

Portraits of resilience: writing a socio-cultural history of a black South African location with the Ngilima photographic collection. Benoni, 1950s-1960s.

Feyder, Sophie

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Benoni, 1950s-1960s.

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Sophie Feyder

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Dr. O.J. Moore

Dr M.R. Westmoreland

To Marie-Jeanne Manuellan,

To all the invisible female hands behind great names.

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Cover image: Unidentified woman, Benoni Old Location, 1950s. Ngilima Photographic Collection.

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It is very true that writing a thesis is akin to running a marathon, in that it is an exercise in endurance. The metaphor also accurately describes the simple truth that the closer one gets to the finishing line, the longer and more painful it feels. Writing the acknowledgements however stands out as a real pleasure in the midst of these last steps, for it allows me to pause and mull over the many wonderful encounters and special relationships that were made along this long journey.

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GLOSSARY

ANC: African National Congress, popularly referred to as "Mandela's party". Created in 1912, it is the first political party founded by Africans, and which strove to fight for the rights of South Africa's black population. After being banned between 1960 and 1990, it has been consistently in power since 1994, when the first democratic elections marked the end of apartheid.

Bioscope: South African term for cinema.

Doek: headscarf that women usually wear after getting married.

Gumboot dance: male African migrant workers working in the mines developed a percussive dance, similar to tap dancing. They created various rhythms combining stomping with clapping and slapping the side of their wellington boots.

Homeland: also known as "Bantustans", homelands were the territories set aside for black South Africans, as part of the "Separate Development" policy. The apartheid regime created ten of them, four of which were considered as "independent" territories, "governed" by a puppet government. Black South Africans caught in the cities without the right papers were threatened to be deported to the homelands.

Lobola: the bride wealth that the groom's family pays to the bride's family, the amount depending on various factors, including level of education and whether she already has children or not. The exact amount is the object of a potentially long process of negotiation between both families, often with the participation of the extended family. Historically, lobola was paid in cattle but over time cash became the standard form of payment. With so many men struggling to find employment, lobola can be paid in stages instead of in a lump sum.

Location: the first semi-formal black residential areas in the urban areas outside of mine compounds. While townships were thoroughly planned, locations were more chaotic in appearance for the fact that plot owners were responsible for building their own house, according to their own means. Locations were generally for less endowed in terms of public infrastructure. For further description of these differences, see chapter four, part one.

PAC: the Pan-African Congress of Azania was another important political party founded as a black nationalist movement. It was launched in 1959 by Robert Sobukwe and a number of former ANC members, who decided to break away from the ANC in protest of some of their positions.

SACP: South African Communist Party, founded in 1921 and declared illegal in 1950. It participated in the struggle against apartheid and today still part of the Tripartite Alliance with the ANC and Cosatu (Congress of South African Trade Unions).

Shebeen: a tavern selling alcohol without a licence, most often located in private homes in townships and locations. Shebeens were one of the most important institutions of socialisation in the townships, where music styles unique to the townships emerged. Shebeens are most often operated by African women, the more successful ones being nicknamed "shebeen

queens". These women would serve homebrewed beer and other alcoholic concoctions of their making (often using highly toxic elements such as car batteries). After 1960, when it became legal for Africans to buy bottled beer, they also served bottled beer. Today the shebeens are legal and mainly owned by men.

Spaza (**shop**): the equivalent of an informal corner shop located in the townships, often in people's homes, selling the basic everyday household items (mielie-meal, eggs, cooking oil, bread, etc). Spaza shops often make it possible to buy in smaller quantities than in conventional shops. Today these spaza shops are often owned and run by Somalis, who in the recent years regularly become the target of xenophobic attacks.

Stoep: South African term for porch, a ledge running along the front of the house, forming a covered entrance. Most stoeps are polished daily with a deep red or black polish.

Stokvel: are an informal association of about ten or more people serving as a rotating saving-scheme. Each person puts in a fixed amount every month. Each month, a different member gets to take home the accumulated sum. The pressure of the group means that members rarely default on payments. Some stokvels also save so as to be able to buy household goods in bulk, dividing the goods between them.

Sub-economic house: social housing provided by the local municipality, at comparatively low rent. These houses were nicknamed "matchbox houses" for their small sizes. Those in Wattville came with a stove and a bathtub but without any finishing touches (no plastering, dirt floor, no ceiling, etc).

Tekkies: South African local slang for trainers (sport shoes).

Tsotsi: the South African equivalent of a gangster figure, living outside of the system, making a livelihood through petty criminality (pick pocketing, betting, rolling dice, etc) rather than through a formal job. For a historical explanation of the origin of the word and its significance in black popular culture, see chapter two, page 177-178.

