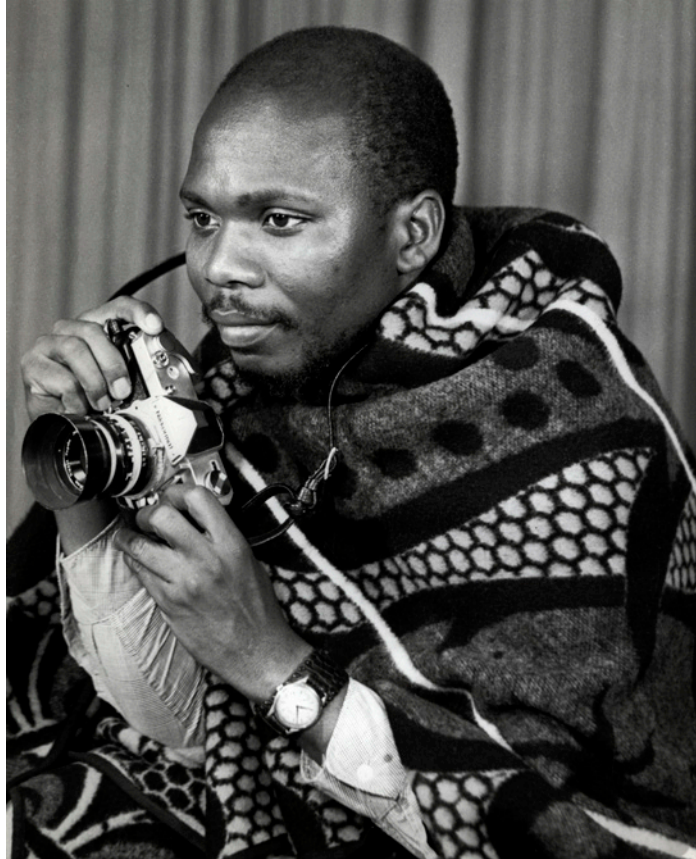


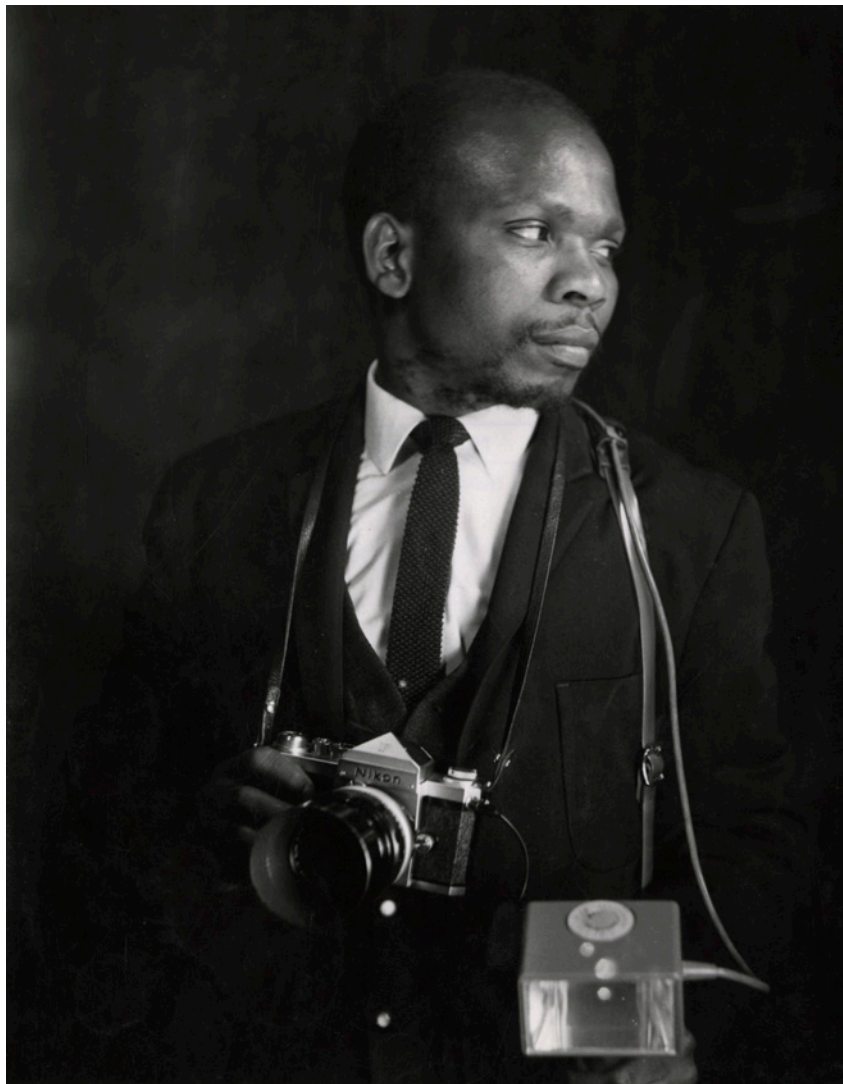
Portraits of a Nation



The studio photographs of
Mohlouoa T. Ramakatane

Edited by Paul Weinberg and Lineo Segoete





Portraits of a Nation
Mohlouoa T. Ramakatane

Edited by Paul Weinberg and Lineo Segoete

This book is dedicated to
Mr M.T. Ramakatane (1937 - 2021)

Portraits of a Nation, Mohlouoa T. Ramakatane
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Cover image: Man in a velvet jacket with fur collar seated and holding the hand of an elderly woman wrapped in a blanket, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio
Cover design: Stephen Symons
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Man in a chair pointing at bird seated on his shoulder, photographed
in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio

Portraits of a Nation

Paul Weinberg and Lineo Segoete

During colonialism and the simultaneous expansion of photography and its gaze, photographs portrayed explicit cultural biases, justified exploitation, advertised the empire, and problematically represented different indigenous peoples and cultures that fed into a racial discourse of European superiority (Ryan, 1997). Looking through Ntate Ramakatane's archive, it becomes apparent that his mission with the camera was different. It was to record the beauty and dignity of his people. In so doing, Ramakatane's photography positions himself on the opposite side of the colonial camera. Unlike a foreign voyeur, he himself is not unlike his subjects. There is an awareness and sensitivity about his representation of his subjects which is evidenced from a collection of portraits of himself included in the archive. Furthermore, the gap between him and his subjects is narrowed by their common sense of familiarity. He treats his subjects with humility and respect, and his clients see themselves in him. His portraits are characteristic of his own demeanour that portrays a self-consciousness not altogether different from that of the average client who would have walked through the doors of his studio.

The Ramakatane collection underlines that the ritual of a portrait session is a special moment in one's life. In his book, *The Genius of Photography*, Gerry Badger suggests, "portraiture at best can reinforce our positive sense of individual and collective humanity [...] the best portrait photographers have been humanists."¹

Soon after the discovery of photography in 1839, the invention of the Daguerreotype facilitated the photographic portrait to move from the prevail of the elite to the ordinary person. This was accelerated by the emergence of further technological innovations in the 19th century, such as the *carte de viste* and the postcard. In the context of African photography, the portrait is its defining feature which continues into the present. As Laura Serani observes, while portraiture has been dominated by outsiders imaging Africans, a strong movement of agency also developed on the continent, "...there has been a greater persistence in the practice of the portrait...a desire for control of one's image, and...the desire to reduce distances with the family far away."²

The portraits made by great African photographers like Seydou Keita, Malick Sidibé and James Barnor, are often associated with the emergence of national identity in the post-colonial period,

liberation and modernity. Kobena Mercer describes the portraits of Barnor for example as exuding, “the hopes and dreams of his sitters and the inner aspirations of a nation” and argues that:

The formal yet relaxed posture of his sitters conveys a dignified self-possession, reflecting the fact that both photographer and photographed share control over the apparatus of representation. This co-operation offers a stark contrast to the fixed gaze of colonial photographs depicting Africans in exoticised exterior settings, drawing attention to their ‘native’ environment and pre-modern tribalism.”³

This notion is further underlined by Liam Buckley in his observation about photography in Gambia after independence, “Portraiture restored people to a state of grace that accompanies the end of colonial occupation. The portrait work of the census was national to the extent that it had been a joyous and celebrated occasion - to which all were invited.”⁴

Ramakatane rose to prominence in the 1960s, during the height of Lesotho’s campaign towards independence. While some urban Basotho people modelled themselves on the colonial rulers, many Basotho had been growing steadily opposed to colonial rule throughout the first half of the 20th century and their resistance presented itself in subtle and overt ways.

It is in this context we should understand the studio portrait archive of Mr Mohlouoa.T. Ramakatane. He captured the sensibilities, aspirations and self-image of his people from their perspective and not from the scrutiny or surveillance of the coloniser. This observation is strengthened by the consistency displayed in how he worked with sitters in his studio. Ramakatane’s own

experiences as a Mosotho migrant worker in apartheid South Africa and his altercations with the law, sensitised him and arguably inadvertently emboldened him. Ramakatane was the nation’s portraitist, focused on immortalising the integrity of his people, inclusively, whether from the Royal family, clergy (black or white), government officials, children, and even homeless people – he sought to portray the humanity and dignity in all.

In the curation of this archive and book, as we scoured through tens of thousands of images of ordinary Lesotho citizens who presented themselves to the camera in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane’s City Centre Studio in Maseru, the high moment of the portrait played itself out in a myriad of ways. Each of the sitters who passed through his studio became, for that moment, individual characters in the theatrical performance of a nation. As they positioned themselves against the heavy curtain backdrop, made themselves comfortable on the linoleum flooring, standing or sitting, gazing into bright tungsten studio lights, they projected who they were, who they imagined they were, or who they aspired to be. They often drew on the available props, which included a posy of flowers, a radio set, a spare studio camera, or a magazine. In other scenes they play-acted fantasies – the gangster, the cool globalized urbanite, sometimes smoking or drinking a coke or a beer, all influenced by ever-present popular culture imagery, drawn from films and magazines. Our studio performers ranged from workers to school children, from bureaucrats to people of all religious persuasions, from those who wore traditional attire to slick fashionistas, from lovers to married couples. The *mise en scene* in the City Centre Studio in Maseru

hummed of the post-colonial independent state and Afro-modernity.

A strong *tableau* throughout the archive was the ever-present theme of migrancy and its dominance in the lives of Lesotho nationals in relation to their neighbour, South Africa. In the many images of posing couples, it is clear that many of the men are migrant workers employed on the mines. The photograph caught in Ramakatane's studio, elevates itself to a *momento* to be shared, cherished fleetingly, narrowing the physical distance between the couple while separated, only to be reunited again during the end of year annual holidays. In some instances, men posed individually, leaving behind a memory and a mortal reminder of their absence from their loved ones and families. In others, women provocatively presented themselves in their underwear or swimsuits to remind their partners who they had left behind, projecting themselves as objects of desire.

