

**S'KHOTHANE: REPRESENTATION IN, AND INFLUENCE
ON, CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ARTS PRACTICES**

by

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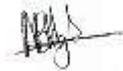
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DECLARATION OF ORIGINAL WORK

I, Nkosikhona Bongamahlubi Ngcobo (Student Number: 55794920), declare that this dissertation, ***S'KHOTHANE: REPRESENTATION IN, AND INFLUENCE ON, CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ARTS PRACTICES***, is my own unaided work, except to the extent explicitly acknowledged. All the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

This dissertation is being submitted for the Master of Visual Arts degree, Faculty of Human Sciences, University of South Africa. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination by any other University.



2016

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to society's misunderstood, those that are often defined as "weird", "shocking" or just "unusual".

I also dedicate this to my lovely wife, Dorcus, and two beautiful kids, Uyanda and Skhanyiso.

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ABSTRACT

S'khothane: Representation in, and influence on, contemporary visual arts practices

For several years now, *S'khothane* youth culture has been viewed as a social ill. This view started after it received massive broadcast and print media coverage during the course of 2012. Crews claiming adherence to *S'khothane* were interviewed by investigative journalism programmes on two of South Africa's most watched television channels, eTV and SABC1.

While some townships¹ in Gauteng claim to have been the birthplace of *S'khothane*, this subculture appears to be based on various other subcultures that preceded it. Cultures such as *Swenkas (Umswenko)*, *Sapeurs (La Sape)* and *Pantsula* influenced various aspects of the *S'khothane* culture, from dance and poses, to dress style and performances.

References made to *S'khothane* in studies by Mkhwanazi (2011) and Jones (2013a) as well as mass media coverage on programmes such as *3rd Degree* (2015) and *Cutting Edge*, have generally been negative. Jones (2013a:210) describes *S'khothane* as a disruptive manifestation of consumption, which involves publicly destroying expensive designer clothes, shoes and accessories to show that these symbols of wealth are meaningless and easily replaceable.

This study explores the representation of *S'khothane* in selected contemporary visual artworks and assesses any influence it might have on these artworks. The study also investigates public perceptions about the *S'khothane* youth culture and evaluates these against realities documented during data collection to determine whether the perceptions

¹ Referring to the townships of *Katlehong*, *Thokoza*, *Vosloorus* and *Daveyton* in the east, *Soweto* in the south-west and *Diepsloot* in the north of Johannesburg.

were premised on misconceptions. A group of participants was randomly selected from *S'khothane* events that took place in Fountains Valley (Pretoria), Soshanguve, Tembisa and other *S'khothane* gatherings held in places such as recreational parks and taverns. The participants were interviewed to gain insight into their perspective of the *S'khothane* culture, to establish the culture's origin, its practises and elements.

S'khothane is widely integrated and visually appropriated in the visual language of selected contemporary South African art practices. To this end, this research extends into a focused analysis of selected artworks in order to demonstrate how *S'khothane* influences selected contemporary visual arts practice in Gauteng. Through this approach, it becomes clear that these modes of representation embody no explicit moral judgement as one might find in investigative journalism programmes. There is a subtlety in the way *S'khothane* is represented by selected artists. In the Jamalaun Nxedlana artworks discussed, there is an element of realism depicted in the absence of manipulation through the documentation. On the other hand, Kudzanai Chiurai's form of representation involves manipulation because he produced his visual artworks in a studio where he used props and had the ability to control the composition of the artwork. Nontsikelelo Veleko made a representation of various *S'khothane* elements including colourful clothes and accessories such as sunglasses.

The study also investigates how *S'khothane* lifestyles, dance, poses, clothing and performances are trends shaped influenced by other subcultural historic groups such as *Swenkas (Umswenko)*, *Sapeurs* (La Sape) and *Pantsula*; giving them fad status, whether it be morally correct or not.

KEY TERMS

S'khothane; *ukukhothana*; youth culture; *Izikhhothane*; township; Contemporary visual arts; identity; subculture.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Through a selection of artworks the study investigates how a specific young urban subcultural group known as *S'khothane* (singular) or *Izikhothane* (plural) is represented in visual arts practice. It is also through these works that this the artists making these works explores the various aspects, characteristics and elements of this culture.

The various elements that constitute *S'khothane* such as lifestyle, gesture, style, fashion, creativity, pose and freedom of expression, are analysed in selected works of visual art by Jamalaun Nxedlana, Kudzanai Chiurai and Nontsikelelo Veleko. The question is whether the same aesthetic judgement of *S'khothane* that is encountered in investigative journalistic programmes continues through into other modes of representation such as the visual arts.

By understanding further the context of these works this study in turn investigate the legacy of *S'khothane* and how this contributes to a negative impression of this subcultural group.

1.2 BACKGROUND

The culture of *S'khothane* is mainly composed of urban youth aged between 15 and 28, from township settings, who adopt creativity, performances, bright colours, gold accessories, glitter and ostentatious fashion and those elements as a manifestation of flamboyance and extravagance that enable this group to chase their aspiration by “borrowing” an LSM (Living Standards Measure) as a form of escapism from their social reality. These, they believe, attract respect, status, prestige and indulgence that may appear outlandish to many members of society.

The word *S'khothane* is taken from the isiZulu word “*ukukhothana*”,

loosely translated as “to lick one another”. The word *khotha*, meaning “to lick” in isiZulu, is the root of the words *ukukhothana* and *ubukhothane*. Various communities of the Gauteng Province claim ownership of the word. Some communities believe that it refers to the provocative action of licking one’s fingers to peel through bundles of money. Others state that it refers to being soaked in Ultramel – a popular South African brand of custard (Capron 2013). Regardless of these differences in meanings ascribed to the name and practices of *S’khothane*, their identity is consistent from region to region.

The terms *S’khothane* and *Izikhothane* are umbrella terms that refer to exactly the same social concept. In this study, I choose *S’khothane* as the umbrella term to describe this subcultural urban black youth identity.

In the past several years, the emergence of *S’khothane* in various communities across South Africa, but most notably in the Gauteng Province, has been a source of heated debate mostly due to the widespread media coverage that the subcultural group has received. The portrayal of *S’khothane* in investigative television programmes and news media in general has not been favourable. These mass media outlets suggest recklessness, consumption of highly priced clothing, alcohol and self-destruction. For example, phrases such as “Bling gone obscenely mad”, “Disturbing new township youth culture”, and “Materially obsessed” are just some of the descriptive terms used to describe *S’khothane* in an episode of 3rd Degree ².

1.3 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

In order to define *S’khothane*, the study establishes how and where it started as well as its significance and the meaning ascribed to it by its supporters. *S’khothane*, as a social construct, is a form of human expression with a meaningful urban identity. To understand it, one needs to firstly view the activity in itself and then to assess it in context to uncover the contributing factors, causes and consequences (Tolstoy

1990:4). *S'khothane* is regarded as a controversial township culture because it mainly involves black township youth presumed to be from poor backgrounds (Bristowe 2013:75). This carries with it a certain presupposed judgement: the idea that *S'khothane* are from poorer communities and therefore branded as troublesome, misfits and rebels.

While there are studies of youth subcultures from as far back as the 1960s, *S'khothane* is only briefly mentioned as part of other studies and has not been a subject of a focussed academic interrogation². This study offers a meaningful perspective of *S'khothane* based on observations of and interviews with young people who identify with *S'khothane*. It is hoped that this research will provide a foundation for future research in other aspects of *S'khothane*, its subgroups and associated practices, as well as other African youth subcultures³.

1.4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The study examines the history and culture of *S'khothane* youth by analysing how they wish to be perceived in terms of style, fashion, creativity and expression. It also looks at how *S'khothane*, as an urban form of everyday expression, influences art by drawing on Constructivism, Performative and Cultural Appropriation theories in the analyses of selected visual artworks and activities that may be deemed provocative or to have negative outcomes. The influence of *S'khothane* on selected contemporary artworks is considered because elements of this culture have been appropriated into contemporary artworks through the aesthetic decisions of specific artists.

Therefore, the study determines the extent to which *S'khothane* has

² In addition to media documentaries and articles on *S'khothane*, some studies mention the subculture as part of larger social and cultural debates but do not study the phenomenon in detail. These include: *The linguistic identities of multilingual adolescents involved in educational enrichment programmes in Johannesburg* (Bristowe 2013) and *Conspicuous consumption and black youth in emerging markets* (Mkhwanazi 2011).

³ These may include: Amabujwa, Amavenkel, Amatariana, Pantsula and others.

influenced selected contemporary visual arts practices, identifies and analyses how it is represented. It also describes how these artworks define *S'khothane* as a cohesive urban youth group. This study was the stimulus for my own practical component which was based on the results of my investigations of *S'khothane*.

The research questions to be addressed are as follows:

Main question:

In what ways does the subculture of *S'khothane* manifest in selected contemporary visual artworks of Kudzanai Chiurai, Jamal Nxedlana and Nontsikelelo Veleko?

Sub-questions:

- (a) How can *S'khothane* be meaningfully interpreted through visual expression as a distinctive youth sub-culture within a particular setting?
- (b) How do different modes of representation portray *S'khothane*, what do these say about the practice of *S'khothane* and do they enhance the visuals ability to express the sub-culture?
- (c) To determine whether the contention or misconception judgement of *S'khothane* that is encountered in investigative journalistic programmes and documentaries continues through into other modes of representation such as the visual arts.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopts a postmodernist worldview with a constructivist approach to interpreting the observations and findings. This study adopts these frameworks in interpreting the observations and findings, and also in critically analysing the representations of *S'khothane* in the selected contemporary visual artworks by Kudzanai Chiurai, Jamal Nxedlana and Nontsikelelo Veleko.

1.5.1 Postmodernism

According to postmodernism, there is more than one way of comprehending an event, culture or object as knowledge because it is subjective, that is, people perceive reality through their own interpretation of it. Knoetze (2012:62) defines postmodernism as

a set of assumptions regarding ontology (realities are created), epistemology (knowledge is fluid and provisional), methodology (interpretive and critical methods are more apt to study a plural society) and axiology (the study of values: no one set of values are per definition better than another).

Postmodern culture challenges the modern culture system and operations. Postmodernism is against conformity, it embraces individualism. *S'khothane* is influenced by postmodernity because it does not conform to the societal belief that rules are meant to be followed. It challenges reality, it does not follow the crowd. It reflects on challenging the education system in the postmodern world and how art can be used to change society's conventions. *S'khothane's* look and fashion says that each person is entitled have an opinion. Reality is therefore only contextual. Some people may believe that *S'khothane* actually have money while others have a more realistic understanding of their performances. Postmodernism applies to *S'khothane* because their reality is created through their a belief system which leads them to public expressionism. *S'khothane's* comprehension of reality is subjective while the viewer judges it according to his/her preconceptions or values.

1.5.2 Constructivism

The basis of Constructivism theory is grounded on observation and scientific study about how people learn. It says that people construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. Hence, Walker and Lambert (1995:1) define Constructivism as a theory of learning and a theory of

knowing. The concept of this theory is drawn from a variety of fields such as psychology, science and philosophy. Furthermore, Shapiro (2004) views Constructivism theory as the convergence of knowledge and experience that is the basis of a continued development of ideas, beliefs and values. It needs to be noted that not all experiences are the same, one may have a similar experience to another but the outcomes differ due to prior experience and knowledge. For example, *Sosha S'khotha King's* (SKK) member KG Sfarzo (SSK 2014, Personal Interview. 6th September, Pretoria) states that all the members of the group define themselves according to their attitudes, lifestyles and values. They have properly defined structures on rules of conduct in terms of what they can and cannot do as members of the group. They do not do crime and education is of high importance (some of their members are attending tertiary institutions and some of the members are entrepreneurs).

Piaget's (1985) view of learning and constructing meaning through experiences shows a process of mentally balancing perception in comparison to previous understanding and re-adjusting to adapt the meaning and experiences. There is a constant adjustment and adaptation of meaning of the culture-focused influences through the stages of maturity. For example, the Italian Gates (IG) group believes *S'khothane* is about knowing one self and having a belief in what you are doing to achieve a certain target. Furthermore the IG loves beautiful and powerful clothes, hence they "dress to kill" which refers to the best dresser of the day in terms of the value of the items used during their presence at performances (IG 2014. Personal Interview. 11th October, Thembisa).

Because of its state of maturity, the group disputes burning and tearing up money and clothes as part of the *S'khothane*. According to the groups I interviewed, the *Sosha S'khotha Kings* (SSK), Italian Gates (IG) and Epic Stress Lafamilia (ESL), these acts are wrong and unacceptable and it is of the opinion that groups who destroy do so to seek the wrong kind of attention which leads to misconceptions of *S'khothane*. This engages in

expressing cultural and social discourse as explained by Fosnot (2005) who describes Constructivism as the knowledge, not as truths, but rather as constructed explanations by human beings.

1.5.3 Performative theory

In Performative theory, every human being puts on a performance as a sign to themselves and others of their place within a particular society. This is done through conversations, the kind of food we eat and the clothes and body decorations (such as tattoos and jewellery) that we wear. Performance theory can be applied to analysing how *S'khothane* can be viewed as performance art and how they express themselves in relation to their artworks. The *S'khothane* wear distinctive expensive, colourful Italian clothing and shoes. They drink expensive alcohol and they do not view money as a “problem” in terms of the things they love and want. The *S'khothane* express themselves through the form of expressive dancing and chanting.

