

MORAPEDI, ONE WHO PRAYS: AN EXHIBITION BY LERATO LODI
CURATED BY AMOHELANG MOHAJANE
NORTH WEST UNIVERSITY GALLERY 2021
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Notions of life, death, faith and love are some of the concepts of life that are always the most difficult to comprehend and subjective to perception, the one commonality they all share is that they are constant. Everyone experiences them, no one is immune and the individual responses to these lived concepts vary greatly. To live is to love and to have faith and, to live is to one day die.

After losing someone close to you, people tend to look for comfort in specific memories and tangible objects, sometimes comfort is found in the clothes they used to wear, meals they used to eat, places they liked to visit and music they loved to listen to. Some people talk about feeling their presence at specific sites or locations, and some feel them in specific life changing moments. South African artist, Lerato Lodi on the other hand finds comfort and impressions of her grandmother when she prays.

After the passing of her grandmother Thalita Lodi in 2018. South Africa. Lerato noted specific practices and rituals which were observed in the various ceremonies that developed in response to her grandmothers passing. For Lerato, Thalita Lodi served as a matriarch while she was alive, she was a community leader, entrepreneur and a committed member of the Methodist Christian church. While Thalita went to church religiously as much as she could, she also observed her family's traditional practices and communicated with her ancestors. Lerato witnessed her grandmother as she observed the traditions of both these dual concepts of spirituality without conviction.

In grieving, Lerato conceptualised an otherworldly entity, Morapedi who embodies her late grandmother. Morapedi serves as a spiritual entity that Lerato finds comfort in, a companion that shows herself and communicates with Lerato in different ways, sometimes in song, sometimes in prayer and at times, with beads (dipheta), sacred cloths (lesela) and snuff. It was Thalita who taught Lerato how to pray and Morapedi which translates into "The one who prays" is a manifestation of Thalita. In her absence, Lerato conceptualized this body of work where she attempts to comprehend her grandmother's transcendence from the physical plane to the spiritual pane.

In the exhibition *Morapedi: One who prays*, Lerato Lodi takes us on a personal journey of her understanding and perception of spirituality. Faith and spirituality are very personal concepts and Lerato's faith is anchored on her memories of her grandmother and the lessons she has bestowed upon her regarding belief and spirituality. Without the physical presence of her grandmother Lerato reflects on her grandmother's teachings and her experiences of her as she attempts to navigate and negotiate her own perception and the practices and rituals that one undertakes within these concepts while also taking note of the political history of Christianity in Africa and the consequent stigma attached to traditional African spiritual practices.

Through the exhibition Lerato notes her grandmothers presence around her and their conversations as she attempts to elevate her voice and embody her through the body of work.

In “*Dikotlolo tsa Mma Lodi*” (2021) (Figure 1 & 2) we see numerous enamel bowls installed in the space. The function of the bowls differ from family to family, but are mostly used for events where the hosts are expecting a lot of guests as the bowls can hold much more than your average dish. For big events such as weddings and funerals, one is always sure to spot one of these bowls at the host’s home. What is interesting about these bowls is their stature, “Mosadi wa motse ona le dikotlolo tsa hae” These dishes not only serve a utilitarian function but also serve as to situate the owner in a certain level socially, young girls don’t own these bowls, but women of a certain age and stature will hardly be found without one of these. The bowls Lodi displays are marked T.Lodi to signify who the owner is. The bowls can easily be stolen at these events as family members and community members usually bring with them functional cutlery, bowls and dishes in order to assist with the preparation for the event. At times the dishes will intermingle and one will lose track of their dishes and bowls and for this instance it is highly recommended that one mark their belongings. It is also with pride that one marks these dishes as owning the bowls is seen as some kind of achievement, a rite of passage of sorts where one transcends from being a mere woman to being “Mma wa lapa” A mother of a household. The bowls serve as a badge (Like the ones scouts would carry after achieving a task) of womanhood and are personal, they also have an ability to represent you even if you are absent, for instance should you be unable to attend a family event, you would however send your bowls/dishes to show that you are in support of the event but unfortunately cannot make it in person, and therefore when people see the dishes marked with your name, some would even think that you are there in person. The bowls in this regard represent Thalita Lodi even after she has departed from this physical plane, they represent her presence, and cement the notion that at some point in time a woman by the name Thalita Lodi was alive.