A glimpse into Ramakatane's self-portraits suggests he was fond of posing and projected a confident sense of cosmopolitanism. This was no doubt due to his South African urban experiences. As a young scholar he left Lesotho to complete his high school studies in South Africa in the mid 1950s. He lived on the East Rand of Johannesburg but was a frequent visitor to Soweto. His entry into photography had begun by taking photographs from a young age after which he graduated to a street photographer and then to a photojournalist. It is the same trajectory of most of the great photographers of the time – Peter Magubane, Alf Kumalo, Ernest Cole and later, Santu Mofokeng. He worked for *Drum* and *Zonk* magazine, amongst others and was well versed in urban sophistication, style and fashion. He loved soccer and

played with the famous Kaizer Motaung, the founder of the popular Soweto soccer team, Kaizer Chiefs. He was also politically conscious and came into close contact with many political leaders including Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Alfred Nzo and Robert Sobukwe and their respective movements.

What we know from a series of interviews conducted during the creation of the archive is that Ramakatane covered the Sharpeville massacre in 1960. As he told us, he hid in a rubbish bin as protesters fled bullets and police on that fateful day. The rubbish bin might have spared him his life, as well as providing an ingenious cover for documenting images of the event, but only just. He was injured, concussed, believed dead and taken to a mortuary. While on the mortuary slab, he heard his relatives calling his name and suddenly woke up. His affinity to the radical political leadership of the time, and his opposition to the oppressive government, all seem to have played a part in his return to Lesotho, after the Rivonia trial of 1964 which saw the incarceration of Nelson Mandela and other activists.

Soon after Lesotho gained independence in 1964, he established his portrait studio in Maseru, which became Ramakatane's major source of income for decades. He was also appointed the chief portraitist of the Royal family. His photographic career was diverse. He did corporate assignments, interspersed with social event photography and photojournalism. It is clear that the political consciousness that he brought with him from South Africa never died. While he covered events of the time in his native country, he remained outspoken. In the magazine he established called *Public Eye*, he criticized the elections of 1972 that brought in President

Lebua Jonathan, known to be a friend of the apartheid South African government. Thereafter he was arrested by the authorities and spent two years in detention without trial.⁵

In hindsight his choice to leave South Africa and then return to Lesotho to establish a studio has been a remarkable gift for Lesotho, African vernacular photography and world photography as a whole. The studio portraits provide us with an intimate perspective of the nation and its people from all walks of life during and after independence. It is a unique and special anthology. At the core of the archive are the black and white studio portraits from the period 1968-1980 that have been retrieved, organized, accessioned and digitized, to be permanently housed in the Lesotho National Museum. It is however by no means the full extent of his portrait work. In our various visits to secure the archive from 2019-20, Mr Ramakatane told us sadly that an outhouse with his archive burnt down a few years previously. His work from 1980 onwards for the next decades, including his transition to colour portrait photography were destroyed, along with the images he took at Sharpeville, at great risk to his own life.

While there is sound criticism about photography from Teju Cole who asserts that the medium “illustrates, without condemning, how the powerful dominate the less powerful” and that it will “bring the *news* and continue to support the idea that doing so – collecting the lives of others for the consumption of *us* – is a natural right”,⁶ it is also true that Ramakatane and his peers played a subversive role that allowed ordinary Basotho to reclaim their stories in the most subtle yet symbolic way. His images became like family heirlooms, records

of pivotal life moments like marriage and graduations, permanent reminders of people missed and longed for, and they even documented key historical events of national importance. Ramakatane’s work set the tone for an entire generation and gave voice to people who were used to having others speak on their behalf about who they were. Regardless of whether it was his intention to create a national treasure in the making and careful preservation of his images, including the fact that all the photos were stamped with a date, they have become, “a message in a bottle, or like seed: an object transmitted to the future, ready at any moment to burst forth” (Pinney & Peterson, 2003).⁷

These selected portraits, spared from the fire and included in this publication, remain a critically important body of work. Portrait studio archives in a southern African context are themselves rare. While Ramakatane may not be an exception in the genre of post-independence African photographers who were doing similar work, he was a pioneer in Lesotho who provided a powerful, intimate window into the lives of its people. His images, peppered with nuance and subtlety, at the same time also offer us glimpses into the lives of Basotho in the post independence period – how they courted, celebrated, commemorated, communicated and represented themselves. The Ramakatane images, now digitised and accessible, reach out to many thousands of individuals and their families but mostly they touch the heart of the nation.

It is unfortunately tragically common in southern Africa that when studio photographers pass on, their negatives and prints are often thrown away by their heirs. More recently, collections like Mr Ramakatane’s

have become fashionable collector's items, and have been sold to art buyers in the first world, seldom to return to the host country or to be seen again. 'Heritage for sale' continues to be part of the African vernacular photography movement. In that sense Mr. Ramaktane's portrait studio photographs of Lesotho are gold, much like the elusive metal thousands of migrant labourers from Lesotho dug for in the mines of South Africa. But for once and in this case, fortunately, the gold is the country's hands.

Endnotes

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- 2 Zannier, S. in *Portrait of Mali* in Malick Sidibé *The Portrait of Mali*. Skira Editore S.p.A, p 32
- 3 Mercer, K. 2010. *People Get Ready*, James Barnor's *Route Map of Afro-Modernity*: London, Autograph ABP, p5
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- 5 Interview with Mr Ramakatane 2019
- 6 Teju Cole, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/06/magazine/when-the-camera-was-a-weapon-of-imperialism-and-when-it-still-is.html>
- 7 Pinney, C & Peterson, N (eds). 2003. *Photography's Other Histories*. pg 5. Duke University Press: Durham.

Mohlouoa T. Ramakatane: Resilience, Affluence and Collective Empowerment

By Matseliso Motsoane

The life of Mohlouoa Ramakatane was nothing short of remarkable. To sum it up in a single piece of writing would not only be arduous but unjust. Here I endeavour to shed light and celebration on what his pioneering photographic career, business acumen, humility and love truly meant for his people. Against the backdrop of apartheid South Africa, and the deep systemic repression imposed on his home country, Lesotho, Ramakatane was a living example of Black resilience.

Born in 1937 in Butha-Buthe, Lesotho, Ramakatane was the second born of eight children. He began his education at Butha-Buthe Camp Primary School, where he recalls having to alternate days of attendance with his older brother Tlokotsi. More than a decade later, Ramakatane followed his family and moved to the bustling city of Johannesburg where he sought out work to contribute to supporting his family. At this juncture in Ramkatane's life, photography was only a hobby, a skill that he was in the process of sharpening during his free time on the weekends. He soon learned that this hobby had the potential to become a career. It was then that he became a street photographer, going door-to-door taking portraits of his community in the townships of Johannesburg, and then setting up a makeshift studio in his family home in Daveyton, Benoni. He fell deeper in love with photography and realised he could do more, reach more people and continue making the money he needed in the process by becoming a photojournalist. This marked his entry into the first cohort of Black photojournalists in South Africa along with the likes of Alf Khumalo, Bob Gosani and Peter Magubane. During his short stay in South Africa of only about six years, Ramakatane's photographs were published in *Drum Magazine*; *Bantu World* as well as the *Golden City Post*.

While his career is worthy of reverence, the aim of this essay is to speak to the symbolic and political meaning of Ramakatane's successes. It is to position him as a pioneering figure, not just in his photography career but in the world of African entrepreneurship. Here I affirm that Ramakatane was not just a symbol of wealth or affluence, but an example of resilience and resistance to the injustice of imperialism in Southern Africa. Resistance and resilience amongst African people are often associated with images of violence and protest and of being forced to endure hard and painful working and living conditions. Figures such as Ramakatane, however, painted a different picture with their lives. Traversing momentous events in both Lesotho and South Africa he was not the exception in most instances. He too was subjected to numerous arrests both at home and in South Africa, his and his family's safety was always in question, yet it was not these events that signified his resilience. Rather his ability to transcend the barriers put in place for his failure¹ and continued repression. Ramakatane inadvertently represented resilience through financial and social progress.

Perhaps it is important at this point to remind the reader of the colonial history of Lesotho. Ramakatane was born in what was

then Basutoland, under the governance of the British Empire. He recalls being able to coexist with white people in Lesotho, yet throughout his upbringing there was a constant sense of mistrust of white people. From the 1860s when Lesotho was annexed by the British Empire, Basotho were expected to pay a 'hut tax' to the colonists. A similar system was in place in Botswana (then known as Bechuanaland), and Swaziland. About the commitment of Britain to truly invest in the social and economic growth of Lesotho, some historians argue that 'they made a wilderness and called it peace'², their priorities being mainly to minimise expenses and to maintain peace with the Cape. To that end, Basotho were subjected to taxes which doubled in the late 1870s and, as one would imagine, continued to grow thenceforth. By the late 1950s, almost a century later, Basotho still needed to pay taxes of a similar nature. By then each African man was subject to about 1 pound per annum in taxes.³

It is against this backdrop, and in spite of the challenges he faced, that Ramakatane was able to purchase land in an area of Maseru called Moshoeshoe II, a suburb where only the elite could start a home. Shortly after, he erected his City Centre Studios in the middle of Maseru next to a building owned by a man whom many recall as one of the richest African men in Lesotho at the time, Mr. Mthembu. Ramakatane's contemporaries recall that even with stable employment either in the government or private sector, they could not keep up with the taxes, which were a prerequisite to acquiring land in that area. Ramakatane therefore came to be revered as someone who was able to keep up with the demands of the colonial powers that be, in order to rise to his own success, a feat that very few others were able to perform. City Centre Studios towered over all the other commercial buildings in the vicinity. It represented not just financial wealth but the possibility for

an ordinary Mosotho man to reach such heights. At a time when few photographers were able to capture and develop their own photographs, City Centre Studios was complete with a darkroom. Ramakatane's studio became a symbol of hope and progress. Within the studio itself, Ramakatane did not just seek to make profits. His contemporaries, former workers, and family recall that he imparted skills to those who worked there so they too could use photography as a means of creating a better life. His darkroom technicians were both men and women, and he often expressed the importance of empowering women in the workplace. After his recent passing, Mr. Ramakatane was commemorated in a radio tribute in which former colleagues, students and contemporaries shared anecdotes about his life. A common narrative in these short interviews was Ramakatane's generosity and selflessness.

Outside of his studio, Ramakatane frequently brushed shoulders with the most influential people in Lesotho and boarded international flights with government, clergy and regional photography delegations. Again, no small feat, especially for a man whose political affiliations were unclear in what was a volatile political climate. Many maintain that Mr. Ramakatane was a member of the Basotho Congress Party (BCP), a claim that is easily verifiable based on his access to photographing political figures such as Ntsu Mokhehle. However, given the highly politicised decades in which his career took shape, it is worth noting that while Ramakatane rubbed shoulders with the political elite, he quite effectively evaded any public association with a political party and thereby avoided the drama that could result from it. Among other things this is a testament to Ramakatane's favourable character and the respect that people had for both him and his camera.