According to an online report by the Institute for the Public Understanding of the Past and Institute of Historical Research (2007) in the United Kingdom, while this theory arose from various fields of social sciences, it mostly links to the work of Richard Schechner (1985) and Victor Turner (1988). Schechner (2002:2 cited in Gunnell 2010:5) defines performance as any action that is framed, presented, highlighted or displayed. Butler (1988:519) highlights that performance usually involves the repetition of stylised acts thus suggesting that performance entails the continuous portrayal of rehearsed deeds. Butler (1988:519) says that, regardless of context, performances are made up of “ritualised gestures and sounds”, For example, *S'khothane* can be viewed as performative because not only does it involve the wearing of a unique style of clothing, it also involves the performance of ritualised gestures and sounds. Performative theory is used to examine how *S'khothane* perform their acts in their quest to change the negative perception of their culture. Ritual, according to Durkheim (1997), is an automatic binding together of people into a

collective through their shared values, beliefs and practices. The gestures that are ritualised in *S'khothane* include dancing and movement. (for example?) *S'khothane* lift their feet to show their expensive Italian shoes and walk in a particular manner during the performance and at other times.

Social identity spans further than social representation. It includes the actual activities and symbols (Fig. 1) that are used by the group for identification purposes and extends to shared routine practices, dress code, accessories, settings, beliefs and other symbols. Fig. 1 illustrates a hand-gesture used by the Italian Gates (IG) *S'khothane* crew. They raise their hands and use the thumb and index fingers to form the letter “I”, which is the initial letter of their name. They state that this is a representation of their unity as the Italian Gates (IG) while, at the same time, it denotes the individuality of each member of the group.



Figure 1. Zingisa Nkosinkhulu, *Italian Gates (IG)* at the opening of the exhibition (2016).

Butler (1993:7) draws attention to the way in which performances highlight and communicate people’s identities within society. Similarly, Goffman (1969:28) states that performance theory suggests that, in any society

people have particular styles and present a performance, whether through the clothes they wear, the conversations they hold or the food they eat. All of these are a performance designed as a signal-system to themselves and to others within their social group.

1.5.4 Cultural Appropriation

The concept of Cultural Appropriation is used to address the question of whether elements of a culture are borrowed from other cultures and it is also applied to the analysis of the selected artworks in terms of how the artists used some of the *S'khothane* elements that represent the culture to produce their artworks.

There are a number of definitions of Cultural Appropriation but all seem to be in agreement that Cultural Appropriation involves the “borrowing” (Sturken & Cartwright 2001:350) of elements of a particular culture by another. Edwards and Coffrey (2010) believe that Cultural Appropriation is the practise of one culture adopting the voices, objects and content of another culture. Cultural objects that can be appropriated include behaviours, dances, art, dress codes/styles, music and language, amongst others.

Cultural Appropriation is complex in nature and therefore may have various intended and unintended effects on the source culture. Ziff and Pratima (1997:9) are of the view that the misrepresentation of cultural elements may have a harsh impact on the source culture or, as the authors put it, the “exploited culture”. The receiving culture can, in their appropriation of a certain element, negatively depict the source culture (Ziff & Pratima 1997:9). Additionally, the removal of a cultural object from its original context may have “an impact on the cultural object itself” (Ziff & Pratima 1997:8) resulting in losing the original meaning of a particular cultural object. The commodification of cultural objects and the appropriation of a culture’s intellectual property for commercial exploitation without first attempting to understand the meaning of the object within the

framework of the original culture, may result in the original culture losing its “sovereign claim” (Ziff & Pratima 1997:17) over the commodified object resulting in misappropriation. Young (2000:301) argues that there are cases of Cultural Appropriation that are not objectionable from a moral perspective and even worthy of praise from an artistic viewpoint.

Read and Stangos (1994:19) define Cultural Appropriation as

the direct duplication, copying or incorporation of an image (painting, photograph, etc.) by another artist who represents it in a different context, thus completely altering its meaning and questioning notions of originality and authenticity.

In this definition, Cultural Appropriation is defined, not from an artist “borrowing” directly from a culture, but rather from another artist’s work. Cultural Appropriation primarily involves the taking of cultural expressions, intellectual property, ways of knowledge and history from a culture other than one’s own (Scafidi 2005:19). Artistic expressions may include elements appropriated from another culture reproduced for commercial gain. Young (2000:302) identifies various sorts of appropriation which all involve outsiders (members of another culture) taking or borrowing cultural artefacts from a different culture.

The appropriation of a physical object from one culture to another is referred to as “material appropriation” (Young 2000:302). This can involve the removal of a tangible cultural object, such as a statue, from its original culture to a different culture. Once appropriated, the object removed from its natural context may lose its value and meaning.

“Non-material appropriation” (Young 2000:302) involves the copying of intangible works of art (such as music and stories) from a culture by an outsider. An example of this may be the adaptation of traditional African board games such as *Morabaraba* into commercial versions. These may be viewed as an infringement of a culture’s “sovereign claim” on an object as the original meaning and procedures (in the case of traditional games)

may be altered by the appropriator.

The appropriation by an artist of stylistic elements from a different culture is referred to as “stylistic appropriation” (Young 2000:302). This kind of appropriation is not concerned with replicating whole works, or parts thereof from another culture but is rather the adoption of basic elements of a certain culture into an outsider’s culture or artwork. South African’s kwaito⁴ music, for instance, can be said to have adopted its formative sounds from American hip-hop music. Similarly, most of the basic elements of marimba music (such as how the drum was played), popular among Africans during the era of the Union of South Africa, was appropriated from African cultural music forms and then fused with Western music of that time for financial gain.

Another form of appropriation identified by Young (2000:303) is “motif appropriation” which refers to an influence of a particular culture on the works of art of a member of another culture. Young (2000:303) gives the example of Picasso who was influenced by African art forms but produced work with a style that was unrelated to their artistic influence.

The last form of Cultural Appropriation identified is “subject appropriation” (Young 2000:303) which refers to the process in which an artist represents elements, or members, of a culture other than his/her own. Some of the works of Kudzanai Chiurai (see section 4.3.2), for instance, depict elements of *S’khothane* while the artist himself is not part of this subculture. In this study, Cultural Appropriation, as it has been defined by Sturken and Cartwright (2001:350) above, will be used to critique representations of *S’khothane* in contemporary visual artworks. The works of Kudzanai Chiurai, Jamal Nxedlana and Nontsikelelo Veleko will be assessed to establish the presence of subject appropriation and whether the appropriated cultural elements have an influence on their art.

⁴ Kwaito is the uniquely South African music that originated in townships during the 1990s.

These appropriations are relevant to the study because they show how *S'khothane* appropriates elements of material culture of the *Swenkas*, *Pantsulas* and *La Sapeurs* and re-invents them as their own. It is also useful in analysing and contextualising the selected artworks because the process of appropriation continues into these artworks.

1.6 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, contextual and descriptive design to gain insight into *S'khothane* with a focus on establishing its history and the elements that constitute it. The Constructivism, Performative and Cultural Appropriation theories and comparative method is used to analyse selected visual artworks in order to determine their representation of *S'khothane* and to investigate whether these suggest any misconceptions as portrayed in the news media programmes.

In addition to the above, data was collected by means of personal interviews with *S'khothane* performers in order to understand the culture holistically, their practices and performances. The questionnaire used for these interviews was drafted in English (refer to Appendix A). However, while most participants responded in English, others felt comfortable responding in their mother tongues – all of which were comprehensible to me. The selection of subjects for face-to-face interviews resulted in a group of participants randomly selected from two *S'khothane* events that took place in the Pretoria, Soshanguve and Tembisa townships of Gauteng, and other *S'khothane* events that I attended.

Three *S'khothane* groups were selected for the purpose of this study. These groups were chosen because they are known as “kings” because they won performance battles as voted by the audience. In addition, a veteran *S'khothane* was invited to participate. The veteran was a *S'khothane* who had matured but retained the values of the group. He is currently selling clothes to different groups. Interviewing the veteran the study needed to hear his views on changes between the past values of

S'khothane and the present. *S'khothane* groups selected for interviews included: the SSK, IG and ESL. The first interview session, with six members of the SSK, was conducted on 6th September 2014 in Pretoria. This was followed by an interview with 10 members of the IG on 11th October 2014. The final *S'khothane* group interview took place on 16th December 2014 with ten members of ESL. A few individual interviews were also conducted on these dates in order to gain personal insight from some individual members of *S'khothane* groups. Also, on 6th April 2015, an interview was conducted with recognised *S'khothane* veteran, Shadrack Bongani Skhosana.

All interviews were video recorded with the exception of the interviews conducted with the Epic Stress Lafamilia (ESL) group and Shadrack Bongani Skhosana both of whom expressed that they were uncomfortable with being recorded. In both these cases, their answers were manually transcribed.

In line with Unisa's ethical standards, all the selected participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the importance of their participation in the study and its accuracy. The participants signed a consent form prior to being interviewed, indicating that they gave permission to record the interview and that their information would be used solely for the purposes of this study. Those who did not want to be recorded expressed their objections and these were immediately noted and taken into consideration. Participants were informed of their rights to participate or to withdraw from the research process at any time.

Some of the collected data and artworks have been exhibited as part of the practical component of this study. All material that does not form part of the exhibition will be kept confidential and will only be accessible to the primary investigator and his academic supervisor. All research subjects were given a copy of their interviews and any related material.

1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1: Introduction. This is an introductory chapter that presents the background of the study. It highlights the research aims and objectives, rationale, theoretical framework and methodology. It outlines the data collection processes that were conducted for this study and the overview of the chapters. The chapter also reviews the existing literature, a majority of which emanates from mass media sources and a few studies that mention *S'khothane*.

Chapter 2: History and theories of subcultural groups in relation to *S'khothane*. This part seeks to define youth and engages existing identity and subcultural theories in order to ascertain the appropriate fit of *S'khothane* activities and identities to these theories.

Chapter 3: *S'khothane*: Cultural Appropriation, adoption or new invention? Here I examine *S'khothane* in comparison with other cultures that existed before and that might have influenced it. The evolution of *S'khothane* as a South African township youth culture is explored. Cultures that are believed to have had an influence on *S'khothane* such as the *Swenkas (Umswenko)*, *Pantsula*, and *La Sape* are also explored in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Presentation of findings, analysis of artworks and the practical component.

This three-part chapter looks into the following aspects:

Firstly the findings from interviews with group leaders and one veteran (called a “legend” in *S'khothane* slang) that provide a basis for the analysis of the artworks and acts as a lens through which I observe whether representations and perceptions created in popular culture and in contemporary visual arts are misconceptions. The findings are presented largely at a group level, as the nature of *S'khothane* is based on groups. These views give insight on the background and progression of the culture

as stated in the aims of the study.

Secondly, the chapter presents an analysis of selected artworks by the artists Kudzanai Chiurai, Jamalaun Nxedlana and Nontsikelelo Veleko in order to determine whether *S'khothane* has an influence on contemporary visual art practices. In this section, the artworks are interrogated for elements of *S'khothane*, such as clothing styles, postures, accessories, practices and symbols, amongst others.

Thirdly, the chapter discusses my practical component which forms part of this research.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations presents the conclusions of the study and suggests recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 2

History and theories of subcultural groups in relation to *S'khothane*

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In order to analyse and interpret the visual representations of *S'khothane*; this chapter unpacks the formation and behaviour of this sub-culture, which the findings is used to analyse the selected artworks. Young people want to belong to a group that gives them a sense of meaning, identity, worth and recognition. The more they are given a sense of self-worth and belonging, the easier it becomes for them to articulate the values of their group. This section gives an overview of definitions of youth through engaging with existing identity and subcultural theories in order to determine which of these is most applicable to *S'khothane* performances. Furthermore, the identity and subcultural theories outlined in the study examine how *S'khothane* has enlighten the youth to carve out cultural spaces, explore and experiment with their identities and attempt to provide models for the “older” generation and the general public to understand youth behaviour. In order to do this, I use the findings of the interviews conducted with *S'khothane* groups, photo documentation, group leaders as well as one interview conducted with a veteran of this culture to validate the identity and the subcultural theories which are mentioned in this chapter.

2.2 YOUTH AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

Being youthful is part of the life cycle that is characterised by the experience of being young, even though it is not confined to generic brackets of age because, *S'khothane* identities are formulated and expressed. In South Africa, there are conflicting views on what age groups constitute youth. Public policy, law and social perception define “youth” in various ways. For example, the National Youth Development Policy Framework (2002:36) defines youth as any person between the ages of 14 and 35 years. However, the *White Paper on Social Welfare* (SA 1997:67)

defines youth as a woman or man aged between 16 and 30 years, while the Child Care Act (2005) defines a child as a male or female aged from birth to 18 years which is the age of consent. Furthermore, the age definitions often differ not only by sex but according to the age limits for marriage, voting rights, criminal responsibility, access to alcoholic beverages, consent to medical treatment and sexual intercourse. Therefore, there is no clear age bracket for *S'khothane* youth and hence they do not easily fit into the abovementioned definitions.

However, there are differing definitions which confine youth to the generic brackets of age. Rietveld (1993:53) contends that youth cannot only be confined to the early part of life from childhood or a social category or a move from infancy to adulthood. In growing-up, one goes through several stages and behaviour changes that differ from one person to the next. It is a psychological phenomenon hence a gap exists between two discourses, that of irresponsible subservient childhood and of initiative-taking adulthood. At such a moment of passage, unconventional ideas may confuse established categories and may contribute to criminal acts and substance abuse in order to fulfil their desires.

Experiences of youth are not the same as those of being an adult. A young person goes through a learning curve, exploring new ideas with fewer responsibilities, making a career path and "soul searching". During adulthood, there are more responsibilities and less time to impress or show-off. *S'khothane*, in many ways, undermines conventional and moral societal norms representation of youth through the exaggerated excessiveness they portray in their wasteful enjoyment of luxurious goods.