Figure 1: Lodi, Lerato. 2021. *Dikotlolo tsa Mma Lodi*. Nail Polish on Enamel Bowls (Installation) NWU Gallery



Figure 2: Lodi, Lerato. 2021. *Dikotlolo tsa Mma Lodi. Nail Polish on Enamel Bowls (Installation)* NWU Gallery

“A conversation between Thalita and Wilhelmina” (church service notes), (2021) (Figure 3 & 4) is an installation that transports us and places us in the middle of a church on a church pew. The installation teleports the viewer to a specific moment in Thalita’s life here on earth, where Thalita was attending a church service with Wilhemina (Lerato’s aunt). The installation situates them in a church service and the framed bible pages mounted at the back lead directly into the moment where Thalita and Wilhemina would hear a scripture that spoke to them or heard part of a sermon that resonates with them. In this installation we can feel Thalita as she finds a pen and scribbles bible verses quickly while listening attentively so she can hear the message that comes with the scripture that both of them would later come back and reflect on should need be. Each framed paper with scriptures represents a different day, a different sermon, a different message that the ladies would comprehend on the many church services they attended and represents also a chance to teach one who missed the service or to echo back when one needs a specific message reiterated. The stark black background and hard bright light serves as to physically place Thalita and Welhemina on spotlight in the gallery space and impressions them as they get a specific epiphany reminiscent of Caravaggio’s *“The Calling of St Matthew”* (1600).



Figure 3: Lodi, Lerato. 2021. *A conversation between Thalita and Wilhemina (church service notes)*. Installation. NWU Gallery.

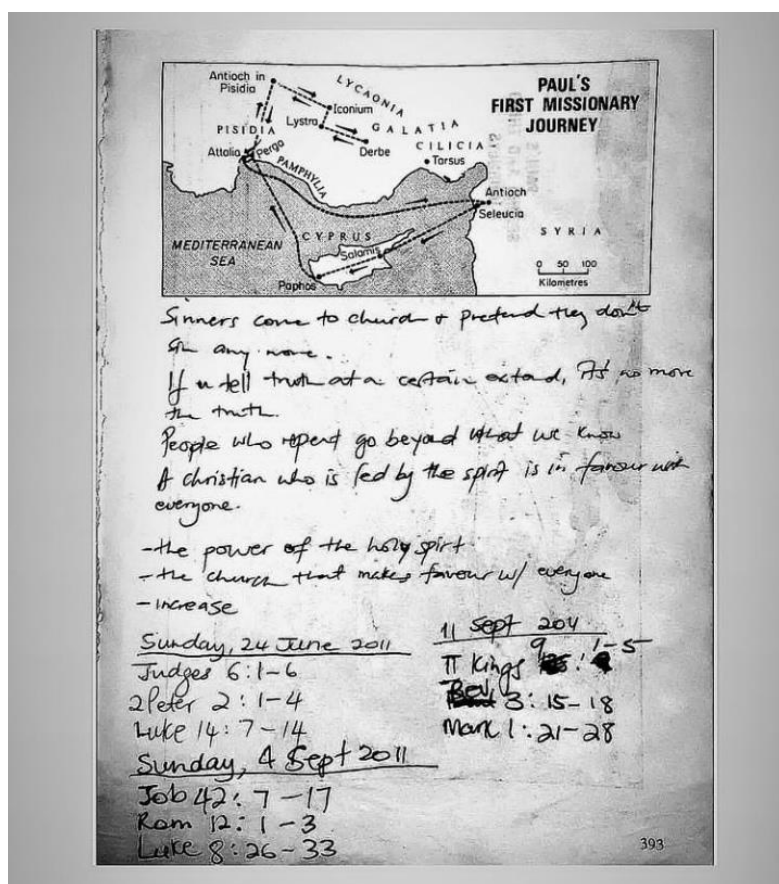


Figure 4: Lodi, Lerato. 2021. *A conversation between Thalita and Wilhemina (church service notes)*: View of one of the church service notes. Installation. NWU Gallery.