Beyond the photography, Ramakatane's dedication to

empowering both himself and his kin can be seen in his other business endeavours. Each business venture proved more successful than the last, thus cementing his position as a pioneer amongst his people. In the early 1970s, a few years after Lesotho had gained independence and some three decades before South Africa would see anything resembling freedom, Ramakatane saw potential for profit in the interest shown by European tourists and 'development' volunteers in Lesotho. He established the Butha-Butha Youth Hostels which accommodated Peace Corp volunteers, tourists and passersby alike. I suppose one's perspective on such relations will dictate whether or not these hostels were a clever way of reconfiguring the power relations at play. Since 1966, Lesotho has come to be known amongst other things for its dependence on donor funding and the 'kindness' of people coming in from the global North. In return for this kindness is a subtle yet gravely problematic romanticization, especially of everyday people in rural Lesotho. The warm hospitality of village folk can easily be exploited, with nothing but a few hundred maloti and some trinkets as compensation. Ramakatane saw the interest of outsiders in Lesotho as an opportunity not only to make money but to empower people in his home village with income for housing and tending to visiting tourists. Running the youth hostels under a comprehensive business structure, complete with guided tours, information booklets and activities for the visitors signifies Ramakatane's eye for opportunity as well as his resistance to white supremacist thinking and the exploitation of African people. Ramakatane went on to establish an array of other businesses, including hair salons and grocery stores that display his outstanding business acumen.

The resilience and affluence that I have referred to throughout this essay was reinforced in Ramakatane's studio portraiture. His detailed archive of studio portraits forms part

of Lesotho's cultural heritage not just because of its obvious historical importance, but for the symbolism that can be derived from it.

Images of African people in their Sunday best, adorned in the latest fashion, expensive blankets and accessories, create a beautiful and poetic contrast to what mainstream photography offered between the 1950s and 1980s. Particularly in South Africa, and often enough in Lesotho, ordinary Africans were either depicted in moments of crisis or repression. Even simple imagery of Black people at work had undertones of such repression, the worker becoming a symbol of society's injustices. In the studio, Basotho people had the freedom to depict themselves how they wished, to write a visual story of grace, integrity and economic success. In his equally symbolic City Centre Studio, Ramakatane could be seen as an agent for this imagery. Often being the creative director behind his camera, he facilitated this reimagining of Black affluence.

I must state before ending, that in positioning Ramakatane within this context, by no means do I aim to suggest that Black families and individuals had no integrity, or that all of us are/were poor and helpless. Rather, my goal has been to reinforce the symbolism behind our successes and how they are visually depicted and to state that in spite of the systemic barriers placed before us, African people have shown resilience not just through active protest and even armed struggle, but also through reconfiguring Western beliefs and depictions of us. Ramakatane was central to this imagining, and continuously upheld others so they could reach the same levels of success that he did. For these reasons, and so many more, Mohlouoa Ramakatane will forever be remembered as a role model, a teacher and father to his people, elders, contemporaries and youth alike.

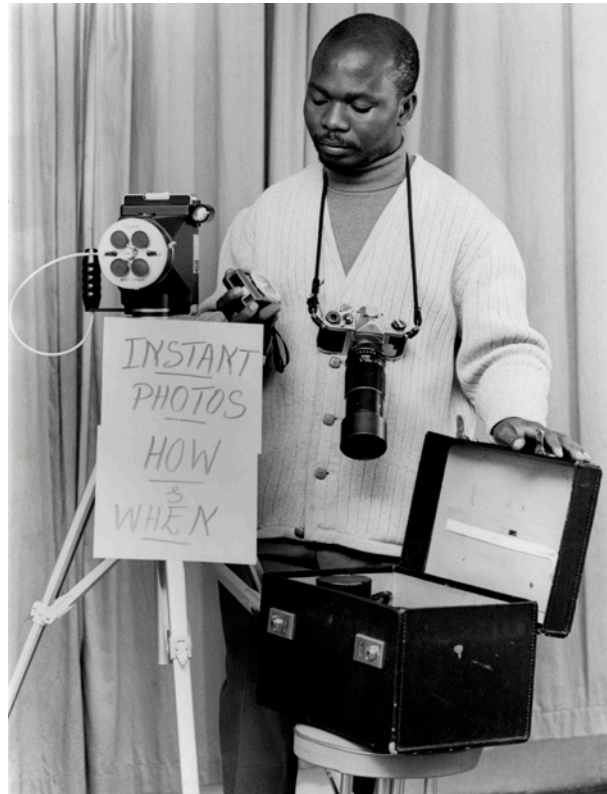
Endnotes

- 1 And the failure of Basotho natives by extension.
- 2 William F. Lye & Colin Murray, Transformations on the Highveld: The Tswana and Southern Sotho. Cape Town: David Philip ,1980.
- 3 Interview conducted by the author with one of Ramakatane's old friends, Mr. Lenyora Mokuoane, add date and place here.



The Photographer as Subject

Mohlouoa T. Ramakatane, having lived in South African townships in his youth, assumed the demeanour of an urban sophisticate. Inspired by the popular magazines of the time like *Drum* and *Zonk*, Ramakatane espoused an elegant sartorial style, so prevalent in those times. Scattered throughout the archive are images of him posing for the camera. These images of him in front of the camera represent his comfortable urban identity which clearly influenced a symbiotic relationship to his sitters.



Lesotho Through a Different Lens: Mohlouoa Ramakatane's City Centre Photography Studio

By Kylie Thomas

20

A new visual history of Lesotho is in formation. It is one that contests colonial frames and brings new perspectives on the country into view. It is being created by contemporary artists, photographers and curators based inside and outside of Lesotho, such as Lerato Bereng, Justice Kalebe, Matseliso Matsoane and Lineo Segoete, and through initiatives like the digitization of the photographic archive of Mohlouoa Ramakatane. The Ramakatane collection, which includes 3000 images made between the late 1950s and the 1990s, not only provides insight into the social history of Lesotho in this period, but also constitutes a key element in the largely unwritten and relatively unknown history of photography of the country. The collection includes studio portraits; images of events; landscapes; portraits of the photographer and images of his family; as well as photographs Ramakatane took in his role as official photographer for Lesotho's Royal family. These photographs make a valuable contribution to Lesotho's rich and complex cultural heritage.

As of yet, there is no comprehensive overview of the history of photography in Lesotho, nor are there detailed studies of Ramakatane's work or that of other Lesotho-based photographers. In an article in which she charts the emergence of locally-managed digitization projects in the wake of Western appropriation of photographic archives in Mali, Érika Nimis argues for the need for Malians to 'reclaim' their country's visual history. She writes:

It is time for the young generations of photographers as well as of scholars in the Humanities and Social Sciences to reclaim this past in pictures, to undertake the task of preserving and bringing out the value of photo archives both private and public and to raise awareness of them in the public, as they document the history of a country, a society, a culture.

The argument Nimis makes with regard to Malian photography also holds for Lesotho, where the country's photographic heritage is gaining international visibility and recognition. The digitisation and creation of the online, publicly accessible collection of Ramakatane's photographs offers an opportunity for visual historians in the country to take up the challenge. However, while access to both cameras and photographs may have been democratized in the decades since independence from colonial rule,

access to the resources to preserve, exhibit and research photographic cultural heritage remains enmeshed in colonial structures. Situating Ramakatane's images in the wider context of the history of the medium in Lesotho and the region, and researching the circumstances in which they were made and the stories of those they depict, will serve to deepen their significance. In order to achieve this in one of the most economically impoverished countries in the world, photographers, archival practitioners and researchers in and from Lesotho require resources and financial support.¹

The essay that follows presents a brief portrait of Ramakatane's early life and career, and offers a first attempt to position the Ramakatane collection within the longer history of photography in Lesotho. I then focus on a small number of photographs drawn from the much larger collection of studio portraits both to consider the social history they hold and in order to raise a series of questions about authorship, ownership, and directions for future research.

Within and Beyond Apartheid's Stranglehold

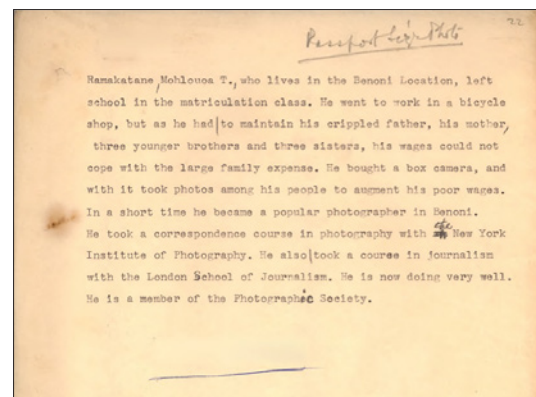
The photographic history of Lesotho has been overshadowed by that of the country's larger and more notorious neighbour, South Africa. At the same time, in this and in many other respects, the political, economic and social histories of the two countries intersect, and have been intertwined for centuries. This cross-border relation is also a feature of Ramakatane's life story – he trained as a photographer through correspondence courses and launched his career while living in South Africa.

A biographical entry and portrait of Ramakatane is included in the 'African Leaders Who's Who' section of the *African Yearly Register*, a publication edited and compiled by Mweliso Skota,

¹ Matseliso Matsoane is writing the first doctoral dissertation on the work of Ramakatane at the University of the Witwatersrand.

who was General Secretary of the ANC in the 1920s and 1930s and editor of the newspapers *Abantu-Batho* and *African Shield*. The entry describes how Ramakatane turned to photography to supplement the meagre salary he earned working in a bicycle shop. After purchasing a box camera, Ramakatane became a popular photographer in Benoni, a town to the East of Johannesburg. It was a good moment to begin a career as a photographer – picture magazines like *Drum* were all the rage and the medium was associated with glamour and fame. Home cameras were not yet ubiquitous, but by the 1950s it was quite affordable for working class people to purchase images taken by street photographers. It was also fashionable to have one's portrait taken in a studio. The *African Yearly Register* entry provides insight into the young photographer's ambitious nature and desire to explore the wider world – the correspondence courses he took not only provided him with qualifications he could not attain in South Africa or Lesotho, but were situated in the metropolitan centres of New York and London. However, in spite of his creativity and entrepreneurial skills, Ramakatane's burgeoning photography business was cut short by the increasing violence of the apartheid state. .

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Entry for Mohlouoa Ramakatane from the *African Yearly Register*, c.1959. T.D. Mweliso SKOTA Papers, 1930-1974, Wits Historical Papers Research Archive.



22

The portrait of Ramakatane, alongside other notable figures, from the *African Yearly Register*, c.1959. T.D. Mweli SKOTA Papers, 1930-1974 , Wits Historical Papers Research Archive.