Their strong fashion sense plays a role in how they identify themselves and others. *S'khothane* do not just spend money, they want value for their money. A brand has a specific symbolism associated with it which drives its desirability which reflects in the identity it creates for the person using it. Consequently, in forming cliques, youth may be seen to create identities that are constructed and reconstructed through clothing to distinct

themselves self discovery (Amit-Talai and Wulff 1995:2).

The *S'khothane* trend, formed by a group of young people wanting to be unique and different by using expensive brands of clothing, introduced a new trend which is now seen as “showing off”. This behaviour led to the formation of different groups that meet at designated sites during events and compete for recognition. This shifting identity of outward appearances demonstrates a direct link between youthfulness and fashion as they relate to *S'khothane*. The similarities of representation of *S'khothane* identity are also found in Yinka Shonibare’s artwork (see Fig. 2: *Big Boy* (2002)).



Figure 2. Yinka Shonibare, *Big Boy* (2002), wax printed cotton fabric and fiberglass, dimensions variable

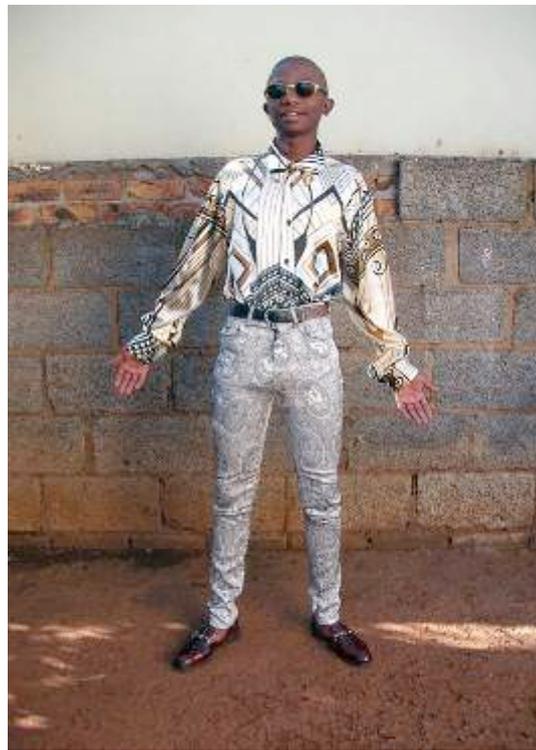


Figure 16: Jamalaun Nxedlana, *The real S'khothane* (2012)⁵.

S'khothane elements found are flamboyant, colourful clothes, different patterns, posture, shiny shoes and confidence (a sense of pride and a boastful nature). However, Shonibare’s artwork illustrates cultural identity

⁵ This artwork is analysed on page 69.

within the contemporary context of globalized fashion in post-colonialism. In the context of this study, Shonibare's illustration and use of patterns, textile and printed fabric have an African inspiration that is authentic, although the fabrics are made by Dutch who were in turn influenced from Indonesians batiks.

Similar to *S'khothane* the use of Italian materials, textile and printed fabric became an important representation of culture. Furthermore, patterns, textile and clothing partly contribute as main drivers of the sub-cultural group, because *S'khothane* culture has a strong fashion dominance. To illustrate this, the similarities in Shonibare's artwork can be interpreted using the behaviour and the gesture of *S'khothane* which conveys a "Do not look at my face, look at my expensive clothes" statement. In one of the personal interviews, Pastor (a member a *S'khothane* group dubbed the Italian gates) stated that "You shouldn't just look at our face as *S'khothane*, look at our uniqueness, *umswenko* and how we dress".

Performance

In the past, black men were denied opportunities to express their talent in public life, in music, film or theatre due to political power by the oppressor (white male) over the oppressed (black man). Fig. A: *Big Boy* (2002) by Yinka Shonibare represents the black man reclaiming his power on stage without the limitation of his cultural background. The base, as the representation of the stage, and the headless body are expressed as a performing artist.

Body

The representation of the male African body covered with an African material expresses the African identity, the talent of the people and culture of dance. The headless body is used as a symbol to represent Africans as they were believed to have no "brains". A lack of knowledge considered the black body to be an object rather than a human being.

Fabric

The fabric represents the African identity. It is European but represents the African culture and expresses the fact that the clothes are “borrowed” material from a foreign culture. The work recounts that most African materials were manufactured out of Africa but using the raw materials from the continent. The artwork destroys the understanding that Africans are inferior to people from the West and Europe.

The *S'khothane* culture expresses the same notion than no-one is superior even if they do not possess equal resources. They do not conform to white supremacy or the bourgeoisie, they destroy the perception that all Blacks are useless and have no brains. They rebel against the stereotypes of "garden boy" or "kitchen girl" thereby breaking the chain of “slavery”. The phenomenon of *S'khothane* brings more than just a physical appearance to its members. The group has an influence over its members by giving them a sense of belonging to a group that acts outside of the norms of society to express subcultural theories of expression. The following chapter explains the concept of Cultural Appropriation and how it relates to the *S'khothane* by examining whether this is a new invention or has been appropriated from other cultures such as *Swenkas*, *Pantsula* or *Sapeurs*.

2.3 IDENTITY AND SUBCULTURAL THEORIES

There are factors contributing to a person's identity such as birth and social groupings. There are certain elements that contribute to a group of people's identity, giving them a sense of belonging, such as race, country of birth and popular culture (hip-hop or dance music, for instance). Community structures related to youth culture have implications for what and how cultural values and acceptable social behaviours are passed on to future generations. Piaget (1985) explains that the cognitive constructivist point of view, the initial foundational schemas of what is right, wrong, good or bad are learned through interactions and experiences within the community.

In South African townships, popular subcultures include *S'khothane*. For example, ten friends from Phomolong section in Tembisa Township started the Italian Gates (IG) group, commonly known as the "Kings of Tembisa". The members are: Pastor, Bill Gate, The Captain, Mesh, Jovies, King Helpla, Killa, Vodka, Rossi Moda (RM) and Cooper. All of these are nicknames chosen for each member based on his role in the subculture or on his personality traits (see Appendix C for the meanings of these identity names).

Another group, called Sosha S'khotha Kings (SSK) was founded in 2009 in Soshanguve by two friends, Kamogelo (known as "KG Sfarzo") and Alfred (known as Mokalipa "Majemboo"). The SSK was the first *S'khothane* group in Soshanguve hence the members were nicknamed the "Kings" by their spectators perhaps referring to their being pioneers of this culture in their township. Explaining the meaning of his nickname, Kamogalo pointed out that KG is the short form of his real name whereas Sfarzo is the name of a top Italian jeans brand that is usually worn by *S'khothane*. Alfred's nickname, Majemboo, is taken from the township youth slang word "*majimbos*" which is used to refer to male peers. The word is equivalent to *Amagents/magents* in some townships (SSK 2014).

Personal Interview. 6th September, Pretoria).

S'khothane members are known for flaunting expensive goods that include clothes, shoes and alcoholic beverages (Berk 1995:439). At any given *S'khothane* event, a participant from the SSK group claimed to be wearing expensive (Fig. 3) Italian clothes such as Sfarzo trousers, an RM belt, one Carvella shoe and one Arbiter shoe worth a total value of R10 750.00⁶. These expensive clothes are donned to attract people to performance gatherings of *S'khothane*, especially young women in the audience attending these events.



Figure 3. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, Alfred wearing expensive Italian clothes and different pairs of shoes (2015)

S'khothane want to be seen and desire admiring glances from their audience which seems to be a sufficient reward. This appeals to their sense of exhibitionism which becomes part of the entertainment. Stryker (1968, 1980, 2001) and Stryker and Serpe (1982) view identity as being organised in a chain of importance which means that the more noteworthy

⁶ Trousers – R2 700.00; Shirt – R2 050.00; Belt – R1 500.00 and two different pairs of shoes: Arbiter – R2 700.00 and Carvella – R1 800.00. The prices claimed by this participant were proven to be correct, as I went to Spitz, Mr Snob and other shops to confirm them.

the identity, the more prominent the behavioural decisions of the character. Identity includes self-appraisal, self-respect and self-esteem (Jasso 2003:4). Hence, the SSK members freely express themselves through their dress code and performance, regardless of how the community perceives or labels them. They believe they are exercising their freedom of expression. They stand firm in expressing their culture and claim that they will remain *S'khothane* irrespective of judgments of them made by certain disapproving members of their communities and society in general (SSK 2014. Personal Interview 6th September, Pretoria).

The differences between cultural groups, individuals and generations in South Africa make for a variety of complicated identities (Soudien 2007:65). The roots of identity theory can be traced to the writings of George Herbert Mead (particularly 1934), which display a system endorsing the investigation of various sociological and social mental issues. Identity theory has, at its centre, three components (Stryker 1980, 2001).

Firstly, personal quantitative attributes (Stryker 1980, 2001), which relate to aptitudes, skills, competencies, performance, as well as other ordinal qualities such as honesty and wealth. Personal quantitative attributes work in two ways: firstly, a portion of the phenomena at the heart of a personality such as fitness, expertise and execution qualify as personal quantitative attributes. Secondly, although identities are generally role-related, the identity theory accommodates the likelihood that identities are based on more generalised quantitative characteristics which include both ordinal qualities such as honesty and cardinal aspects such as salaries, riches, and other material assets. For example, the expensive brand consumption phenomenon in South Africa does not only include middle-class consumers, it spans across the South African landscape to the working class who also buy these expensive brands that they cannot really afford. This phenomenon can be attributed to the aspirations and dreams of young people who desire to fit in with the lifestyles of their peer group.

Secondly, personal qualitative attributes (Stryker and Burke 2000:293) such as membership into groups or networks within which identity processes occur. For example, social identity is not only social representation, it includes the actual activities and symbols that are used by the group for identification purposes that extends to shared routine practices, political affiliation, dress, acquired material objects, settings, beliefs and other symbols. *S'khothane* are not necessarily acquainted with each other but mutual understanding and dress code allow them to form a unified group with mutual aims and objectives.

Additionally, *personal qualitative* attributes pertain to the identity theory in a mixture of ways, for example, occupation, when an identity process is explored in a particular group and loyalty, where individuals label themselves as belonging to a particular group (Stryker and Burke 2000:293-294).

Thirdly, *primordial attributes* (Stryker 1980, 2001) are self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-verification, self-worth and status. In the case of *S'khothane*, primordial attributes can be seen through their competitions and their boasting about their high end, European fashion outfits which are individuals denoting their membership of a group. An expensive price tag is a sign of superiority over their peers and boosts the owner's self-esteem. This boasting may extend to public acts in which these expensive goods are trashed and destroyed in front of their peers which gives them an even more controlling status. This also applies to alcoholic drinks, such as Verve Clicquot Champagne and Johnnie Walker whisky where pouring it out onto the ground appears as a form of boasting that they are able to buy more alcohol and the burning of bank notes in full view of the opposing crews shows their disrespect for the money. These material objects encourage experimentation with self-constructed forms of identity that allows them to escape their social realities and live outside of their natural dispositions (Stryker and Burke 2000:286). For example, brands and logos are intertwined with lifestyle branding. Merchandise that depicts

a certain lifestyle is part of popular culture. Young people associate brands with social identity and status, for example, some youth would never buy Pep Store jeans as they think branded jeans are status symbols that define you as a person. They also associate higher prices with better quality.

The lifestyle mentioned above was found in one of the groups I interviewed, the Italian Gates (IG) group. The name of the group emanates from Italian brand clothing and one of the world's richest men, Bill Gates, which they believe attracts the power to become future billionaires. They view Bill Gates as their role model and motivator for them to become successful in life and their clothing reflects this because they use mainly top designer brands such as Sfarzo, DMD, Rossi Moda and Arbiter (IG 2014. Personal Interview. 11th October, Thembisa).

The use of designer brands shows that the perception of social class is the main influence that led to the formation of these youth subcultures (Bennett 1999). Individual identities emanate from qualities such as gender, sexuality, social class, nationality, religion and location (Roberts 1997). Mathebula (2012) explains that *S'khothane* originate from South African urban working-class homes and that most of them are supported by the old age pensions of their grandparents. It appears that, regardless of the backgrounds from which they come, *S'khothane* go to great lengths – even burning expensive clothes and money, and wasting food and drinks – to attain fame by giving the impression of being wealthier than their opponents during their performative battles. However, Bristowe (2013:75) suggests that *S'khothane* are youths “dressing up and parading themselves in the latest fashion in a ritual bragging fest where they celebrate their extravagance”. This connects with notions of self-confidence, self-esteem and self-worth because, although they are acting in a destructive manner, this does not make them essentially bad people, it is only that they find a warped sense of pleasure through this destructive behaviour of destroying desirable goods to entrench their self worth.

Hebdige (1979:80) applied semiotics as an analytical tool in order to analyse the meaning of style, in which the major task is to interpret the signs that make subcultures identifiable. The action of “pexing”, which is the snapping of fingers, is one of the signs that are part of *S’khothane* performance. It means emphasising or driving the point home and attracting attention which is the ultimate motivation for their actions (Knoetze 2015) which are economic rather than simply bravado. This was confirmed by member of the Italian Gates (IG) stated that their appearance/performance fee was put into their savings schemes. Some of the events at which they appear and perform are organised by the community as a way of promoting, marketing and attracting a crowd.

As indicated by Hebdige (1979), the meaning of style is built through the fusion of clothing, music, dance, make-up and drugs. According to the founders of the SSK group (SSK 2014, Personal Interview. 6th September, Pretoria), the main motivation for establishing the group was to introduce a new style of group culture in Soshanguve as the *S’khothane* culture lacked popularity in this area due to negative media publicity and undesirable perceptions created by it. This was also to educate people in their community about *S’khothane* to manage these poor perceptions and portray a positive image of the sub-culture. Members of their community admire *S’khothane* style of dress and culture as crowds of youths follow this culture as spectators in this community⁷.