Ho phasa Badimo” and “Mmereko wa Badimo” are phrases used to refer to a ritual or practices that are performed in memory of those that have passed and in attempts to preserve good relations with

the deceased kin. The order of the practice differs from family to family and is performed for different reasons. The most common reasons are for thanksgiving, asking for blessings and good fortune. "*Sebaka sa Badimo*" (2021) (A shrine or sacred ritual site) is an installation of a similar ceremony/ ritual that would be observed. In performance of this ritual, the one/family performing the ritual do it in such a way as communicate with their ancestors. In this specific installation, Lerato lights candles, candles are known to symbolise light and purity, it is believed it is through the candle light that the ancestors and God are able to pin point your location and be aware of who exactly is praying/ communicating with them. During this process one would greet those that have passed and introducing themselves so that the ancestors are aware exactly who is performing this practice, and attempting to communicate with them. Water, alcohol, snuff and other consumables such as meat (if there was an animal sacrifice) are offered up to the ancestors as to appease them. Lerato includes dried sage in the installation, dried sage is known for its ability to clear the air of negative spirits and negative forces in order for the spirits of the departed to be comfortable and be present in the specific site. This ritual is performed around the belief that the ones who have passed live on in an alternate phase where they watch over us and protect us. And it is through this ritual that one is able to be in their presence and communicate with them effectively, in such ceremonies one would tell them of their lives and how they have progressed or regressed, doing so to thank them for their blessings or asking them to make their lives a bit easier by lighting their way and removing negative blockers. One would also ask for protection against negative forces as well as illnesses during this ceremony while thanking them for the good health they have enjoyed so far.



Figure 5: Lodi, Lerato. 2021. *Sebaka sa Badimo*. Installation. NWU Gallery.



Figure 6: Lodi, Lerato. 2021. *Sebaka sa Badimo*. Installation. NWU Gallery.



Figure 7: Lodi, Lerato. 2021. *Sebaka sa Badimo*. Installation. NWU Gallery.

The exhibition Morapedi: The one who prays at first glance represents Lerato's personal exploration and journey in finding a balance between two dual forms of faith and spirituality. It observes and reflects the multiplicity and subjectiveness of praise, beliefs, faith and spirituality and functions as Lerato coming out and stating unequivocally and without fear of prejudice her own understanding and practice of spirituality. How she relates, comprehends and finds comfort in the duality of which she finds herself in.

But upon closer inspection, the exhibition serves as Lerato's personal dialogue with her grandmother. It is both a tangible and intangible five-week ritual that she performs as she is simultaneously communicating with her grandmother. It is a love letter to her, an acknowledgement of her existence, presence and the wonderful role she played in her life while she was alive. Through the exhibition she monumentalises Thalita and Thalita's lessons on faith and spirituality. She acknowledges that it is through her that she is able to reach various levels of consciousness through prayer and practice and she let's her know that she misses her, and that she still carries her as she continues on her life journey.

It is through this exhibition that Lerato Lodi unconsciously encourages us to connect with the departed that we once and still love so much. Through this exhibition Lerato inspires us to use whatever we have at our disposal that reminds us of our beloved departed and use it to connect with them. She assures us that the departed are not dead, but live on in an alternate plane and can be accessed. For her it is through objects such as "*Dikotlolo tsa Mma Lodi*" or scribbles found in the pages of a bible, its memories of church pews and church services, the lighting of candles and burning of sage. Whatever you believe in, However you may do it, Lerato encourages us to connect, to remember, to continue loving, not to hurt but to continue a relationship in alternate planes and find comfort in the love we once shared.