Many people from Lesotho, like Ramakatane himself, actively participated in political life in South Africa and in the struggle against apartheid. On the 21st of March 1960, an event occurred that would fundamentally alter South African history, as well as the course of Ramakatane's own life. On that day, more than 5000 people gathered outside of a police station in Sharpeville, not far from Johannesburg, to protest against being forced to carry passbooks, documents issued by the apartheid state that severely limited and strictly controlled the movement of Black people. In what came to be known as the Sharpeville Massacre, police officers fired live ammunition into the crowd of peaceful protestors, and within two minutes, 69 people were killed, most of them shot in the back as they tried

to flee. Many more were wounded, and thousands of people were arrested. Ramakatane suffered a concussion and narrowly escaped death. In the aftermath of the massacre the state banned the opposition parties and jailed their leaders, forcing them underground and inaugurating the armed struggle. Ramakatane was accused of sedition and was forced to return to Lesotho or face imprisonment in South Africa.

The Lesotho to which Ramakatane returned was no less violent and unstable – the years leading up to and following independence saw the development of a bitter feud between the Basotho National Party (BNP), which opposed King Moshoeshoe II, and the Basotho Congress Party (BCP), which was elected to government in the first elections. In 1970 the BNP annulled the 1970 election results and suspended the constitution. Chief Leabua Jonathan exiled King Moshoeshoe II and repressed opposition. It was the start of sixteen years of authoritarian rule, known as *Qomatsi*, or the State of Emergency. Ramakatane was arrested and held in detention for publishing an article in which he publicly criticised the regime. After Lesotho established diplomatic relations with the then-Soviet Union in 1980, the country effectively became the site of a proxy war – the government of Lesotho received military assistance from the USSR, the People's Republic of China and North Korea, while South Africa assisted the Lesotho Liberation Army. Many people, including hundreds of civilians, were killed as violence erupted across the country.

Geographically engulfed by South Africa, Lesotho also suffered the structural violence of the migrant labour system, and was not exempt from the violence of the South African police, nor from that of the Security Police and apartheid death squads. After attaining independence, Lesotho became a site of refuge for political activists from South Africa and was therefore also targeted by the apartheid regime. On the 9th

of December 1982, South African Defence Force commandos crossed the border into Lesotho to kill activists who were living in exile in the country. They attacked people in their homes on the outskirts of Maseru, where they believed that members of the African National Congress were in hiding. Forty-two people were murdered, 12 of them Basotho nationals.²

The majority of the photographs included in the Ramakatane collection were created during this tumultuous time.³ However, the portraits made by Ramakatane do not overtly address the turmoil taking place beyond the walls of his City Centre Studio, and at first glance, the photographs may not seem to reveal much about the volatile political context in which they were taken. Some of the arguments that have been made about the work of Malian portrait photographers, such as Seydou Keïta (1921-2001) and Malick Sidibé (1936-2016) who were working in at a similar time to Ramakatane, can be applied here. However, while self-fashioning and assertions of independence and 'Afro-modernity' may feature in the work of all these photographers, reducing them to these claims is to force them into a single frame and to obscure the significant differences between them. Some of Ramakatane's portraits, like those of Keïta and Sidibé, convey new found freedom from colonial rule. At the same time, and on closer inspection, Ramakatane's portraits offer insight into the dark shadow

2 For further details about the massacre and the names and stories of those who were murdered, see Phyllis Naidoo's *Le Rona Le Batho: An Account of the Maseru Massacre*. Verulam, 1992. An online copy of the book can be found on the South African History Online website: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/le-rona-re-batho-account-1982-maseru-massacre-phyllis-naidoo-south-africa-1992> See also Mahula, 2017.

3 Ramakatane's archive does include images of political violence. For the most part, these photographs are not included in the collection of his work digitized by the PLP.

apartheid cast across the region, as well as the continuities of subjugation that persisted in Lesotho after the country attained independence in 1966.

Understandings of the histories and practices of photography studios in Africa have taken increasingly nuanced form since the early 1990s, when the images produced by portrait studios began to enter global art networks. The work of scholars such as Sophie Feyder (on the Ronald Ngilima collection); Pamila Gupta and Meg Samuelson (on Capital Art Studios in Zanzibar); Rachel Ama Asaa Engmann (on the Deo Gratias Photo Studio in Ghana); Erika Nimis (on Mountaga Dembélé in Mali among others); and Jennifer Bajorek (on the studios of Benoît Adjovi, Doudou Diop, among other West African photographers), have developed critical approaches that move far beyond the decontextualized aesthetic considerations that characterized how studio portraits from the continent were first understood in the West. Through close engagement with photographers and with the photographs they made, their scholarship situates and foregrounds the meanings of photography in the particular locations they study. Their work casts light on the creativity and ingenuity of photographers on the continent and at the same time, draws attention to the uneven relations of power that continue to affect how photography in Africa is practiced, perceived and circulated. Drawing on these approaches, I will briefly position the photographs within the larger photographic history of the country and the region, and will then turn to an analysis of some of the images included in the Ramakatane collection.

Situating the Archive: Lesotho in Photographic Time

While Ramakatane's City Centre Studio shaped how people engaged with photography in Lesotho, ethnographic and pictorial representations have dominated how the photographic heritage of the country has been seen beyond its borders. As a result, it is not only the contemporary photographic history of Lesotho that has been overlooked, but the much longer history of the medium and how it was taken up not only by colonists, but by Basotho people themselves. Photographs of Basotho leaders and of their families dating back to the introduction of the first cameras in the country, as well as photographs of soldiers who were enlisted to fight on behalf of Britain in both the First and Second World Wars, provide a different view into the history of the medium, one that is not entirely circumscribed by racist (ethnographic) or romanticized (pictorial) frames. Photography was employed by missionaries from England and from France in the late 19th and early 20th Century, and the ways in which portraits were deployed as signifiers of Christian civility, and the insight these images provide into the social world of the time, is yet to be explored.⁴

In her article, *'Ra li Ts'oants'o* ('Father of the Pictures'): Joseph Denfield's Photography, 1944-1965, Phindezwa Mnyaka provides a critical analysis of photography in the late colonial period in her detailed study of the life and work of Joseph

Denfield, an amateur photographer from England who settled in the Eastern Cape in South Africa and travelled extensively in what was then Basutoland. Mnyaka observes that pictorialist photographs taken in Basutoland in the 1950s effectively positioned the country and its inhabitants outside of time. Mnyaka shows how Denfield's widely circulated photographs of then-Basutoland in salon exhibitions across the world promoted a romanticized view of the country and its people. "In his earliest days as a photographer in Northern Nigeria as well as in his journeys through Basutoland," Mnyaka writes, "Denfield had sought to capture a sense of timelessness: 'natural' tribes without history in the former and a people (and especially a landscape) untainted by modernity in the latter" (2010: 48). It is instructive to consider Denfield's portrait of a mother and child in the doorway to the hut in which they live in relation to the studio portraits Ramakatane made of mothers with their children just more than a decade later. Mnyaka notes that Denfield's portrait, 'Mother and Child', reveals the photographer's "determination in consciously constructing an idealised landscape informed by a visual grammar of 'authentic African-ness'" (94). This image formed part of the exhibition 'The Beauty of Basutoland', held in East London in South Africa in 1953, which reinforced the notion of the mountain kingdom as a place outside of time. In contrast, Ramakatane's studio portraits collectively convey how firmly Lesotho was embedded in the modern world, one constituted not only by fashionable clothing and accessories, but by economic and political forces that separated families, condemning thousands of people to leave their homes in search of work across the border. The Ramakatane collection includes numerous portraits of women with their children, some of them mothers with newborn infants. Many of these photographs would have been taken to send to their partners, the fathers of their

4 The first missionaries in Lesotho arrived in the 1830s. See Ntabyane S. K. Tseuoa, "Church and Land in Basutoland: The Paris Evangelical Mission and its Implications", *Studia Historiae Ecclesasticae*, 2020, 1-16.

children who worked on the mines near Johannesburg, deep under the ground, around 400 kilometres away.

A major shift in photographic representation across Southern Africa occurred in the wake of decolonization and as the struggle against apartheid in South Africa intensified in the decades after the Sharpeville Massacre. Pictorialist and ethnographic depictions were displaced in the 1970s and 1980s as South Africa became the epicentre of socially committed documentary photography in the region. Photographers who formed part of the Afrapix photography collective sought to show not only political violence, protests and funerals, but the structural violence of apartheid and its effects on everyday life. Several South African photographers recorded the effects of migrant labour on who were forced to seek work across the border and on those who remained behind. Between 1979 and 1984, Joe Alfers photographed people at KwaTeba, the Employment Bureau of Africa in Maseru, who were hoping to find work on the mines in South Africa.⁵ This series was published in *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart*, a book and exhibition that formed part of the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in 1983.⁶ Alfers' photographs reveal how the iniquitous effects of apartheid crossed the porous

5 Alfers also worked as the photographer on the Analysis of Rock Art in Lesotho (ARAL) project and produced a vast number of photographs documenting rock paintings across the country. See the African Rock Art Digital Archive: <http://sarada.co.za/#/library/>

6 See Badsha, Omar (ed) *South Africa: The Cordoned Heart – Twenty South African Photographers*. Cape Town: The Gallery Press, 1986. The book can be accessed online: <https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/south-africa-condoned-heart-twenty-south-african-photographers-edited-omar-badsha> The photographs made for The Cordoned Heart project are held in the Special Collections of the University of Cape Town Library. The images that appear in the book can be accessed online through the library's website: <https://digital-collections.lib.uct.ac.za/islandora/object/islandora%3A5709>

border between South Africa and Lesotho. In an interview conducted in 1985, Alfers recounts how difficult it was to take photographs in Lesotho at that time. He recalls how “they had the Lesotho liberation army operating on the one side, and the Police Mobile units on the other. And we got a lot of flack from them... If you tried to slip out of town to take pictures, they could come and take you away” (1985, 6). Political repression, the lack of institutions offering photographic training, and the absence of a network like that of Afrapix in South Africa, meant that there were relatively few photographers working in Lesotho. The digitization of the Ramakatane collection has brought images of the photography society in Lesotho to light, but the lives and stories of the photographers who worked alongside Ramakatane have not yet been researched. For this reason, the work of photographers from other places constitutes a significant part of Lesotho's visual history. Images made both inside and outside of Lesotho by Don Edkins, Santu Mofokeng and David Goldblatt document the effects of the migrant labour system and of working and living conditions on the mines in South Africa. More recently, Thom Pierce has documented the devastating effects of silicosis on miners and their family members in Lesotho, and Greg Marinovich photographed the strike at the Lonmin Platinum mine in Marikana, near Rustenburg in South Africa, and the massacre that took place there when police opened fire on the workers.⁷ The strike was called by rock-drill operators working at the mine, the majority of whom come from Lesotho. Taken together, these photographs provide a portrait of the collective trauma and struggle that has characterized life in Lesotho since

7 See Thom Pierce, *The Price of Gold*: <https://thompierce.com/tpog/>; and Greg Marinovich <https://gregmarinovich.photoshelter.com/index>

colonization. Ramakatane's studio portraits provide a different, inside view into how more than a century of migration has shaped life in Lesotho, as well as insight into other, happier, aspects of life.