Italian Gates (IG) believe in breaking all preconceptions such as the belief that a limousine is only for rich people by hiring a limousine and parading it in the township when collecting them for their event (Fig. 4), also to illustrate their flamboyance and “we’ve arrived” status. The group shows their lifestyle through their motto, “*Living your future in the present*”. They believe that people should not believe that things are impossible because,

⁷ The first interview session, with six members of the SSK, was conducted on 6th September 2014, Fountains Valley, Groenkloof, Pretoria. This was said by Pulane during the interview.

if they work hard, anything is possible and therefore anyone is able to live like the Italian Gates (IG) (IG 2014. Personal Interview. 11th October Thembisa).



Figure 4. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *Italian Gates (IG) archive, the first S'khothane group to bring a limousine into Tembisa (2014)*

The discourse of youth is a universal experience. Youngsters' interpretations of how they view the world are not to counter the mainstream value system but to critique it. Ka Platjie (2012) perceives *S'khothane* as an obsession with attention, fame and glamorous fashion in order to attract respect, status, prestige and a sense of self-worth. *S'khothane* performances are outlandish, provocative and unpredictable. In this way, *S'khothane* position themselves as resistant and defiant of dominant and normative behaviour.

Youth cultural practice is connected to a movement. Young people tend to group into arrangements that are about improving or changing their standards. Throughout history, subcultures from different parts of the world have used dress and excessive spending as status symbols. Sophiatown in the 1960s is a typical example of this where the *Pantsula* style was popular and, in America, the hip-hop culture also feeds on the same trait of using dress sense, excessive spending and garments or

beverage prices as a way of asserting status. To some extent, *S'khothane* subculture is no different in its use of fashion items in its performances. *S'khothane* may even buy two pairs of shoes of the same high-end brand in different colours and wear one shoe of each colour to indicate how many pairs they have. This is generally communicated through the stylish dance moves and artistic use of their bodies at performances. Youth cultures tend to use social media to promote their movements, as Amit-Talai and Wulff (1995:10) attest:

When it comes to globalisation or transnational connections youth cultures are in the forefront of theoretical interest; youth, their ideas and commodities move easily across national borders, shaping and being shaped by all kinds of structures and meanings. It may concern development and consumerism. This was made possible by technological development.

Hebdige (2002:122) also notes that diverse young people bring distinctive degrees of change into a subculture. They do this because, as a group, they want to stand out from the crowd and make their mark even though they need to be accepted for what they are.

Black urban youth are not naïve. They move and operate seamlessly between different subcultural groups. Participation in various subcultures binds these young people together and they are identified through their unique styles. The sorts of popular cultures, music and film, images, dress, hairstyles and behavioural codes collectively create the subculture's style, making them visible to outsiders.

Brake (1980:12) explains that the style is used to distinguish a sub-cultural group from others as they create their own sense of character and equates subcultural perceptibility through what members of these groups wear, how they wear it and how they talk and carry themselves whilst practicing this to entrench their sub-culture For example, the Italian Gates (IG) have two different aspects: *S'khothane* and the *Tarianas*. It is prevalent that younger *S'khothane* depend on their parents for financial

support, for example, when children pass their examinations, their parents buy them Italian brands (IG 2014, Personal Interview. 11th October, Thembisa). The group called the ESL (IG 2014, Personal Interview. 16th December, Pretoria) regard themselves as *Tarianas*, which, in contrast to the *S'khothane*, are not destructive but are about dressing well and looking good. They particularly admire Italian designer clothes and culture as they explained during my interview with them. The *Tarianas* make money from, for example, temporary jobs to maintain their lifestyle and status. According to one of the members, Costa, Italian fashion is renowned for its style and sophistication. A person, who wears brands such as Arbiter, Rossi Moda, Sfarzo and Navigare, is respected and becomes famous for being the fashion king or queen in his or her neighbourhood.

The formation of subcultures, in this case, the *S'khothane*, can be seen as a collective way of dealing with challenges experienced by its followers. The creation of a new subculture brings psychological and emotional well-being to its members (Williams 2007:574). Therefore, *S'khothane* identity must be seen as a way in which young people can share the same social practices, symbols and beliefs. For example, according to Pastor (IG 2014, Personal Interview. 11th October, Thembisa), a member of IG , expressed with a sense of pride and passion that *S'khothane* is about dressing ostentatiously in Italian designer clothes and “looking like a king”. He says that the difference between their group and other *S'khothane* groups/crews is that they wear only Italian clothes. In his view, they stand out in terms of the dress code and *S'khothane* it is about “dressing to kill” and the pouring of Ultramel custard on the ground is for “kids” – not true *S'khothane*. It is about competitiveness. This view is different from other groups, for instance, the *Sosha S'khotha Kings (SSK)* (SSK 2014, Personal Interview. 6th September, Pretoria) who insist that the use of custard enhances their performances as they artistically express themselves.

CHAPTER 3

***S'khothane*: Cultural Appropriation, adoption or new invention?**

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Is *S'khothane* a new phenomenon recently manifesting in some Gauteng townships? This chapter discusses in detail a number of well-known South African sub-cultural groups such as *Swenkas*, *Pantsulas*, the *Sapeurs* all of which the subject matter, the *S'khothane*, evolved from. The study investigates whether the practices of *S'khothane* are appropriated across these sub-cultural groups by considering the evolution of *S'khothane* and the strong links that can be observed across these representations against the backdrop of the lifestyle shifts over time, using three theoretical frameworks, Constructivism, Cultural Appropriation and Performative theory. I also use the findings of the interviews conducted with *S'khothane* groups, the group leaders as well as one interview conducted with a veteran of this culture to address the various misconceptions of *S'khothane*.

3.2 SWENKAS, SAPEURS

In the South African context, one of the precursors of *S'khothane* are the *Swenkas* (*Umswenko*), a product of the urban lifestyle, for example, Jeppe Hostel in Johannesburg in the 1930s. The *Swenkas* pioneered the sense of identity and pride in dressing expensively with an aim to show off stylistic attributes and a "sense of attitude" (Mabandu 2012). These were migrant mine labourers who had left their rural home towns for better work prospects in Gauteng, also known as the city of gold. Gauteng held promise of a better, flashier life than which they had departed from and this held excitement and infinite possibilities manifested through the adoption of various elements, to establish this sub-culture *Swenkas* (Fig. 5). They participated in fashion events that included a performative event. *Swenkas* are primarily Zulu men who dress extremely well in order to reverse the dispossession of migrant labour in the city (Hansen 2012:317).

While *Umswenko* concerns itself with dressing “extremely well” in pricey clothes, *Swenkas* are also performers who have been known to be curtain-raisers for *Isicathamiya* musicians. Isaacs (2010) explains that *Swenkas* ascribed to three basic principles: dignity, cleanliness and the rejection of any form of criminality. The *Swenkas*, therefore, not only acted in fashion parades and performances but also had a shared way of life defined by principles accepted and practiced by a broad community of men aligning themselves with *Swenka* identity.



Figure 5. Baba Ali, *Mswenkofontein* (2015)

The *Swenkas* have survived for many years and not only influenced *S'khotane*, but also inspired popular culture. In recent years, *Swenkas*

have re-emerged in various forms of mass media with Danish filmmaker Jeppe Rønde producing a documentary on this culture titled *The Swenkas* (2004). Local rap group, Boyz N Bucks also released a song celebrating *Swenka* culture entitled *Mswenkofontein* (Fig. 5). In the same year (2015), Boyz N Bucks' member, Rikhado "Ricky Rick" Makhado released a solo single titled *Boss Zonke* in which he paid tribute to the *Swenka* subculture and proclaiming himself as "boss of *Umswenko*". While the music video of *Boss Zonke* does not have representations of the *Swenka* culture, the music video of *Mswenkofontein* appropriates *Swenka* performances and characteristics. One of the Boyz N Bucks' members, Stilo Magolide (Fig. 6), dressed as a *S'khothane* while performing his verse for *Mswenkofontein*.

Stilo Magolide not only appropriates the clothing of *S'khothane* in his performance, but also their usual performative dances and battle songs. The lyrics to his verse are as follows: "Many in a man with no plan, dressed like a kid in a *Truworths* budget, my kicks are designer, jeans are designer, tags say 'made in Japan', come on my friend". The verse sounds exactly like it was uttered in a *S'khothane* battle, only missing prices for each of the clothing items mentioned.



Figure 6. Baba Ali, *Mswenkofontein*; Stilo Magolide (2015).

Phenomena similar to *S'khothane* are not only found in South Africa. In Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of the Congo, for instance, there is

a subcultural group called the *Sapeurs* (also known as *Le Sape*). Downey (2011) explains that the acronym SAPE was taken from the *Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes* and that the word *Ambianceur* was coined in Francophone Africa and denotes persons who create ambience, in other words, “atmosphere-makers”.

This phenomenon of *S'khotane* is not only found in South Africa, but also in Brazzaville, the capital of the Republic of the Congo with a group called the *Sapeurs*. Downey (2011) explains that the acronym SAPE was taken from the *Société des Ambianceurs et des Personnes Élégantes* and that the word *Ambianceur* was coined in Francophone Africa and denotes persons who create ambience (in other words, atmosphere-makers).

Le Sape is a movement that originated in post-colonial Congo. Members of the movement are referred to as *Sapeurs*. According to Paolini, Elliot and Moran (1999:193), the name emanates from the French word *saper*, which relates to dressing stylishly. Organised *Sapeurs* are believed to have emerged as part of the several *clubs des jeunes premiers* which sprang up among the poor of *BaKongo* in Brazzaville in the 1970s (Paolini et al 1999:193). Prior to the formation of these clubs, *Sapeurs* existed individually. According to Grall (2011), the origin of the *Sapeur* culture lies with G.A. Matsoua, the first *Grand Sapeur* who, during 1922, was the first Congolese to return from Paris dressed exclusively in French clothing. He was adorned in a foreign, but soon to be revered, Parisian style of dress consisting of expensive and sophisticated suits, rather than the traditional African clothing of that time.

The *Sapeur* movement was re-popularised during the 1960s and 1970s after internationally famed Congolese musician, the late Papa Wemba, returned from his *tour de Paris* with a plethora of flamboyant European designer clothes. Wemba and other musicians, such as King Kester Emeneya, fuelled the burning desire for French fashion by spending tens of thousands of dollars to wear the clothes of European designers such as Versace, Gaultier, Cavalli and J.M. Weston (Pettersson 2013), among

others. Furthermore, The *Sapeur* subculture is mainly practised by men who worked as farmers, carpenters, taxi drivers and labourers who, after working hours, dress to dance or engage in friendly competition.

Expensive colour-blinding outfits, costing from \$10,000 upwards, are the main identifiers for the *Sapeur* culture (Grall 2011). The *Sapeurs* are known as a non-violent group of people who are respectful and considerate towards others. They consider their style as an art form, that is, the art of being a gentleman. They normally attend weekly competitions, called “*throw downs*”, to compete against each other and other groups to see who is wearing the most expensive designer labels (Grall 2011). Their demeanour is one of joyous eagerness, that is, dressing in colourful, flamboyant clothes with polished tailoring and perfect attention to detail; suits in periwinkle pink, poison green and buttercup yellow, *Jeeves-esque* bowler hats, fat regatta stripes, handsome canes, plump bow-ties, polished brogues and jaunty evening scarves (Doig 2014).

S'khothane sleek and colourful dress styles can be traced back to the *Swenkas* and the *Sapeurs*. The similarities between *Swenking* (Fig. 7), *Sapeurs* (Fig. 8) and *S'khothane* (Fig. 9) include performance and dance, flashy clothing and the flaunting of designer clothes as the main symbols of their value systems. The intention of all three of these groups is to gain respect by virtue of their material possessions. However, the differences between the *Sapeurs*, *Swenkas*, and *S'khothane* can be observed through the age groups of their adherents. The *Swenkas* and *Sapeurs* cut across age groups, from young adults to old men whereas *S'khothane* adherents are predominantly youths in their teens and early twenties.



Figure 7. Andrew Bell, *The Swenkas* (2014).

In Fig. 7: *The Swenkas* (2014), an artwork by Andrew Bell of two gentlemen who represent superiority, kingship and ownership. Their standing pose and dress code gives an impression that they are “a cut above” those below them. Their attire has the modern classical look with bright colours. Fashion is incorporated with the business class look showing that anyone can be at business class level irrespective of their backgrounds. His pocket and his position in society identify the “man of the house” through his representation. The environment in the image is categorised as poor and disadvantaged due to the lack of development and infrastructure. Coming from a disadvantaged background therefore is not a disadvantage.



Figure 8. Hector Mediavilla, *The Sapeurs* (2009).

Fig. 8: *The Sapeurs* (2009), an artwork by Hector Mediavilla, shares the same sentiments as Yinka Shonibare that questions the Eurocentric identity and class by breaking the silence of white superiority and conceiving of blacks as inferior. In this artwork, the black body is represented celebrating black power in the Eurocentric or western environment while wearing western attire. The dress code is a borrowed material to complement the bright African colours in form of fashion. In this artwork, the dance represents the hybrid culture (mixed influences) in modern society. The building or monument is classical, which complements the attire as the representation of class is categorised by its standards. Finally, it breaks the stereotype that no class, race or gender is superior as both women and men dance together reflecting the spirit of *Ubuntu*.

The *Sapeurs* and the *Swenkas* consist of respected men who do not behave in an unruly manner whereas the behaviour of *S'khothane* is perceived as disruptive, particularly because some supporters burn expensive designer clothes and bank notes.