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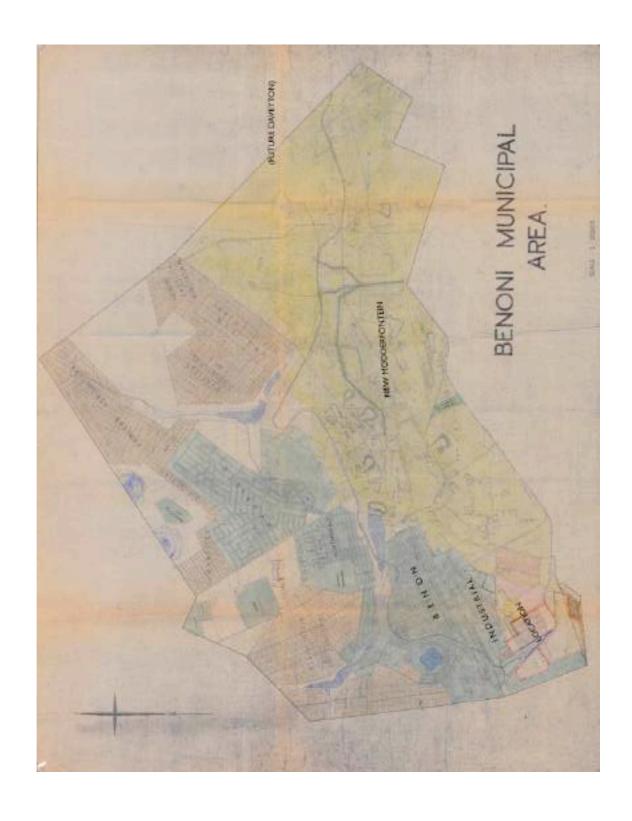
Figure 5.22: Joyce Mohamed's younger brother, wearing a Sotho attire. Asiatic Bazaar, mid-1950s, NPC
Figure 5.23: Young men on street corner posing with vinyls by Duke Ellington and Norman Grantz. Photo by Thorence Ngilima. Old Location, early 1960s, NPC351
Figure 5.24: Brass bands playing at weddings. Photograph by Thorence Ngilima. Old Location, early 1960s, NPC
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Figure 6.1: Xolani Ngilima (great-grandson of Ronald Ngilima), Hemisha Bhana and another participant in the action of gluing the posters. Photo by the author, Actonville, 2013368
Figure 6.2: "Benoni Location is home. STAY HOME. COME HOME". Photograph by the author, Actonville 2013
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Figure 7.1: The new OR Tambo Narrative Centre photographed from the street. Photograph by the author, 2013



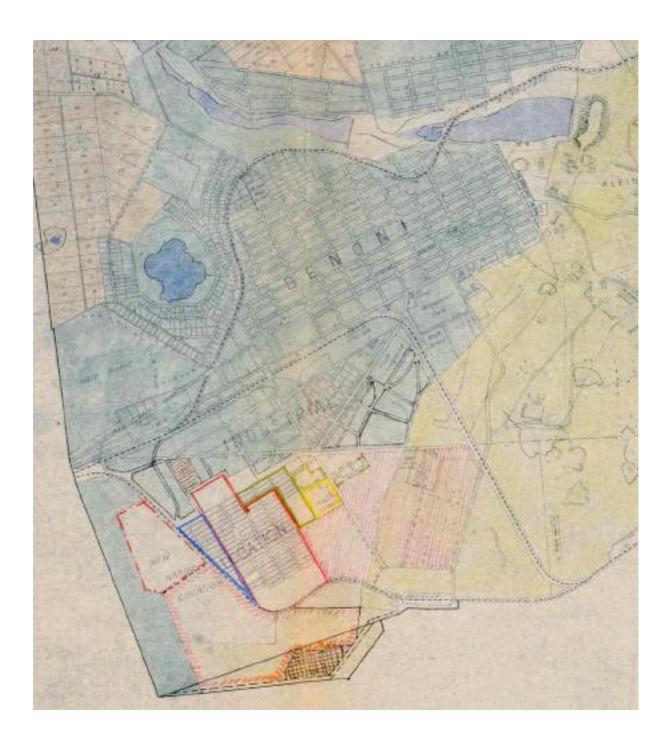




Map 1: Benoni in relation to South Africa, Erkurhuleni metropole and to Johannesburg.



Map 2: Benoni municipal area, dating from 1942, "Stigting van Lokasies. Benoni Munisipaliteit" (National Archives, NTS 6004 125/313N 3). The areas in blue indicate the residential white suburbs (and industrial area), while those in yellow indicate the areas under the control of mining companies. The location is squeezed between the industrial zone and the border with Brakpan municipality.



Map 3: Benoni town, the industrial zone and the location. The location includes, from left to right: the New Native Location (or Wattville, in doted lines), the Asiatic Bazaar (blue), the Old Location (red), the Cape Stands (green), the municipal compound (yellow). The map clearly shows how the industrial zone separates Benoni town from its location. This is an enlarged detail of the archival map in map 2.



Map 4: Benoni location, including the Asiatic Bazaar (in blue), the Old Location (informally known as Etwatwa, here in red), the Cape Stands (or Cape Flats, here in green), the municipal compound (in yellow). The original map was produced by the Town Engineer's Department of the Town Council, under the title "Old Location, Asiatic Area and Southville", dating from May 1955. This map was kindly given to me by Samuel Msali, who somehow got it from Benoni townhall's archives.