Longing and Belonging: Ramakatane's Studio Portraits

The Ramakatane collections reveals the City Centre portrait studio in Maseru to have been more than a place to have one's photograph taken – it served as a social space where people found ways to articulate their identities, to affirm friendships and love relationships, and to depict their growing families.



Young girl in a dress with a large collar smiling with her head turned back to the camera, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio

Ramakatané's skill as a portraitist of children is made clear through his portrait of a little girl who is clearly at ease in the studio, and seems to be delighted about the fact that she is permitted to turn the dials of the giant radio. This prop appears

in many of Ramakatane's portraits and serves as the perfect distraction for the child, whose legs are only slightly longer than the curved wooden legs holding the instrument off the ground. The slight angle at which the photograph was shot, combined with the child's mischievous smile, gives the image a playful air. Her shiny sandals, hand-sewn dress and earrings, as well as her beautiful hair and skin and happy look all convey that she is well cared for and loved. The portrait may have been taken to mark a special occasion, such as a birthday, or to be sent to family members living in South Africa. Similarly, Ramakatane's photograph of a mother displaying her baby, who is draped in an embroidered white cape and bonnet, conveys her pride and confidence before the camera.

Some of the other portraits included in the Ramakatane collection are in sharp contrast to these joyful images. Several of the photographs that remained in Ramakatane's studio and that now form part of the digitized archive are images of



Smiling woman seated with an infant held up in her arm dressed in a cape and baby bonnet and looking at the camera, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young girl with a purse and umbrella on her arm standing close to and leaning on her seated mother in a hat with her purse strapped on her arm, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio

barely concealed misery. As much as many of the portraits he made testify to the bonds of kinship and the longing for togetherness, they also reveal the hardships of life in Lesotho and the challenges faced both by those who were forced to leave the country to work in South Africa, and those who remained behind. Some of the photographs are portraits that, in spite of the sitters' best efforts to portray themselves in the best possible light, convey exhaustion, loneliness and despair.

Ramakatane's portrait of a mother and daughter taken in his studio is a study of the sorrow of separation. The woman is shown in a moment of contemplation, seemingly oblivious to the camera's x-ray, her wistful expression is matched by her posture and by the position of her arm – both evoke her sadness and a sense of defeat. At around the time this photograph was taken, more than half of the foreign-born workers on the mines in South Africa were from Lesotho. The 1970s and 1980s were a time of relative affluence in the country, as during this time mineworkers' salaries increased and so too did the

remittances they sent back home. The carefully positioned feet of the mother and daughter display their neat sandals, worn with socks and with stockings, and they each hold handbags and wear brooches pinned to their dresses. However, as the image makes clear, additional income and the commodities that could be purchased as a result, could not compensate for the loneliness of forced separation. Nor can the wider context of political violence and daily hardship be removed from the frame.

Many of these photographs testify to the longing for togetherness and for a good life in the face of brutal economic inequality and political subjugation that has continued into the present. The challenges of life in Lesotho and the desire for a stable existence take a poignant form in the collection of photographs that depict Ramakatane and his family. In addition to the thousands of studio portraits that are now available to be viewed online, a selection of images of architecture and landscapes; social events and the Basotho Royal family, 148 photographs depicting the Ramakatane family have also been scanned.

The camera is a favoured prop in portraits of Ramakatane himself, as well as in photographs of his family members. Its appearance in so many images in this part of the collection symbolizes the importance of the instrument for the family and their relationship to the medium, which was clearly much more than a means of earning a living. Ramakatane's life was defined by photography, and the medium shaped the lives of his family members, who not only appear in many portraits, but also worked alongside Ramakatane in creating them. The collection testifies to the presence of women photographers and photographic technicians working in Lesotho – perhaps most notable among them is Mme Mabasias, Ntate Ramakatane's wife. The history of women's engagement

with the photographic medium in Lesotho is just one aspect of the larger story of the Ramakatane collection that remains to be told.⁸

Reclaiming Lesotho's Visual History

The circumstances that led to the digitization of Ramakatane's archive are bound up with the entry of his work into the collections of the Lesotho National Museum (LNM). The foundation of the LNM, the country's second national museum, funded by the government of Lesotho and UNESCO, led to a large-scale research and design project to develop a narrative and exhibitions that would do justice to Lesotho's complex history. The museum is an ambitious project that will include both natural history exhibits and the social history of the country from pre-colonial times to the present, and that is in some ways overdetermined by the nationalist agenda of the state. The museum research and design team began work in 2017, at a critical moment in the global history of museums, one in which the very idea of the museum was under question. The matter of the repatriation of stolen cultural heritage was high on the agenda, as were questions about decolonizing museology, museum displays and practices of curation. A delegation working on behalf of the LNM met with the director of the British Museum in London in 2018 to discuss the return of precious artefacts from Lesotho that had been taken to England during colonial rule. An agreement was made that the objects could be displayed in the museum in Maseru, but that they would be exhibited as part of a long-term loan rather than returned. Restitution went against the British Museum's

8 Jennifer Bajorek has written about the hidden role of women in the history of photography in Senegal. See Bajorek, 2020, 80-82.

policy. It also ran against the views of the British Museum's director who argued that it was best for people to come to London where artefacts from across the world could be seen in one place.⁹

From 2017-19, I formed part of the LNM research team and one of the key challenges we faced was how to tell the story of Lesotho's recent past, and in particular the country's volatile political history. While the collection of archival photographs at the Morija Museum and Archives, which was founded in 1956, provides a rich source for exploring Lesotho's more distant visual past, and the history of the mission station there in particular, it is more difficult to find photographs documenting life in the country after independence.

I became aware of Ramakatane's work through an article by Mordekai Musundire published in the Lesotho-based online newspaper, *Public Eye*, and immediately recognized it would make an important contribution to the story of the country the museum narrative sought to tell. We learned that Ntate Ramakatane was living in Butha-Buthe, just more than a hundred kilometres from Maseru, and that while a large part of his archive was extant, a large and valuable part of his life's work had been destroyed when the outbuilding that housed his archive caught fire. In order for his work to be part of the new museum, it would need to be digitized and metadata providing information about the photographs needed to be included with the images in order to make the collection searchable and useful for research.

While recognition of the value of photographic heritage

9 For an overview of the position of the British Museum with regards to restitution, see Opoku, 2019. See the British Museum's own narrative about contested cultural heritage on their website: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/contested-objects-collection>

in Southern Africa has increased in the last two decades, sustainable programmes to restore, preserve, digitize and make such collections accessible are virtually non-existent. In 2019 the Photography Legacy Project (PLP) was launched in South Africa and has led to the digitization of the photographic archives of 12 leading photographers from Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa and Sudan.

In 2021, the museum design team worked together with the Photography Legacy Project to digitise Ramakatane's archive and to ensure it would be made available both to people in Lesotho and across the world. The PLP is supported by the David Goldblatt Family Trust, and the digitization of the Ramakatane collection was made possible through funds secured through the Modern Endangered Archive Project (MEAP) at the University of California, Los Angeles. Photographer and director of the PLP, Paul Weinberg, together with a small team working in Lesotho, overcame the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and digitized the material. The photographs are now available online, both through the PLP and MEAP websites, and once the museum opens its doors, photographs from the collection will be on display in Maseru, Lesotho's capital.

Other than the portraits Ramakatane made of his family members and of the Basotho Royal family and other dignitaries, the names of those who appear in his studio portraits are recorded. Exhibiting the photographs in the Lesotho National Museum gallery offers an excellent opportunity to source more information from visitors about the stories that lie behind the photographs taken in Ramakatane's studio and to identify further background of the people portrayed. However, making these portraits available in the place where they were taken does not resolve all the questions the collection raises with regard to ownership and privacy rights. While some of Ramakatane's sitters and their

family members may feel honoured to have their portraits included as part of the archive and for reproductions of their images to appear in the museum, others may not wish for their photographs to be placed on display and might request that the photographs be returned to them. Another particularly thorny set of questions arises if these images enter the art market and are sold as works of art, as is the case with studio portrait collections originating from other parts of the continent.

In their readings of how West African photography has been framed and exhibited in Europe and North America, Elizabeth Bigham and Candace Keller point to how the meanings of Malian studio portraits were defined and delimited by a range of external mediators (Bigham, 1999; Keller, 2014). While the ways in which these images were championed by art dealers, critics and collectors ensured that they were accorded value within the international art market, it has also meant that the larger story of the context in which they were made has largely been omitted. As Keller notes, framing Keïta and Sidibé as individual artists without acknowledging the participatory nature of studio portraiture, as well as the names of their studio apprentices, obscures much about the history of the medium in Mali (Keller, 2014, 39). In this sense, the commercial interest in African photography in Europe and North America represents an opportunity for individual photographers but can also pose a threat to photographic heritage.

At the same time as a small number of African photographers are celebrated, as Nimis observes, "valuable archival sources on the history of Malian and African photography are disappearing with its last witnesses, dispersed or despoiled in near-universal indifference" (Nimis, 2014: 397). Researchers, archivists and curators working in the field of photography in Africa can play a significant role in challenging such indifference and in advocating for archives to be protected, digitized and

made publicly accessible. The digitization and curation of the Ramakatane collection is a critical step in developing Lesotho's photographic heritage. The collection opens new ways of understanding Lesotho's intertwined history with South Africa, and at the same time casts light on the unique story of the country's recent past.