**Figure 9. Motheo Modangu Moeng, *The commandos create their own photo shoot with a rehearsed sequence of poses* (2015)
(Source: Spinks 2015)**

Similarities in the artworks shown above represent the power of black youth due to its radical spirit and tenacity. In Fig. 7,8,9 there is a likeness or golden thread that can be observed across these representations, in that, whilst they show evolution in the sub-cultures over the years; the key elements such as behaviour (style, artistic moves or poses and attitude), ostentation (style, expensive taste) and distinctive manner in which fashion items are put together (style, bold, bright colours and swag) to drive a distinctive factor remain. In Fig. 8 and 9 their posture and choice of music at events and performance shows that with evolution there has been a degree of modernization of the sub-culture making it relevant to current times.

3.3 THE 1950s: THE BIRTH OF PANTSULA

The *Pantsulas* emerged between the 1950s and the late 1980s. When leather coats made their first appearance, an assortment of soon-to-be admired brands such as Foot Joys emerged as favourite brands. One of the Pantsula groups was called the *Italians* (popularly known as *Matariana*, the Sotho word for people of Italian origin) which was known to have armed robbers, shoplifters and petty criminals in its midst. *Matariana* were known for mocking educated people who could not afford their clothes and expensive lifestyle. The *Italians* were followed by the *Milanos* whose name had nothing to do with their status and more with their pleasant demeanour.

The characteristics of *Mapantsula* is, firstly, their immaculate sense of style, which embraces Converse All-Stars, Dickies-branded khaki, Pringle jerseys and head-gear from Dajikorp (Fig. 10). It was well known that they were associated with violence. For example, members of *Mapantsula* created an impression that they were violent and intimidating because, as Monaheng (2013) states, *Mapantsula* were known to have an affection for knives – Okapi traditional, Three Star or “Rambo” knives.



Figure 10: Filipa Domingues, *The African Cypher* (2015).
Image from film (Source: <http://10and5.com/2012/06/19/the-african-cypher/>).

Pantsula is practiced by young men. It emerged as a strong urban street identity in the 1950s (Makukule 2008:3). Like *Swenkas*, this culture is characterised by the wearing of unique and expensive clothes (Carter 2012:188; Makukule 2008: 94). *Pantsula* had a perception of violence. Khumalo (2010:13) states that the public viewed *pantsulas* as “aggressive ruffians” who were known for mugging people. Makukule (2008:73) supports this view and adds that the *pantsula* culture also encompassed the oppression of women, having multiple sexual partners and involvement in gang activities. This culture had various subcultures including: *AboMshoza* (the *Mshozas*) who were woman supporters of the *Pantsula*, the *Ivies* who were men, affluent peace-loving people and *Amahippie* (or the Hippies) that were perceived as non-violent, women and men highly fashionable subculture of the *Pantsulas*.

From the 1950s (Fig. 11) to the early 1980s, *pantsula* was practiced by men aged 30 years and older. In the 1950s, Sophiatown was the birthplace of the *Pantsula*, formerly based on American gangster fashion, music and vehicles which were popular during that era and were considered to be the ultimate symbol of success and being “able to afford it”. The *Pantsulas* spoke predominantly *Tsotsi taal* and they dressed elegantly with designer labels such as Pringle (Hugo 1997:125). The *Pantsulas* were mostly respected and feared because they created their own unique ways of expression, language and behaviour including the use of violence (Monaheng 2013). However, they had an unsavoury side, that of gangsterism, hooliganism and bravado and a general disrespect for all accepted formal societal norms and behaviours. Wearing expensive clothes, showing off their designer labels and wearing cotton hats called “sporties” distinguished the *Pantsula*, as did walking with a particular swagger and looking at others with a “signature look” (Maqoma 2011:4). This, however, changed after 1976 due to the political events of the time when the culture was adopted by much younger members of society and its practices also changed (Makukule 2008:i). During the Apartheid era,

there was civil unrest in the “townships” and due to social conflict caused by political instability between the youth and the South African Police. Young men used *Pantsula* dance as a means of expression (Webster, 2010). *Pantsula* went through a rapid change from being an aggressive, dominant male culture associated with criminality in the 1950s to being one that is now predisposed with performance, dance and dress style almost exclusively.



Figure 11. Bob Gosani, *The Americans – the Reef’s most notorious gang* (1954).

In the 1980s, the *Pantsula* dance was popularised in South African townships and continues to inspire young dancers⁸. Towards the end of the 1980s, *Pantsula* emerged in various forms in the mass media such as SABC programming. The SABC even screened the film “Mapantsula” in

⁸ In the 80s, *Pantsula* dance was popularised in South African townships and continues to inspire young dancers. The Pantsula Dance Academy, opened its doors in November 2013 at Gauteng.

1989 that was written and produced by Oliver Schmitz and Thomas Mogatlane (Monaheng, 2013). In 2000, local *Kwaito* artist, Kabelo “Boogaluv” Mabalane released a song titled “Pantsula4 life” and in 2004 he released another song titled “*Amapantsula ajabulilile*” which means *Pantsula* are happy. In 2011, a variation of *Pantsula* dance was part of a music video for Beyoncé's “Run the World (Girls)” and Bischof (2013) states that a South African *Pantsula* dance style which was once associated with criminals, is gaining a global audience since it was featured in videos by Basement Jaxx and Beyoncé.

Townships in Johannesburg, mainly Soweto in the south-west and Diepsloot in the north, claim to be the birthplace of *S'khothane*, also called *ukukhothana* (Capron 2013). However, participants in a 2011 episode of SABC1's current affairs show, *Cutting Edge*, said that the culture started around 2006/07 in Johannesburg's East Rand “townships” in the form of exhibitions by a group calling itself the *Pantsula Group*. It reported that the *Pantsula* were known to loiter on street corners in Johannesburg such as Smal, Commissioner and Jeppe streets to show off their expensive clothes and accessories. There appears to be no common ground between the *Pantsulas* and *S'khothane*. According to the show, the introduction of the *Pantsula Group* saw a new trend of *S'khothane* which began with a few innovators who started calling themselves “Scientists”. The Scientists were the initiators of the trend of wearing brightly coloured clothes and they formulated new dance moves such as *Mosha* and *Nyakazisa* (Nxedlana 2012).

The transition of the music and art industry shows that each generation is influenced by the previous generation. This also applies to dance, music, lyrics, styles of dress and fashion. In Fig. 11: *The Americans – the Reef's most notorious gang* (1954), an artwork by Bob Gosani, the gentleman's pose and the environment shows the influence of vintage styles such as the Kofifi Dance. In Fig. 11 the image gives off a classic view (style, fashion) with a suave (style, behaviour) and modern feel (style, setting); in

the former *Pantsula* dress code not only gives a representation of a mature young man who is ready for responsibility but also the transition of growth stages, from boys to men. The *Pantsula* group is often associated as members of dance groups and the sub-culture has been dented with negative perceptions of gangstarism; their sub-culture has a solid focus on style and dialect. Their creativity and impact is best demonstrative as a collective, in a group. The similarities with *S'khothane* are shown by the representation of different standards of living, maturity, vintage (traditional) and modernisation.

The *Pantsula* and *S'khothanes* are classified by their lifestyles. The *Pantsula* group, in their early stages, had to prove themselves to be accepted in society and it was not easy to become a *Pantsula* until they were featured in live performances, theatres, stages and parties. This is similar to the *S'khothane* whose society finds it difficult to accept them as a performing culture that is acting in their best interests.

While the *Pantsula* groups (Fig. 10) are identified by their attire such as All Star sneakers and Dickies' labels with vibrant colours, *S'khothanes* are well known for their gold teeth, bright floral clothes and expensive lifestyles. Although the groups have different everyday lifestyles, they continue being part of the society that names them and disowns them. *Pantsula* and *S'khothane* use similar movements and collective dance routines, which shows unity and freedom of expression.

These groups are found in urban township contexts where the youth does its best to find ways through the problems facing society today. Therefore, both groups wanted to be identified with a local lifestyle with the global vision of making *Pantsula* and *S'khothane* a widespread phenomena. The best way to do this, they believe, is to be a collective group with the same vision that relieves the stress of employment by creating opportunities through their craft. *Pantsula* and *S'khothane* have similar interests in the living the best life they were meant to have through expressing themselves

without limits.

3.4 CARELESS SPENDING OR CONSEQUENCES OF POLITICAL CLIMATE

Conspicuous spending by blacks and black subcultures needs to be understood in the context of years of oppression. The economic exclusion and the oppression of Africans contributed to conspicuous spending of large sums of money by some on material possessions that only depreciated in value such as clothes, cars and jewellery. This started with the Land Act 27 of 1913 when blacks were dispossessed of land they owned and prohibited from purchasing or owning land in these areas. The ability of blacks to own any meaningful assets was further restricted with the introduction the Development Trust and Land Act 18 of 1936 which abolished the rights of Africans to own land anywhere in the country, including in “Native reserves” established through the 1913 Act mentioned above.

Further restrictions on asset ownership and meaningful economic activity for Africans were instituted in the form of the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 which sought to limit livestock owned by Africans and to remove African families from “Black spots” (land previously owned by Blacks that was geographically located within “White areas”).

In the quest to understand the identity of *S'kothane*, the *Swenkas*, *Pantsula* and other African urban subcultures, the reality that, in the past, the rights of blacks to buy anything meaningful were taken away and the only way they could express wealth was through the purchase of expensive cars and designer clothes. Over time, this way of expressing wealth was performed through black subcultures such as those of black mineworkers and factory workers, such as *Umswenko*. *S'kothane* can, in this context, be seen as a consequence of this history of dispossession of blacks and the subsequent spending patterns of a people dispossessed of a right to preserve their wealth through the rampant consumerism.

3.5 THE IDENTITY OF S'KHOTHANE

S'khothane colourful styles of dressing can be traced back to the 1940s urban youth culture. The economic boom that characterised World War II led to the growth of the fashion industry in the towns and cities and Johannesburg became the scene of novel tastes and flamboyant demonstrations (Ka Plaatjie 2012). As the closest townships to Johannesburg, Sophiatown and Alexandra were pitted against each other in lethal gang wars and, most of all, fashion. This fashion was characterised by zoot suits, lengthy overcoats and Florsheim shoes giving rise to a new class of inner-city youth, the infamous *tsotsis*, with a bespoke dialect dubbed *tsotsi taal*, a fusion of local African languages and Afrikaans. The term “*tsotsi*” originally referred to a specific style of stiff trousers worn by the so-called “urban clevers” however, before long the *tsotsis* had their own charlatans who were characterised as being uncouth and prone to resort to violence.

Another contradictory view on the origin of the culture is that it originated from Katlehong in the east of Johannesburg. One of the founding members of the Italian Gates (IG) *S'khothane* group, nicknamed “Pastor”, who is originally from Katlehong, believes that a *S'khothane* group named Famous Manyanyisa Kings (FMK) was one of the founding groups. This group, also known as *amaVenkel*, were known for wearing clean, expensive and top-quality designer clothes and shoes. The FMK group met on a weekly basis at a park in Katlehong’s Sikhosana section to show off their clothes⁹. Nkosi (2011) explains *S'khothane*:

They bill themselves as street performers, but their art consists of little more than branded clothing and face-offs with rival crews who compete over who have more money. The trend called Ukukhothana, loosely translated as ‘dissing’, is a money-conscious South African

⁹ Personal Interview, 11 October 2014, Thembisa.

version of the USA's 'diss' battles, but unlike the Americans whose jokes begin with: 'Yo mama is so...', these kids start theirs with: 'I'm so rich I can do this, or buy this...' and then proceed to demonstrate how much money they have by engaging in wasteful expenditure and bragging behaviour.

During the early 2000s (2004-2006), groups of young people, dressed in expensive clothes, from different sections of the Katlehong Township organised minibuses with powerful audio sound systems and convened at the Germiston Lake for parties and braais¹⁰. This style of street fashion and parties continued during spring with each group wanting to stand out from the crowd. This trend was known as *ukukhothana* which was done to impress and encourage women to become part of the groups and to fall in love with them. According to Shadrack Bongani Skhosana this was the main aim of "*ukukhothana*¹¹".

According to the IG group (IG 2014, Personal Interview. 11th October, Thembisa), *Ukukhothana* started late in 2006 with a group of impeccably dressed young men at the S'khosana section in Katlehong (also known as Natalspruit, popularly known as Spruit) on the East Rand. The group was known or referred to as *Izikhothane/S'khothane* and *Amabujwa* which is the name mostly used by youth who perceive themselves as "*top shayela*", those who stand out from the crowd. These young men competed on a weekly basis to determine who wore the best clothes in terms of the top design brands. The groups hired spotted taxis with tinted windows such as Quantums, Siyaya and Condors as a feature in their competition with the intention of showing which group had the best-looking vehicle. Their behaviour attracted media attention and was broadcast on television, which led to the spread and emergence of *Ukukhothana* in other areas in Johannesburg and Pretoria. *S'khothane* group, known as the 18 Boys,

¹⁰ Barbeques, known as "Braais" in South Africa.

¹¹ Interview with *Ukukhothana* veteran Shadrack Bongani Skhosana on 6th April 2015.

misrepresented and brought into disrepute the image of *S'khothane* by tearing their clothes and money, and even breaking the law by burning money. ESL defines *S'khothane* as a “*kasi*” culture. *Kasi* is a slang name taken from Afrikaans word “*lokasie*” that means “township” and people relate to it as it imparts a feeling of home. Furthermore, being a *S'khothane* is demanding because the lifestyle, traditions and creative pursuits have to be maintained. *Tarianas* culture includes a family aspect in terms of a group of friends, community life, festivals and celebrations as well as creative, economic and other background factors (ESL 2014, Personal Interview. 16th December, Pretoria).

