes is an unfolding of her identity in relation to her family and at large an identity of a young South African Black woman. This is a very challenging task, as we know, that South African history is porous with contradictions and that such a task is faced with the challenge of being able to navigate through these contradictions in nuanced ways. Kganye’s strategy to engage with the family history also necessitates enquiries into the archive that she explores through personal interviews with her family and family’s photo albums. This process in itself presented other challenging dynamics about the functions of archives. Just as Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Michele Pickover and Graeme Reid, articulate in the book *Refiguring the Archive*, about the function of archives when they write:

For the archive is also always already being refigured; the technologies of creation, preservation and use, for instance, are changing all the time; physically the archive is being added to and subtracted from, and is in dynamic relation with its physical environment; organizational dynamics are ever shifting; and the archive is porous to societal processes and discourses – although at certain junctures, like the one South Africa finds itself now, formal conduits need to be put in place. (2002: 7)

Underlying this statement is the implication that archives, by their ever-changing nature, are limited and complex. What these editors allude to is that archives often do not reveal easy answers, but instead raise more questions about the information they contain. They suggest that archives must therefore be approached critically when attempting to understand, argue, and analyse them. Kobena Mercer (in an interview essay by Gilane Towadros about archives) further complicates this archive function where he argues that “[...] if you look at history, at the archive, its never as clear-cut as inclusion and exclusion, there’s always a revolving door [...]” (2004: 257). Kganye’s project of excavating her family history through personal interviews with family members and family albums thus sets up an interesting challenge in the way that complicates this family’s archive. Furthermore, the use of her own body to reference this archive thereby employs a strategy of autobiography, and in that way begins to bridge the archive’s limitations. Through the story of her mothers’ life and that of her grandfather, Lebohang Kganye invites us to experience her identity, the earlier and later selves, and at the same time reminds us that her history is a typical South African story, and one that many people can relate to.

Philemon Khanyi as we know him through Lebohang Kganye

There seem to be a few contained pathways explaining the journey of a man with many surnames. Lebohang Kganye attempts to illuminate such a narrative with the eyes and means of being the granddaughter of such a man. Kganye attempts to retrace and re-imagine the story of her family by activating the archives of family albums and through interviews with people who knew the man personally. In this way, Philemon Khanye, Lebo’s grandfather, becomes a trace of this past with which Kganye leaps into the present. Philemon along his journey gained and lost different forms of identity as different clerks wrote and rewrote his surname changing it from Khanye to Khanyi, and then to Kganye. Philemon was only ever recorded as Khanye, but when he got married, his wife’s surname was recorded as Khanyi despite the fact that she was taking her husband’s surname as her own. They later had children, and all their children’s surnames were recorded as Khanye except Lebo’s mother whose surname was recorded as Kganye. Years later Lebo’s surname was recorded as Kganye as well.

The name changes raises many complex questions about identity, yet leave residues of her grandfather’s move to the Transvaal (Gauteng), specifically Johannesburg. These names have Zulu, Xhosa and Sesotho derivatives, giving the impression of a man with many lives. This idea speaks about apartheid history and the context in which black people lived during those times. The South African economy controlled by the cheap labour Apartheid system forced many black men to leave their families in the rural areas in order to make a living. Often they were given short-term contracts that would be re-written for a different service. These contracts exposed them to many administrative

errors over which they had no control. Kganye's grandfather experienced this history. The surname Kganye is thus a result of the influences and transformations of the past.

The story Kganye gives us is a glimpse of this past. She stages the journey through her photographs, working with images of the family members who followed her grandfather to the Transvaal. It is here in this work that she goes back and forth through time, questioning her existence as reflected by this varying surname. In reconstructing the story of her grandfather's migration, she works in a studio populated with cardboard cutouts and enlarged black and white photographs that are reconstituted and become sculptural images. In this environment she performs, stages and reenacts her desire to be part of what she could never fully experience. The work questions and references the various interpretations of the family name, and reconstructs this history through photographs, but more particularly through Lebohang Kganye's viewfinder.

## References

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