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Two hidden figures making a political statement about upcoming elections by simulating the three political parties that would be contesting: BNP (peace sign), The BCP in the middle (thumbs up signal), and Marematlou Party (open hand), photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a t-shirt standing with his foot on top of stool in front of him and holding up an open umbrella by both hands, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Woman in a fashion beret and sunglasses dressed in a sleeveless blouse and matching pants standing with a flower held against her raised thigh, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man with a pipe in his mouth and a plastic bag in his hand dressed in jeans and a blanket with two layers standing with his face looking away from the camera, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in Victorian heritage blanket and traditional sun hat standing with molamu held as if about to strike, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a fedora hat and three piece suit and tie seated with his walking stick held in place on his lap by both hands next to leather bag and sunglasses placed on the floor, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man with moustache seated on straw mat (moseme) with his legs crossed one hand placed on lower leg, touching his chin, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in Police uniform smiling and seated with a light blanket draped around his shoulders, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Seated elderly man dressed in a blanket, beanie and gumboots holding a molamu,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a sleeveless tank top with a blanket draped on his shoulder standing and holding a walking stick in his hand as if in combat, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Seated homeless man in tattered clothing, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Woman in a Dashiki blouse and cone hat standing with her hands clasped and side eyeing the camera, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young woman in a short African print dress and head wrap with beads around her neck kneeling on straw mat (moseme) with her hands placed on her lap, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in overalls seated with his fingers folded on his cheek and touching bag on the floor with a blanket tucked between the straps, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young man with a leather bag strapped across his body and an axe tucked into his belt dressed in a t-shirt and shorts and standing with his eyes fixed on to the camera, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Bearded man with polo shirt tucked into bell bottoms in a walking pose with platform shoes, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a battersby hat and jacket with stylish shirt standing in a dancing pose and looking confidently into the camera, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in striped oversized jacket, battersby hat and matching baggy pants standing between curtains with sunglasses in one hand, likely a migrant worker, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Woman in sunglasses and a summer dress standing between curtains,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man dressed in a t-shirt and jeans singing into a mic standing with a hand on his waist and the other holding up his sunglasses, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Smiling teen girl wearing satin gloves and knee high fancy socks standing, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Seated man in traditional hat and suit seated next to wireless radio, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young man wearing a sweater with a stylised collar squatting with one hand on his knee and a radio placed in front of him, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



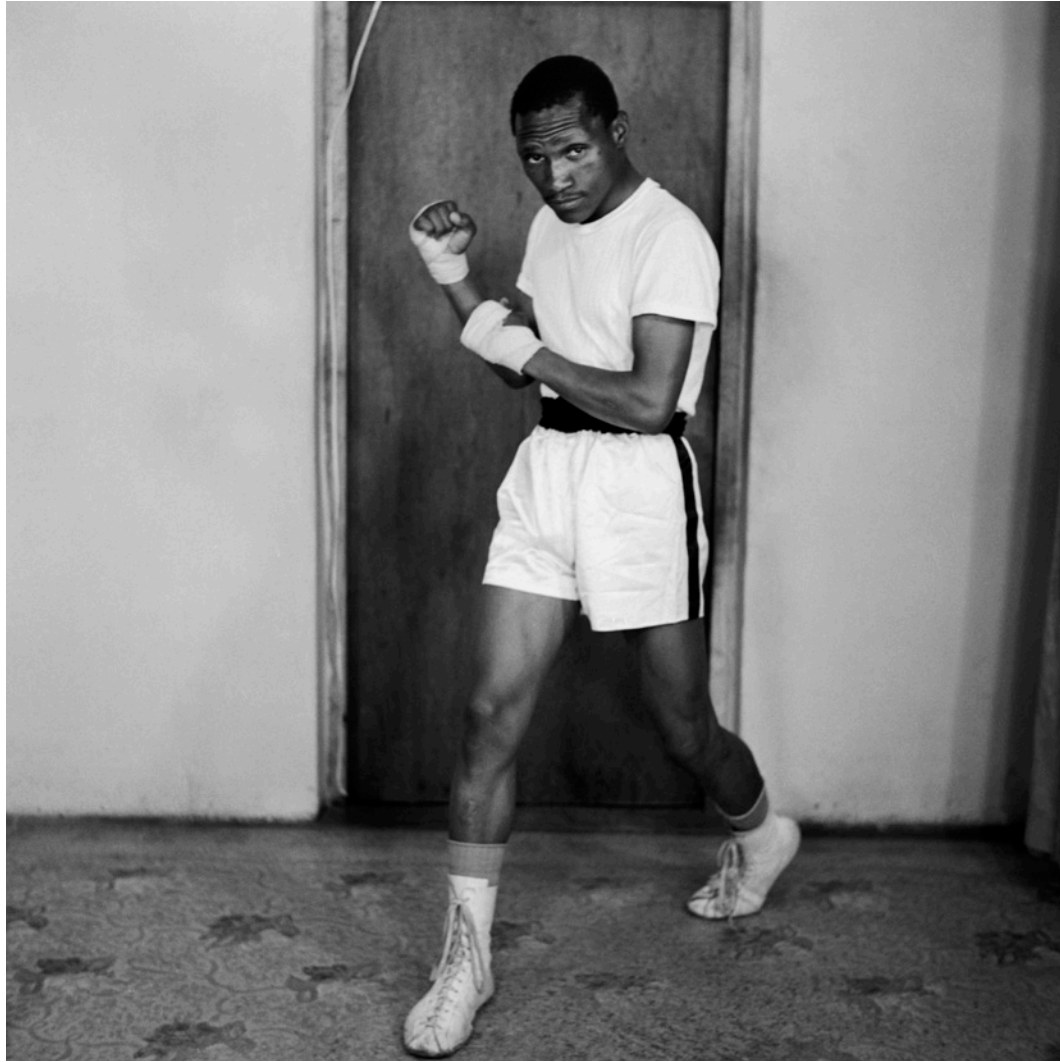
Young man in sneakers cradling a puppy, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



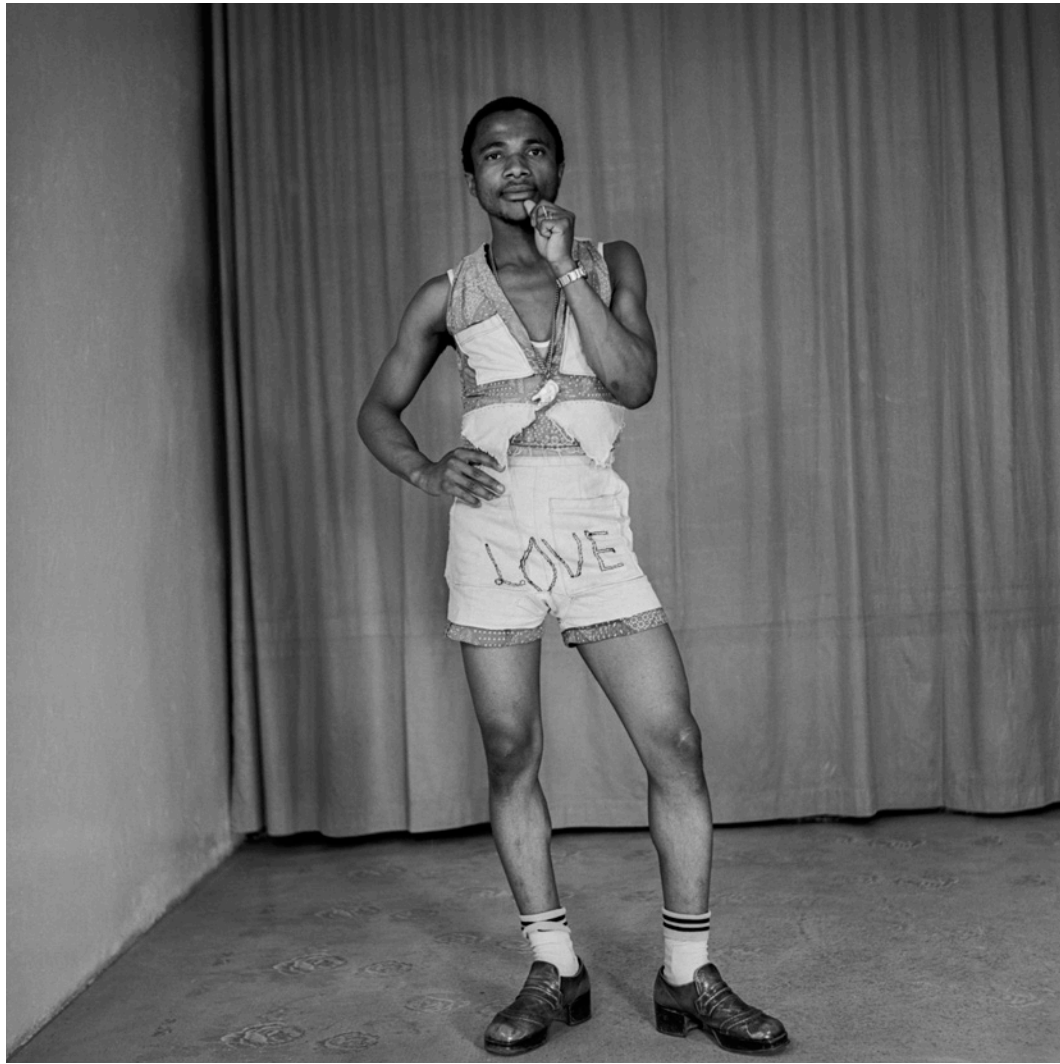
Man in a chair pointing at bird seated on his shoulder, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a gold shirt holding boxing gloves to his chest, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in boxing shorts and gloved hands posing in a boxing stance and looking at the camera, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in shorts with love sewn across his crotch standing in a pose, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



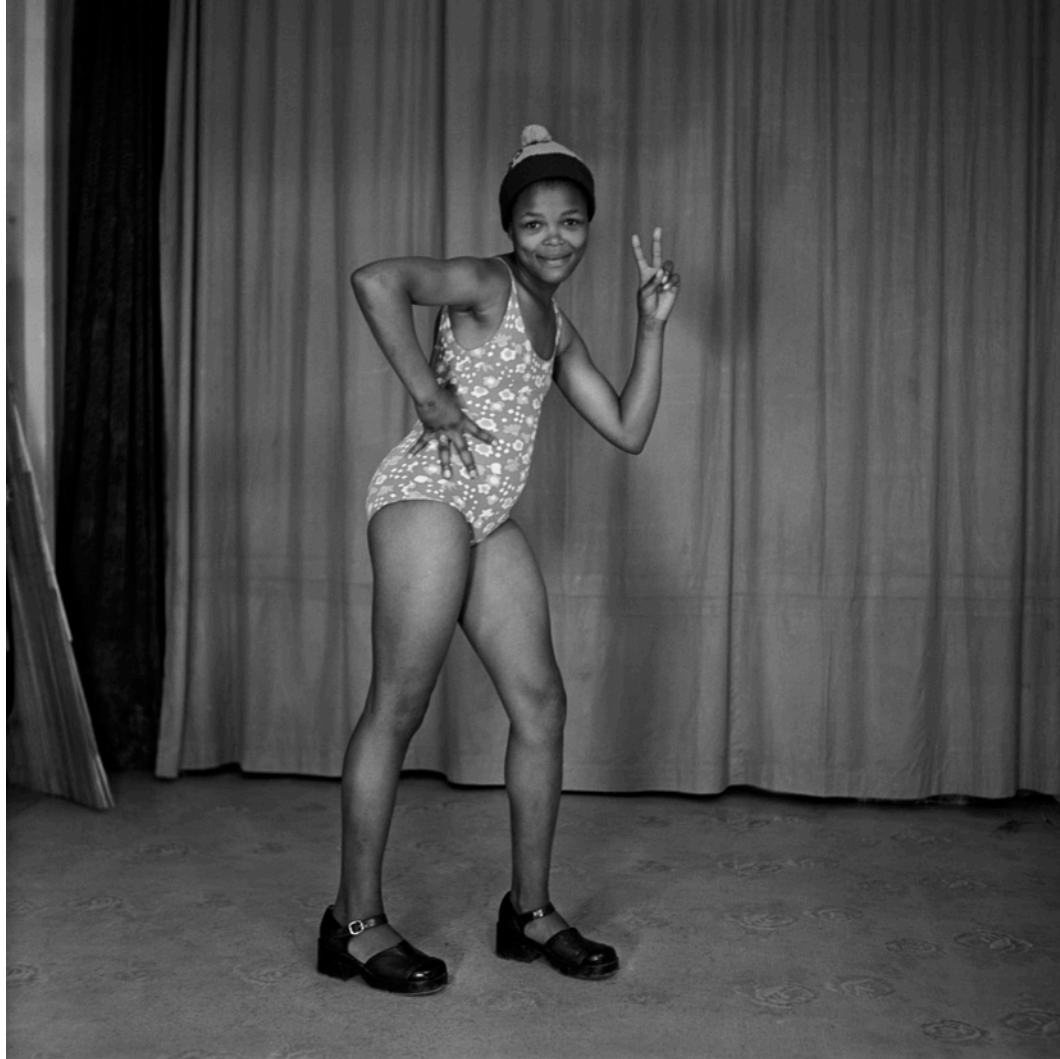
Woman in sunglasses wearing a swimsuit and bucket hat, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