After the *Cutting Edge* episode in 2011, the culture of *ukukhothana* received an assortment of media coverage from the SABC, eTV, Mail and Guardian and Kaya FM which gave a public representation of a previously underground movement that generated public interest (Mkhwanazi 2011:6).

Today, *ukukhothana* (Fig. 12 and Fig. 13) is known as a culture of bragging-battles, where fashion (popular clothing, alcohol, food, dance and language) is the predominant means of distinction. Moreover, the events involve items interpreted as “can afford” based on their monetary value (Nxedlana 2012).



Figure 12. Michela Wrong, *Izikhothane, young Soweto men flaunt their designer duds and then publicly destroy them in a gesture of bravado* (2012)



Figure 13. Jamalaun Nxedlana, *Izikhothane in the township* (2012)

This concept is not a new practice. It extends into specific consumables such as cigarettes. There is bragging between older generations of men who smoke so-called “white cigarettes” (such as Peter Stuyvesant, Dunhill, Rothmans and other expensive cigarettes) with those who smoke what is commonly known as BB (Best Blend), a brand smoked using either a pipe or old newspaper.

S’kothane are viewed as a mirror of the stylised *Swenkas* in the 1940s (Ka Plaatjie 2012) and the *Pantsulas* in the 1950s (Hugo 1997:125). Ka Plaatjie (2012) also refers to *S’kothane* as the successors of the hippies in the 1970s. *S’kothane* have a preference for various expensive clothing labels such as Nike or Porsche shoes, CMB shirts and Carvella (Ka Plaatjie 2012) (see Fig. 14).



Figure 14. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *Movers* (2015)

The *Swenkas* comprised of impeccably dressed (custom three-piece suits) Zulu migrant workers who took part in amateur competitions that were part fashion show and part choreography, as a form of moral code. The prizes were in the form of household goods and money which were sent back home to families (Spinks 2014). Their style of dressing later evolved into a cultural expression and a dance form called *Pantsula*, a township urban form that fuses American tap dancing, *Marabi*, break-dancing and traditional African dances. Today there is an additional style called the “retro”, which is basically a mixture of the three (Maqoma 2011:4).

3.6 S’KHOTHANE: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Constructivism, Cultural Appropriation and Performative theory are applied to describe the phenomenon of *S’khothane*. Whilst they are from diverse areas, are brought together by the sharing of common interests and beliefs which lead to the formation of the sub-culture. This constitutes the basis of Social Constructivism which argues that “human development is socially situated and knowledge is constructed through interaction with others” (McKinley 2015:185). McKinley further points out that “in cultural identity construction, social interaction is the basis for people’s

understanding of their position in relation to others within the same cultural community” (McKinley 2015:186).

The youth express themselves through fashion and use their styles to entrench their uniqueness (Singh 2011). The ESL group was formed by individuals from the same community who wore the finest clothes. Some preferred the Italian brands and others favoured *uMswenko* (which means dressing in expensive clothes, that is, swanking), which are similar styles of clothing. The inspiration behind their name stemmed from their preference for stylish clothes and expensive taste; which projects an ‘epic’ outlook to people. . According to the group, their extravagant lifestyle often puts people under pressure resulting in perceptual exposure of various kinds. Therefore, identities are constructed through uninformed, mixing and matching of fashion items (Maffesoli 1996).

The SSK group defined the identity of *S’khothane* as seeking attention through the wearing of expensive clothes. It is all about “swag”. According to the SSK, “swag” refers to someone who has good taste in clothing, someone who wears top quality expensive clothes such as Sfarzo, Kurt Geiger, Polo, DMD, Louis, Dior, Gucci, Prada, Cadillac, Chanel, Christian Audigier and Cartier, and shoe brands such as Arbitr, Porsche and Rossi Moda as important elements of their lifestyle. SSK state that they buy expensive designer clothes because they believe these promote the identity of the group and the individuals it represents (SSK 2014, Person Interview. 6th September, Pretoria).

Popular culture has an influence on the lifestyle or culture of *S’khothane* in terms of dress code, music, television, bright colours and patterns. In urban areas, there is a lot of media exposure and young people are able to access the latest trends in terms of the fashions that are supported by *S’khothane* and *Tarianas*. ESL (ESL 2014, Personal Interview. 16th December, Pretoria) admits that their neighbourhood affects their lifestyle due to varying degrees of affluence and the exposure to clothing trends as seen on on television and music shows. The ESL feel that their lifestyle or

culture has an influence on their right to freedom of expression because they understand that any basic human right (which is an essential component of any democracy) acknowledges their rights. While some people love the *Tarianas*' culture, others have the perception that the *Tarianas* are a group of ridiculously-dressed young men who show off their wealth. They are also viewed as being *S'khothane* hence they dress inexpensive clothes and style. The difference is that, for the *Tarianas*, it does not involve dancing battle and bragging – theirs is about status showing off their expensive clothes in a calm content manner.

There are striking similarities between *S'khothane* and the *Swenkas*, as well as *Pantsula*'s and *Sapeurs*. *S'khothane*'s appropriated some elements and behaviour but also added their own creative flair in order to create their distinctive identity. This we would regard as the appropriation of *S'khothane* from other sub-cultural groups Akin to the *Swenkas* (*Oswenka*) and the *Sapeurs* (*La Sape*) whose subcultures are predisposed to wearing the nicest and priciest of clothing items, *S'khothane* also wear clothes that reflect their elegance and expensive tastes. And, like the *Pantsulas*, *S'khothane*, in an embodiment of Performative theory, incorporate choreographed dance moves into their performative battles. While some sources suggest that this is a subculture created by a generation born between the 1930s and the 1980s, it is clear from the cross-referencing and interviews of this study that *S'khothane* is a culture appropriated from various other youth urban cultures such as *Pantsula*, the *Swenkas* and *La Sape*.

According to all the groups (IG, ESL and SKK), popular culture has an influence over their performances as they appropriate dance moves from known choreographers such as Dr Malinga, the musician, Theo Kgosinkwe from Afro-pop group Mafikizo and the Uhuru group. They believe that their dance moves serve as entertainment and also bring happiness to their spectators.

My observations of the group when they performed at *S'khothane* events

reveal that the SKK has a huge following of fans. When asked what drew the audience, some followers indicated that they loved the SKK's style of dress and performances which they described as unique and exciting. *S'khothane* events are attended by people who admire the way in which the groups dance and the clothes they wear (SSK 2014, Personal Interview. 6th September, Pretoria).

During an event, they consume expensive alcoholic drinks such as Hennessy, Chivas Regal, Cruz Vodka, GlenFiddich and Johnnie Walker (either Black or Blue Label). Some *S'khothane* have gold teeth to show people that their mouth is worth thousands of rands. Often, when in battle, *S'khothane* members would show their gold teeth and interview members from their rival group by saying: "how much is your smile worth?" The group's emphasis during battles, according to its members, is on mocking the fake brands seen on the streets of Pretoria, Johannesburg and other major cities, and the cheap Chinese shops that sell these fake brands. The IG and SSK acknowledge that, financially, people come from different backgrounds however that does not mean that they should accept fake brands.

The IG are known as entertainers because, when they compete with other groups, they show that they are still the "Kings" in terms of their bragging battles and competitions. The audience normally agrees because the group is most often voted the best group and they therefore win most competitions. However, even after the IG has won, the members groom the groups that they were competing against to improve their skills and eventually to form new friendships. Throughout Soweto, East Rand, Diepsloot and Pretoria the IG are known, respected and dubbed The "Kings", because of their dress code and dance battles (IG 2014, Personal Interview. 11th October, Pretoria).

The community will always have people who criticise *S'khothane* and *Tarianas*. There are certain groups who are always jealous because they believe that deprivation consistently undermines local cohesion among

young people. Excellent (IG 2014, Personal Interview. 11th October, Pretoria) from the IG group said that there are different subgroups within *S'khothane*. He pointed out that, while there are crews that tear their clothes and burn their money, this is not the case for IG as they are only concerned with looking good and wearing expensive clothes. He refers to their subgroup as *AmaVenkel*.

Recently variations of *S'khothane* elements have been featured on music videos and television adverts. For example, Nandos made an advert based entirely on the elements of *S'khothane* as identified in mass media sources at the time. In the advert, entitled *Nando's Stories (S'khothane) #25Reasons – Reason 15*, members of a *S'khothane* group are seen pouring Ultramel custard on the ground and burning their possessions (clothes and shoes) until one crew tears out and burns a seat from the minibus taxis that ferried them to the event. The rival crew are seen pushing their taxi towards the fire made between the two crews to burn it as the advert closes. Exaggerated for humour, this advertisement was one of the media products that encouraged discussion around the “shocking” new culture.

3.7 LITERATURE ON S'KHOTHANE

Popular news programmes present *S'khothane* as consumeristic black youth who spend money they do not have. Nxedlana (2012) argues that this is only one side of the story as he believes that there are also positive elements to *S'khothane*. He (2012) argues that the culture should be viewed as a form of art because “it is a participatory practice, which requires collaboration from *S'khothane* performer and audience”. Such as graffiti, that was previously regarded as vandalism of public space to being accepted as a legitimate art form to portray an artistic message, *S'khothane* is a unique social presence which contributes to a new local art form (Nxedlana 2012). From their unique popular artistic dance acts to their performative battles that come with artistic flair, *S'khothane* have introduced a new form of urban entertainment. This argument is useful to

my study because it shows that there are contradictory views regarding *S'khothane* which are discussed further.

Bristowe (2013:75) suggests that *S'khothane* are youths “dressing up and parading themselves in the latest fashion in a ritual bragging fest where they celebrate their extravagance”. Jones (2013b:39) theorises that *S'khothane* is a mode of self-enunciation which is dependent on the disposability of expensive possessions (such as clothes, drinks and food). He observes that young urban youth gather to watch rival *S'khothane* crews “perform dance moves that mirror the stylised commodity of ‘swanking’ in the 1930s and 40s and *maPantsula* in the 1950s” as Nxedlana (2012) and Jones (2013:76) articulated in articles published at a time when *S'khothane* was still receiving massive mass media coverage in which it was portrayed as “bling obscenely gone mad”. This history is relevant to my study because it includes other subcultural groups such as *Swenkas* and *Pantsulas* which predate the invention of *S'khothane*.

3.8 THE MISCONCEPTION OF S'KHOTHANE AND THEIR IDENTITY

The study cannot isolate existing contention or misconception judgement that was portrayed by mass media around the *S'khothane* as a subject matter, for this study to determine the representation and the analysis of the selected artworks the misconception had to be accessed in order to use the accurate analysis of the subculture. Young (2009:242) explains that misconceptions include stereotypes, myths and untruths formulated against any culture, group of people or individual. This section looks at the misconceptions, assesses the statements that are made and the perceptions held by mass media and some members of society against what I found when I interviewed and observed *S'khothane*.

Often those statements, beliefs and convictions toward this youth subculture constitute untruths. Sometimes the media portray these untrue images as exaggerated and distorted, even though they are based on real

events and people. According to Young (2009:242), people who manipulate the truth usually do so with an intention to promote their own aspirations and interests. In order to address the manipulation of the truth, The findings of the interviews examine the various misconceptions about *S'khothane*. The following paragraphs aim to prove or disprove the contention or misconception of *S'khothane* as a bad influence, as criminals, uneducated, with pious religious attitudes, destructive behaviour and lacking in ambition.

3.8.1 Mass Media

S'khothane featured in eTV's 3rd *Degree*¹² investigative journalism programme hosted by journalist Debora Patta. In this episode, *S'khothane* is presented as a "township craze". Township youths are shown living beyond their means. The negative coverage of this group focuses on how one of the members committed suicide because his parents could not afford to buy the expensive clothes he wanted. Patta and her colleagues also found that some members of this culture tear and burn money and clothes during performances (face-offs/battles)¹³ with other groups just to show that they are richer than the other crew.

3.8.2 Bad influence

Theories such as Cohen's (1955) "delinquency/delinquent subculture" theory as well as Matza's (1964) "delinquency drift" provide a foundation from which interrogations intent on understanding youth subcultures can depart. Cohen's delinquency subculture theory views a delinquent as a person who does unlawful things as a response to dissatisfaction with social challenges (Bailey 1956:216).

S'khothane are often referred to as delinquents or a bad influence on

¹² This episode was aired in May 2012 on eTV.

¹³ These are competitive performances staged between two or more *S'khothane* groups. In these events, they compete to find out who has the best dance moves and the most expensive clothes. The prize is usually just crowd admiration and popularity.

younger generations by the communities from which they emanate. The mass media and popular culture has also portrayed this culture as one without direction, with some media personnel, such as Deborah Patta of eTV's 3rd Degree programme, going as far as referring to this culture as "madness".

Following the interviews conducted as part of this research, I believe that this is both a generalisation and largely baseless. Musicians, such as Ricky Rick and Drake are motivated by *S'khothane* lifestyle and aspire to follow this culture and to be able to afford a lifestyle similar to that of *S'khothane*. Hence Ricky Rick composed a song called "*Umsenko*" and Drake composed a song named "One Dance". There are, though, members of society who believe that *S'khothane* is a "bad influence" on children, as per media portrayal on the culture of the group a number of people seem to have based negative judgement on the programmes aired on TV.

3.8.3 Poverty

News programmes often portray that *S'khothane* come from impoverished communities, are unemployed and depend largely on their poor parents to fund their expensive lifestyles. Some mass media programmes even claim that *S'khothane* force their parents into getting loans so they are able to wear expensive designer clothing. The interviews have brought another angle to this notion and indicated that the majority of *S'khothane* cannot be categorised as poor. For example, some of the groups charge a fee to appear on their clients' posters (clients refer to event organisers of entertainment shows) and to appear at events. Their crowd-pulling services are highly sought after by tavern and nightclub owners in their communities.