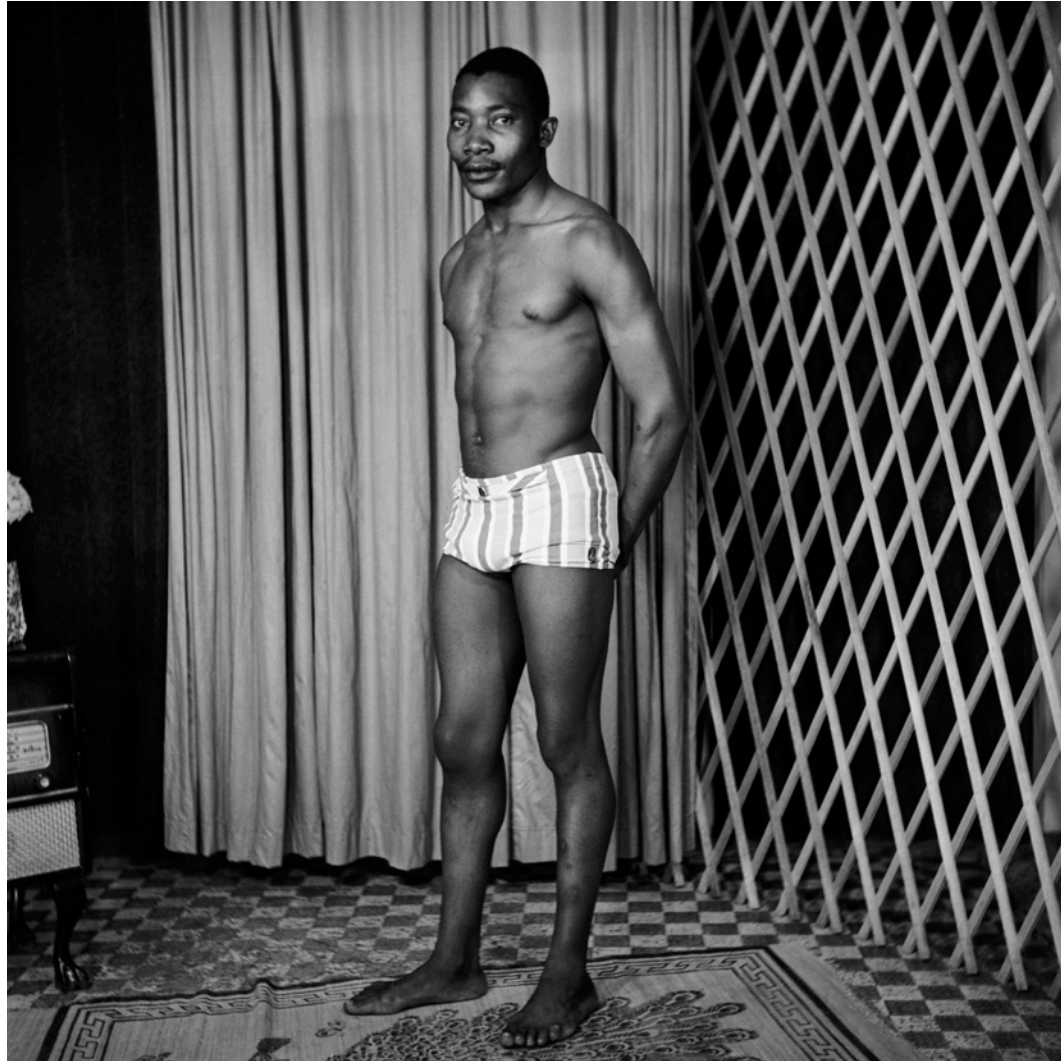
Smiling female bodybuilder squatting with arms stretching a chest expander,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Bare-chested man wearing a battersby in a body builder pose, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Teen girl wearing a swimming costume and pompom beanie smiling and standing with one hand on her waist and another holding up a peace sign, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man dressed in briefs standing barefoot with his hands to his backside, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Woman with her hair wrapped in a chignon scarf wearing sunglasses while sipping on a soda and carrying a tassel purse, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Woman in sunglasses and turtleneck wearing shorts and long gladiator sandals,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



'Miss Businesses Association' with her scepter and beauty pageant trophy,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Elderly woman in spectacles with crown and pageantry sash and lace gloves seated with her hands on her lap, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Woman in a wig and floral dress seated on a straw mat (moseme) and smiling with her hands clasped around raised knee with her purse placed next to her, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young woman in a polka dot dress leaning on her side on straw mat (moseme) in front of flower basket with her fingers intertwined and leg crossed over the other and her face tilted upwards, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Woman in spectacles squatting and holding a cigarette while touching flowers with her other hand, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young woman dressed in a figure belt with tassels over blouse and short shorts standing with her hand leaning on the back of a chair, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man with amputated left leg seated with his pants folded to his thighs in a plaid blazer photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Smiling woman with bandaged foot lying down on a blanket next to her crutch,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Middle-aged woman with cornrows seated between two mirrors and facing down,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young woman in a pleated skirt and fedora standing in an action pose with vintage analog camera placed against her torso as if taking a shot, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young child in a heavy winter coat seated with a pipe on its lips, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young boy with a bow tie around his short sleeve shirt and chain belt in his pants standing with his hand in his pocket, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Boy and girl standing side by side barefoot, siblings, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Two young girls in confirmation outfits, hands clasped on chest, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young girl in confirmation clothing with cape and veil in profile, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Boy in a hat and sweater under his blazer standing and touching one of the flowers in a vase placed on a stool next to him, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Elderly man in a fedora and suit with lace pocket square seated and looking warmly at the camera, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Priest in a buttoned up tweed blazer seated with his hands on his thigh and looking at the camera with a serious look on his face, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a suit and battersby hat smiling with eyes looking away from the camera, hand on his cheek with elbow leaning on his thigh, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Woman in a beanie slightly showing her relaxed hair at the front wrapped in a blanket pinned under her neck and smiling slightly, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a cowboy hat with a leopard print strap and sleeveless sweater over a zip up turtleneck seated and facing the camera, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Woman in a stylish African print headwrap and short sleeved sweater seated with her hand on her knee and head turned to face the camera, with a smile on her face, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Seated traditional healer woman in traditional dress, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Close up of seated policeman in uniform, stock theft division, clasped hands,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Bearded man in a double breasted winter coat seated and holding a pipe in his hand,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young woman in a sun hat and wig seated on a stool with her legs crossed,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young woman in a headwrap and thethana with beaded detail seated on a stool with her legs crossed, one hand leaning on her stool and the other on her knee, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young man in checked jacket and battersby hat seated with one hand on the temple of his face with elbow on his thigh, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in traditional dress, headress, holding a knobkerrie (koto), wearing a hide blanket, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Traditional healer man in regalia standing with whip in his hand and looking into the camera, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Teen dressed in traditional attire with molamu in hand standing next to flower basket placed on stool, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



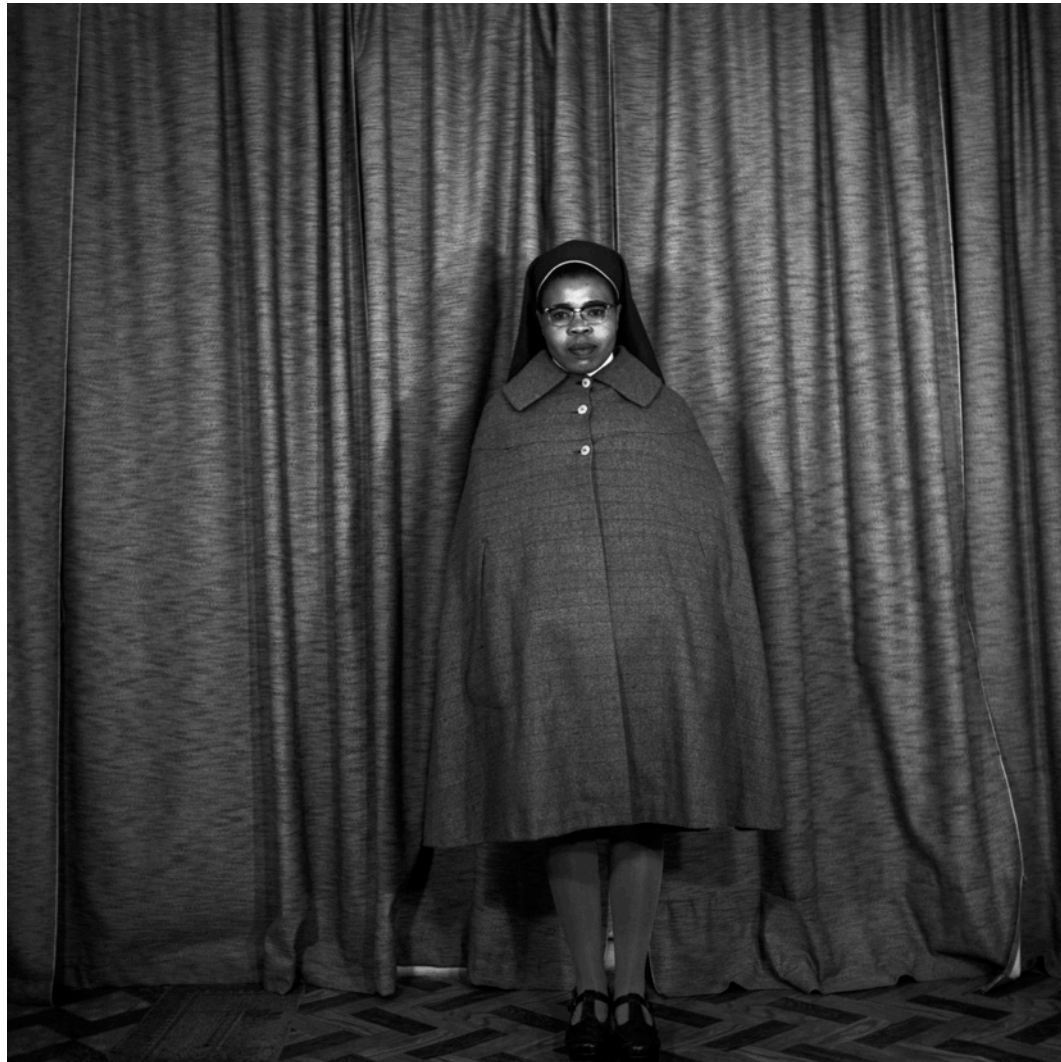
Young woman standing in traditional attire and Seanamarena donning sunglasses and a
battersby and posing with a flower, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Smiling man in a traditional Swati outfit standing and holding up a shield and knobkerrie, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Traditional healer woman dressed in regalia standing and carrying a knobkerrie and tail ornament (lechoba), photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Nun in spectacles dressed in a cloak and standing with her hands out of view,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Middle-aged man in spectacles dressed in a blazer fashioned out of animal hide with scarf tucked standing with his hands clasped on midriff, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in spectacles and a religious outfit with beads hanging on the side standing and looking into the distance, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Middle-aged woman in LECSA Mothers' Union uniform standing with one hand on her thigh and the other holding onto her purse, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Woman dressed in Zionist church clothes and holding a stick while looking into the camera,photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man standing and holding open a religious book with one hand raised as if preaching, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in overalls seated and holding a Crosier on his lap, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Nun in a leather jacket standing with closed hands hanging loosely on her side next to a basket bouquet, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man wrapped in traditional healer cloths around his torso and waist seated on a chair and looking to the side with his face tilted, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Older man kneeling on the floor and holding a Bible to his forehead in one hand and a molamu in another, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Seated man in a plaid blazer seated making a prayer hands pose an looking up,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man and woman in Salvation Army uniform standing together behind flowers on a stool, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in Zionist church uniform standing with one hand raised and a Bible in the other seated next to woman in a beret, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man with both hands raised standing between two women each clasping their hands on their backs, all in Apostolic church attire, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a priest collar and dreadlocks seated holding an infant in his lap and a child surrounded by a group of women in turbans and Zionist capes, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man with both hands raised standing between two women each with clasping their hands on their backs, all in Zionist church attire, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a panama hat and striped shorts holding an umbrella against his waist and standing with his elbow on the shoulder of woman in a heart print dress holding her purse by the strap, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Seated man in a battersby and buttoned up suit and tie seated with one hand on his knee and another wrapped around the waist of woman in a sleeveless turtleneck sweater and plaid wrap around skirt standing close to him with her elbow rested on his shoulder, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young woman seated on the lap of her lover, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a checked shirt and turtleneck sweater looking at the headwrapped woman he is holding by the waist seated next to him, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Two women standing side by side in casual dress clothing, holding hands,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Middle-aged man standing behind his partner holding a purse, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a suit pants and jacket seated with his arm raised on his knee and smiling at teen girl dressed in school uniform seated next to him, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Dancing couple in their dance attire and making a kick pose, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man with sideburns dressed in striped suit and oversized bow-tie holding sunglasses and standing next to woman in a striped dress suit and beret clasping her hands on her torso, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Bride in a crown tiara holding her bouquet up to her chest and holding hands with her groom in a plaid suit and satin gloves, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Couple in formal dress standing side by side holding hands, with the woman's one hand on her stomach, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Moustached man in uniform holding infant up to his chest by one arm and infant holding onto chain on his shirt, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in stylish hat seated in a manspread with girl toddler standing with toy in her hands,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man with sideburns and a round beard seated and holding hands with a man in a polo shirt and beaded necklace with their hats placed on the floor in front of them, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a sweater and blazer standing with his leg folded and leaning against seated friend's shoulder with a cigarette in hand, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man holding stick and a blanket on his arm next to seated barefoot woman, battersby hat, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in a velvet jacket with fur collar seated and holding the hand of an elderly woman wrapped in a blanket, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



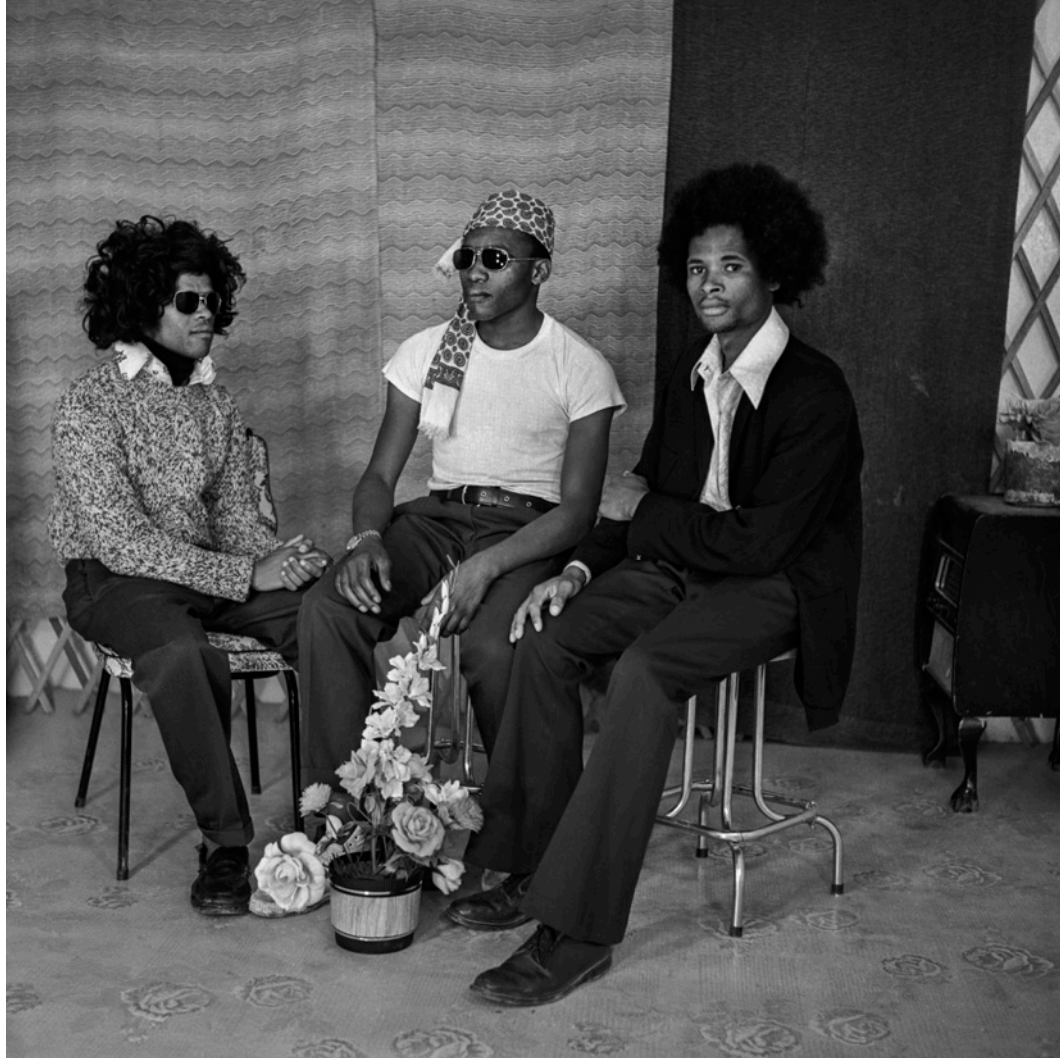
Two older men standing side by side, suit and tie, dressed in a mokorotlo hat, tjale traditional blanket, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Young woman in a two piece suit holding her index finger and standing next to a traditional healer in full regalia and a stick in her hand, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Two men in battersbys seated with a record player between them and a teenage girl standing behind them, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in sunglasses and a headwrap seated between two men wearing wigs with flower pot placed between all three of them, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Group of men play fighting, simulating a gangster style photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man smiling and holding money with his hands up at his friend pointing a handgun at him, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Soldier in camouflage gear and hat standing at attention with his hand raised in a salute, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Police woman in uniform standing at attention with one hand closed, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Nurse in cloak standing with her hands out of view, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Woman in makeup and graduation regalia seated and smiling to the camera with her rolled up certificate held by both hands on her lap, photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Two soldiers holding up rifles military style, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Two smiling policemen seated and holding their batons across their laps,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Man in uniform and leaning to hold flower pot placed in front of him, photographed in
Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio



Policeman in shorts and knee high socks standing and holding a baton behind him,
photographed in Mr. M.T. Ramakatane's City Centre Studio

Acknowledgements

The following people and organisations need to be thanked for their invaluable contributions to realise the acquisition and digitisation of the late Mohlouoa T. Ramakatane's photographic archive. Firstly we are indebted to Mr Mohlouoa T. Ramakatane, himself for his active participation in the archiving and digitisation of his life's work. He welcomed and received us warmly at his home in Buthe Butha on many occasions during the assessment and discussions about his archive. We appreciate the commitment of his family members, Palesa Mathibeli and Motlatsi Ramakatane for their continued support for this project and for offering valuable insights into his legacy.

The digitisation project, of which the book is a product of a broader digital curation project, could not have materialised without the generous support of the Modern Endangered Archive Project based at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) Library. In particular we would like to thank Rachel Deblinger and Savannah Dawson for their guidance in the fruition of Mohlouoa T. Ramakatane's digital archive. The Lesotho National Museum (LNM) together with DijonDesign, Cabana Solutions and the Photography Legacy Project played a very pivotal role in setting the foundation to enable the receiving of the archive and ensuring its digital content be made accessible.

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The archiving, research, and final digitisation that created the M.T.Ramakatané digital archive was made possible through the dedicated work of a team in Lesotho and South Africa. Justice Kalebe, Matseliso Motsoane, Lineo Segoete, Bokang Selialia and Paul Weinberg were instrumental in the selection of more than 100 000 images. Khosi Bane and Bokang Selialia were responsible for the digital scanning. Metadata was created and developed by Lineo Segoete and Matseliso Motsoane with Adrienne van Eerden-Wharton playing the role of quality assurance. Paul Weinberg of the Photography Legacy Project was the curator and project manager.

The project ensured that the endangered and vulnerable archive was transformed into a stable one, meeting the necessary conservation standards. Mr. Mohlouoa T. Ramakatane's archive is now a national heritage asset, digitally preserved and publicly accessible to the nation, the continent and the world. It is available for research and educational purposes through the UCLA Library - <https://meap.library.ucla.edu/projects/the-photographer-who-woke-up-from-the-dead/> and the Photography Legacy Project - <https://www.plparchive.com/the-mohlouoa-t-ramakatane-archive/>



Portraits of a Nation



The studio photographs of
Mohlouoa T. Ramakatane

Edited by Paul Weinberg and Lineo Segoeete