The SSK group members believe that young people admire *S'khothane* because they perceive them as being rich and clean but they do not engage with them to understand how they fund their lifestyles. *S'khothane*

insist that they work hard in order to be able to buy expensive clothes and make names for themselves (SSK 2014, Personal Interview. 6th September, Pretoria).

3.8.4 Criminality

Media practitioners who engage in demographic profiling of *S'khothane* insist that they are gangs made up chiefly of young, unemployed Africans who wear expensive clothing, which they often destroy (Pettersson 2013). The use of the word “gang” by the media in relation to *S'khothane* carries negative connotations and suggests criminality. All *S'khothane* groups that I interviewed denounced crime and claimed that they are only interested in looking good and enjoying life.

The interviews paint a different picture from what has been said, for instance, in an interview with Pulane (SSK 2014, Personal Interview. 6th September, Pretoria) of the *Sosha S'khotha Kings*, the respondent insisted that they are not involved in criminal activities and that the source of most of their money is the informal businesses they operate in their communities, which include a car wash.

3.8.5 Uneducated

There is a perception that *S'khothane* are illiterate or school dropouts. They are mostly viewed as people who do not have the intellectual capacity to complete formal school programmes because of the belief that they are social misfits. However, from interaction with *S'khothane* and from the interviews, IG are business people because they charge for their performances and other groups attend formal education. Some of them manage their own informal businesses and are able to market their own events to their communities. In the case of the IG group, all members are either currently attending some form of formal educational institution or have completed a higher education qualification. For example, members of the IG, Pastor and Mesh, completed their matric and are currently applying for post-matric education, Gates, Jovies and King Helpa are

currently upgrading their Grade 12 subjects, Cooper and Roberto are in Grade 11, Sfarzo is in Grade 10, Killa and Captain X are studying at university, and Vodka, Mesh and Rossi Moda (RM) are searching for employment. The IG explain that admission to their group requires that a member must either be in formal employment or be engaged in formal education (IG 2014, Personal Interview. 11th October, Thembisa). While this is not evident as an entry requirement in SSK and ESL, all members of these two groups are either learners, students or have completed their high school education.

3.8.6 Destructive behaviours

The perception of destructive behaviour has been documented in the mass media. *S'khothane* are known to burn their clothes and destroy money as part of their performances. This is one of the elements that shocked society when documentaries on them were first televised.

All of the groups interviewed for this study denounced the practise of destroying clothing items and money. Whether this was a result of the backlash from society after this practise was televised is unknown. All of the subjects, however, stated that they had always denounced it and said it had nothing to do with *S'khothane*. Nonetheless, all groups admitted to the use of commercially manufactured custard in their performances. This, they argue, is their way of expressing themselves artistically by writing or drawing things on the ground with custard.

The 3rd Degree host, Debora Patta described *S'khothane* as “Bling gone obscenely mad” (2012) in her documentary because of their destructive behaviour. Research participants interviewed indicated that they do not see their dressing in expensive clothing and wearing expensive jewellery as “obscenely mad”.

The general public seem to judge a person to be a *S'khothane* by just looking at the clothes they wear. It is apparent from the study that a lot more than expensive clothes and jewellery is required for one to be a

S'khothane. The culture requires a member to be able to perform certain dance moves to a crowd and make expressions and certain gestures, amongst other elements. The ESL (ESL 2014, Personal Interview. 16th December, Pretoria). Both cultures (*S'khothane* called *Matariana*) also disapprove of the destruction of expensive clothes, jewellery and perishables.

3.8.7 Lacking in ambition

There is a perception that *S'khothane* are lazy people who are afraid of engaging in economic activity as depicted in the 3rd Degree episode on eTV and in the “Cutting Edge” programme on SABC1. In the case of all research subjects in this study, the sentiment that *S'khothane* are often lazy people was dismissed by the groups I interviewed. It was clear that they engaged in legitimate economic activity; some are formally employed or undergoing formal education.

The *Sosha S'khotha Kings*, who operate various informal businesses, are proof that not all *S'khothane* are lazy people. There is no evidence that laziness and subscription to *S'khothane* values are correlated.

There are sentiments that *S'khothane* are useless people who engage in crass consumerism and acts of self-destruction. They are essentially viewed as having no value to contribute to society. On the contrary, devotees of *S'khothane* reported being involved in philanthropic activities in their communities. All groups interviewed reported being involved in charitable activities such as Mandela Day events, volunteering their time to the needy and repainting homes for the homeless in their communities. The perception that *S'khothane* are useless, therefore, is disproved. Hence some groups do things that are viewed as outrageous things in public and still are able to maintain their integrity and “give back” to their communities.

As can be seen from the above paragraphs, most of the beliefs and sentiments the public hold about *S'khothane*, particularly after negative

mass media coverage of this culture and its purported practices (which were disputed by most of the respondents during interviews), are actually misconceptions and generalisations.

3.9 CONCLUSION

This chapter was addressing whether *S'khothane* is a Cultural Appropriation, adoption or new invention. From the history of this subculture, it is obvious that it is not a new phenomenon but an appropriation of style and dance moves of earlier movements such as the *Swenkas*, *Sapeurs* and the *Pantsulas*. The practices of *S'khothane* have incorporated elements not seen in these earlier movements such as the use of custard, whisky and the destruction of items of value just to show that they are meaningless.

The second part of the chapter investigated the misconceptions held by the mass media and generalised community perceptions. According to the interviews that I conducted, these misconceptions that the *S'khothane* are lazy, criminals, a bad influence, uneducated and have a lack of ambition were found to be baseless and untrue. The following chapter presents the findings of the study and analyses selected contemporary visual artworks to find out whether there are influences from the phenomenon of *S'khothane*. It also presents my practical component and its relationship to *S'khothane*.

CHAPTER 4

Presentation of findings, analysis of artworks and practical component

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the visual analysis of selected art works and the analysis to apply and discuss the significance of the theories in addressing key issues in relation to the way *S'khothane* is represented. These interpretations of visual representations of *S'khothane* are informed by background research focused in three main areas. These include: the identity constructions related to *S'khothane* and the degree to which it could be considered a cultural development; influences from other subcultural groups or communities on *S'khothane* identity; and postulations of how *S'khothane* has been misunderstood in relation to popular culture. The last written points of the research involves the representation *S'khothane* based on misconceptions which was circulated in different media programmes on television.

Section 4.3 presents analyses of selected visual artworks by Kudzanai Chiurai, Jamal Nxedlana and Nontsikelelo Veleko. These analyses are used to explore the re-presentation of *S'khothane* in contemporary visual arts. An additional purpose of the analyses is to assess the possibility of whether the contention or misconception judgement of *S'khothane* that is encountered in investigative journalistic programmes and documentaries continues through into other modes of representation such as the visual arts.

The practical component, Section 4.4, focuses on an analysis of artworks produced mostly during this study. Members of the SKK and the IG groups are featured in both the video and still photography sub-components of my study. I documented both crews and their members, capturing moments that expose and personify this culture and the mannerisms, postures and performances that are associated with it. Part of my analysis will be a comparison of my own work with that of Chris Saunders who

photographed the Swenkas, and Cristina Hadwa and Blanda Ucongo who photographed the Sapeurs and their performances. In order to determine to what extent do S'khothane "borrow" from the Swenkas and Sapeurs..

My own practical work, resulting from an engagement with two events that I attended, is informed by Ogundu who said that

[r]epresenting a subculture is an art that requires as much research, respect and understanding as representing a culture as a whole, because most subcultures are inherently a branch of culture (Ogundu 2015:7).

Throughout this process, I aimed to remain critical of all aspects of the subculture in question in order to attain as holistic a viewpoint of my subject as possible. The aim of my practical component is to suggest methods of visual representation of *S'khothane*, to expose elements of the culture that are of particular significance to *S'khothane* and to postulate a visual narration of the emergent urban youth culture often represented as a materialistic, consumeristic, disruptive and destructive culture.

4.2 THE FINDINGS

4.2.1 The identity of *S'khothane*

Individuals identify with particular groups when they find resonances with the perceived identity characteristics of such groups. These could include loyalty to certain principles of the group as well as a sense of inclusivity. In Chapter 2, I referred to Stryker (1980, 2001) in order to establish the attributes that are used to present the identity findings of *S'khothane*: *personal qualitative*, *personal quantitative* and *primordial quantitative (original human instincts)*. *Personal qualitative attributes* (Stryker 1980, 2001), such as membership of groups or networks within which identity processes occur, show that social identity is not only a form of social representation, it includes the values and symbols that are shared in the group. *S'khothane* have developed certain values that are embodied in their lifestyles. These values drive and influence the way *S'khothane* want

to be perceived. *S'khothane* are easily identified through their style of material acquisition, termed *Ukukhothana* that is identified through the purchase of expensive clothing and accessory brands and general lifestyle choices. One could easily identify *S'khothane* because of their appearance, which is often exemplified by clothes made of distinctive patterned cloth. *S'khothane* ritualistically wasting custard is not meant to be offensive, nor is it dangerous or necessarily harmful but it is about entertainment and display of affordability. An additional personal qualitative attribute that allows individuals to identify with *S'khothane* is age. The study found that the behaviour of *S'khothane* has been associated with an overall pattern that refers to a certain age group within South African urban township society and defines what *S'khothane* drink, wear, smoke, their mode of transport during events, types of women they date and how they walk. *Personal quantitative attributes* include daily living considerations such as salaries, accumulated wealth and other material assets. The research has shown that *S'khothane* appear to be living responsible lives because they manage their financial context very closely even though their appearances and performances seem reckless. The interviews revealed that some of the members are employed and some groups charge for their appearances and performances, for example, IG (Personal Interview. 11th October 2014, Pretoria) group normally charges R1 500.00 to appear and R2 500.00 for a performance and appearance at an event. Annually, the group earns between R30 000.00 and R40 000.00 from this. In addition, the Italian Gates (IG) group said that they save their daily school/pocket money on a regular basis. Each member saves roughly R10.00 per day, amounting to R50.00 a week, which is given to a bookkeeper on a weekly basis. In a month, each member would have contributed around R200.00 which, for 10 members, amounts to R2 000.00 a month and R24 000.00 a year. Their savings are allocated according to their budgeted yearly plan, for buying clothes, hiring transport and buying drinks, while some of this money is rechannelled back to the community during Mandela Day and through church events.

The group members meet regularly at a member's house in order to plan for their next event, which usually takes place in a public space such as a park, tavern or community hall. I would suggest that these *personal quantitative attributes* show that *S'khothane* are often exemplified by youthful passion, an interest in current fashion and material possessions which give the appearance of an elegant lifestyle.

Stryker's (1980, 2001) notion of *primordial attributes* identifies ideas around self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-verification, self-worth and status. I would posit that, in the case of *S'khothane*, *primordial attributes* can be identified through the competitions at which participants boast and display their expensive, haute couture outfits. These competitions frequently include as part of the performance "pexing" which is the snapping of fingers to attract attention or to substantiate a specific point being made (Knoetze 2015). Other forms of expression made known during the interview process include the development of new terms, for example, *Amavenkel Manyisa* which loosely means "dress like a king" and "swagger". This refers to an individual who is extravagant in terms of the clothes he wears which includes the material, the price tag, the brand and the origin of special Italian clothes.

Attributes such as gold jewellery, gold teeth and leopard print fabrics are common amongst *S'khothane* and influence their sense of self-worth and self-verification. *S'khothane* are individuals who share the same common goals and experiences in terms of culture, music, fashion, performance and values. The method of applying *primordial attributes* greatly assists in realising this aspect of their identity which confirms Stryker's notion of self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-verification, self-worth and status.

4.2.2 *S'khothane* and influences from other urban groups

The data collected from interviews suggests that part of the formation of *S'khothane* was influenced by other groups specific to the urban environment including *Swenkas*, *La Sape* and *Pantsula*. This link between

urban influences was confirmed in an interview with the IG member, Pastor, who said that he was inspired by his brother who used to wear expensive clothes and belonged to a group called *Famous Manyanyisa Kings* (FMK) which, during the that time, were *Swenkas/Pantsulas*. Other influences that the interviews reveal had an impact on *S'khothane* are traditions of the Christian church, celebrity lifestyles and what is colloquially referred to as the “royal priesthood”,¹⁴ an indication of an extremely wealthy lifestyle (Personal Interview. 11th October 2014, Thembisa).

The information presented in Chapter 3 confirmed that *S'khothane* was developed from *Swenkas*, *La Sape* and *Pantsula* attributes. The similarities between *S'khothane* and the *Swenkas*, *Pantsula*, and *La Sape* are that they all wear expensive and high quality clothing that reflect their elegance and expensive tastes. Even though *Pantsulas* and *Swenkas* are from a previous generation, *S'khothane* draw some influences from them. For example, *S'khothane* incorporate choreographed *Pantsula* dance moves into their performative battles. This is another aspect of the subculture that connects it to other urban groups. During the documentation of the *S'khothane* groups, I observed the crews and the elements that form part of their performances and culture. These involve orchestrated and sometimes dangerous dance moves, sounds and gestures which are choreographed and are coupled with clothing meant to complement the flamboyance of the performances.

Although the *S'khothane* connect themselves to urban groups that preceded them, they are separated from the *Swenkas*, *Pantsulas* and *La Sape* by key differences such as *S'khothane* age groups, spending on specific types of clothing, their performances, poses, manners of showing off for photographs, language, behaviour/action, gesture and music

¹⁴ *S'khothane* view themselves as good characters with holiness being their first priority. When it comes to clothing, which they see themselves as kings who lived in a kingdom of priests.

preferences. The differences can be seen through the two events attended. *S'khothane* prefer listening to House Music, Hip Hop, R&B and Kwaito but the *Swenkas* prefer *Scathamiya* (Acapella) and *Maskhandi* while the *Pantsulas* prefer Kwaito and House Music. Williams (2007) states that styles also separate youth culture into different subcultures that differentiate themselves from other groups by spending on specific types of clothing and music. *S'khothane* identity is therefore heavily reliant on past urban subcultural groups specifically those from the urban inner city environment and the township context¹⁵.

In Fig. 15: *Drowning the bling* (2014), *S'khothane* are presented in front of a small crowd of people who show clear signs of being entertained rather than being afraid or anxious due to their dancing battle performances. In this performance, a *S'khothane* is using accessories to brag and show off while being helped by a member of the small crowd gathered to watch. While holding a jar half-filled with beer in one hand, the youth is using his other hand to immerse his gold watch into the alcoholic drink. The performance demonstrates the authenticity of the brand of watch by immersing it in a liquid. If this immersion damages the watch, then it is not considered authentic. Original watches are perceived to be those that are water-resistant. If a watch is not waterproof, then it is deemed a "fong kong"¹⁶. Hence Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996:183) state that the components are aimed at grabbing the viewer's attention to unique degrees as seen by features such as placement in the background and foreground, virtual size, contrasts, pitch value or colour, and differences in sharpness.

¹⁵ This is discussed in Chapter 3.1-3.6.

¹⁶ "Fong kong" refers to something that is very obviously fake, plastic, or non-believable. It can also be used to refer to something or someone who tries desperately hard to be cool, but does not achieve this. This term originated amongst South African youth and was used during 2000-2002). <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=fong%20kong> Accessed on 17 June 2016.



Figure 15. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *Drowning the bling* (2014)

The identity of *S'khothane* therefore shows that it is a unique and authentic urban youth identity which is nevertheless influenced by other urban subcultures that precede it. There is a link between urban influences and historical subcultural groups which contributed towards the formation of the *S'khothane* identity in terms of their appearance, performances and values. *S'khothane* are integrally part of an urban township environment which defines their social and historical context.

4.2.3 The misconceptions

The misconceptions about *S'khothane* as shown in SABC1's *Cutting Edge* (2011) and later during a *3rd Degree* (2015) television episode represented the *S'khothane* as wasting expensive alcohol and custard, wearing of very expensive designer clothes, conspicuous consumption and the wanton destruction of valuable objects. These behaviours are part of *S'khothane* performances in representing their culture. After the *Cutting Edge* (2011) program was aired, debates about the culture of *S'khothane* were featured

on Kaya FM¹⁷ and one of South Africa's national weekly investigative newspapers, the *Mail & Guardian*¹⁸. In an article for France24¹⁹, Capron (2013) states that

S'khothane burn money, destroy expensive clothes and pour bottles of alcohol on the ground. The *S'khothane* live well beyond their means, spending more money than they and their parents can afford in order to be cool.

Common misconceptions about *S'khothane* exist in part because of misinformation circulated in township communities by means of mass media and programming. The view that *S'khothane* are "crazy" can also be found in Mago (2014:37) who cites an email from a respondent who claims that *S'khothane* are a "bunch of criminals" who purchase expensive items for themselves using money earned from criminal activities. Ndebele (2013) claims that youth such as those associated with *S'khothane* are more interested in cultures of materialism involving opulence rather than upliftment of the poor. *S'khothane* are often personified through lavish and brash displays of unruly behaviour. Their acts of opulence include wearing expensive designer clothes and even burning them, organising expensive parties to show off wealth and an absence of respect and regard for the method of acquisition. However, they also have another side to their identity which is fun-loving, caring and philanthropic. The issue of gangsterism is described by Mkhwanazi (2011:1) who refers to *S'khothane* as "pexing", a form of "brand gangs" that engage in conspicuous consumption as a metaphor of war, with the branded products as their weaponry.

¹⁷ On 1 November 2014, following the coverage of *S'khothane* culture on Cutting Edge, Kaya FM also joined in the discussion on the culture.

¹⁸ On 28 October 2014, the *Mail & Guardian* published an article by Sibongile Nkosi entitled "Burn after wearing -- township kids' hottest fashion statement".

¹⁹ France24 is a French-owned international news channel, with online presence, based in Paris. The article cited here was published on its news website.

There is a tension between the everyday reality of *S'khothane* and how they are represented on popular television programmes. The danger is that popular television and culture has a persuasive way of guiding the public's mind set and this leads to a negative perception of *S'khothane*. The study finds that generalised public opinion and misconceptions lead to misunderstandings surrounding *S'khothane*. These misconceptions inform the negative viewpoints about *S'khothane* which the interviews conducted as part of the study revealed this to be untrue.

4.3 ANALYSIS OF SELECTED ART WORKS BY CHIURAI, NXEDLANA AND VELEKO

The approach in this section is to describe and to analyse the selected artworks by Kudzanai Chiurai, Jamal Nxedlana and Nontsikelelo Veleko to demonstrate in what ways *S'khothane* has an influence on contemporary visual arts to find out how the artwork represented the. Its usefulness extends to other forms of visual expression such as music videos and television advertising as well as contemporary South African visual art practices. The artists are selected because their artworks incorporate *S'khothane* characteristics such as clothing, patterns, the use of bright colours, gestures and accessories. Each selected artist works with the representation of people.

Jamal Nxedlana

In Fig. 16: *The real S'khothane* (2012), an artwork by Nxedlana, a young man who appears to be in his early 20s is dressed in Italian fashion, in the form of a formal, shiny long-sleeve shirt worn with light grey chino trousers with light cream patterns spread unevenly on the fabric. In this representation, the young man wears costly sunglasses and a pair of shiny Italian shoes with reference to an urban township context.



Figure 16: Jamalaun Nxedlana, *The real S'khothane* (2012)

Some elements of *S'khothane* are represented and documented in this artwork. The attire, sunglasses and pose of the *S'khothane* that is commonly seen during their gatherings and battles shows the sense of self-esteem, self-worth and symbolises the status amongst peers. When *S'khothane* pose with their hands at their sides (as can be seen in the artwork), they are ensuring that all the elements of their clothing, including brand names that appear on the belt fastened to their expensive trousers, are visible to both their audience and their rivals.

This pose, with shoulders thrown back and palms facing upward, looks like the young man is showing off and inviting spectators to “look at me”. While admiring the clothes, the aim is to present a person who is confident and fashionable to an audience. The image makes a connection or contrast between *S'khothane* as a well-dressed person wearing expensive clothes and a very gritty, dusty road and unplastered walls which is a familiar sight in urban townships. Hence, Nxedlana has documented the stark difference

between real life / everyday life and the aspirations of the *S'khothane* who come from poverty-stricken backgrounds. Nxedlana accurately depicts the elements of the *S'khothane* by emphasising the contrast between the well-dressed person and the township context in Fig. 17.

In Fig. 17, Nxedlana depicts *S'khothane* with colourful t-shirts and shoes worn with black trousers. The raising of their feet is associated with the pride of owning a pair of expensive shoes or the presentation of the value of their clothing to rival groups during a *S'khothane* event. Apart from wearing deliberately mismatched shoes, these young men are wearing similar clothes showing that they belong to the same crew. *S'khothane* usually wear different expensive clothes as a form of competing against each other with unnecessary misdirected competition and short-lived opulence but, in this artwork, *S'khothane* are wearing what could be described as team attire. In the image, the graffiti on the backdrop also shows the township urban context and reinforces the team aspect, letting everyone know where they belong. Wearing matching team attire can be seen as collective solidifying a sense of identity and friendship.



Figure 17. Jamalaun Nxedlana, *Izikhothane in the township* (2012)

Nxedlana's artworks frame *S'khothane* in a manner that shows their everyday context, regardless of their social status. The graffiti fits in well with the individuals in the photograph. Graffiti artists also want respect from their peers. This artwork depicts one of the main reasons for the

existence of *S'khothane* which is the human need to belong to a group and share an identity with others in the group. These men are standing in a row, wearing the same clothes and showing off their shoes. In the image of Nxedlana, the companionship and the identical clothes show how they are conforming to an ideal of a sense of solidarity, shared experience and unity in the way they are represented.

Kudzanai Chiurai

Fig. 18 entitled *The Minister of Foreign Affairs* (2009) by Kudzanai Chiurai was part of the artist's solo exhibition called *Dying to be men* at the Goodman Gallery, Cape Town which was billed as one that "interrogates the visual legacy of political representation" (Goodman Gallery 2009). It shows a man clad in very colourful articles of clothing, gold jewellery, gold teeth, a watch and a black and white striped knitted fez, which is associated with Islam, against a rich gold background. The fez is worn as part of the everyday fabric of the townships and in some of the West African countries.

In *The Minister of Foreign Affairs*, Chiurai shows the "minister" gesticulating with two pointed fingers whilst appearing to be speaking in the style of an African dictator. This is a satirical representation of a politician in a joking gesture which undermines the authority of the figure represented. The opulence of fabrics and the background show that this person is not poor as the *S'khothane* are but has the power given to him by his background and privilege. The term "Minister of Foreign Affairs" may be taken literally in that he is a political figure or it may be a satirical display that shows that he possesses the same flamboyance as the *S'khothane* sub-culture. The minister is wearing a bow-tie, gold chain and a dashiki shirt which is seen as traditional wear in many African countries. The dashiki shirt fabric looks very elegant. This is in stark contrast to the works by Nxedlana who does not try to hide the background by replacing it with wallpaper. The wall paper looks opulent and its gold colour matches the chain and the person's gold teeth which is also adopted by

S'kothane, however, this is an element emanating from the early 1980s American hip hop artists which was later adopted by other subcultural groups such as *Swenkas*, *Pantsulas* and *Sapeurs* as well as *S'kothane*. Nuttall (2004:438) states that imagery in advertisements depicts an amplified self-consciousness of the styling of human identity as a stage-managed, artful process. Fashion designer brands are used by people to create a certain image of themselves.

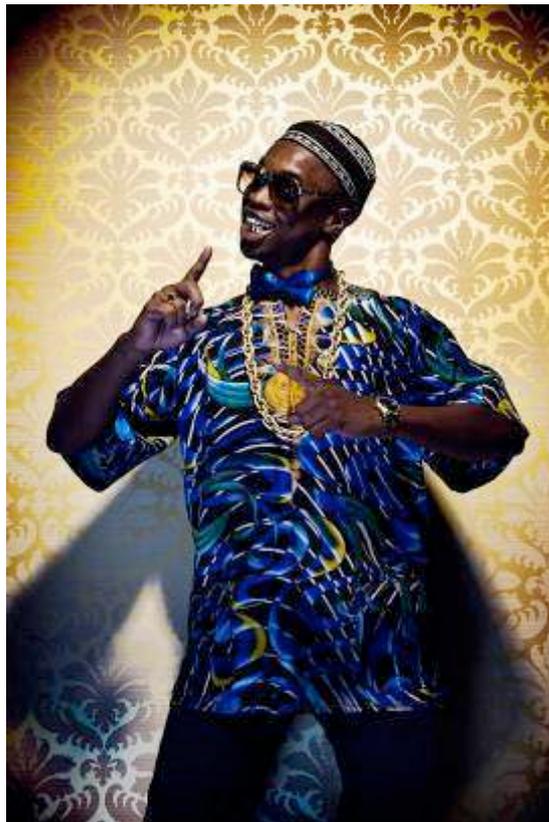


Figure 18. Kudzanai Chiurai, *The Minister of Foreign Affairs* (2009). Ultrachrome ink on photo fibre paper, 150 x 100 cm, 10th edition.

Fig. 19, *Untitled I* (Chiurai 2010) was exhibited as part of the *Communists and Hot Chicken Wings: The Birth of a New Nation* (2010) exhibition at the Goodman Gallery.



Figure 19. Kudzanai Chiurai, *Untitled I* (2010). Pigment inks on cotton rag paper, 72 x 109 cm ,10th edition.

In *Untitled I* (Fig. 19),, a photograph exhibited as part of the *Communists and Hot Chicken Wings: The Birth of a New Nation / 2010* exhibition at the Goodman Gallery, Chiurai depicts a colourfully-dressed man against the background of an African National Congress cloth bearing a picture of South Africa's second president, Thabo Mbeki. The young man in *Untitled I* is wearing a brightly coloured jacket, plain pink shirt and a gold necklace. This work gives the impression that it has been captured in broad day light due to its evenly lit background and foreground. The subject has been placed in the centre of the two pictures of the face of Mr Mbeki, thus drawing the eye to him.

Perhaps as a way to depict the title of the exhibition visually, the image suggests that the new nation, the visual print of Mr Mbeki and the African National Congress (ANC) in the background is one of communism-inspired nations who have deviated from the original ideology of communism. The new nation, or its leaders, as depicted by the young man represents him being a leader within the group *S'khotane* that are obsessed with the self and indulge in expensive items of clothing, which are contrary to the principles of selflessness and humility preached by predecessors of Mr Mbeki. His representation is of a particular party

known as *S'khothane* just as the background represents the ANC party that was lead by Mr Mbeki.

Mbeki also presided over a period of economic growth for South Africa. So his presence in the form of a background printed motif in this artwork may also be interpreted as a symbol of the economic prosperity of *S'khothane* who are mostly presented as individuals from “previously disadvantaged communities” (Patta 2012).

As the idea of wealth accumulation and economic liberation remains a dream for most African families in poor townships, *S'khothane* are engaging in a performance of being wealthy when, in reality, they are not. Despite the cost of maintaining this lifestyle, to them a sense of self-worth and the respect received from their peers for their dress fashion seem enough to justify and indulge in the expensive subculture.



Figure 20: Kudzanai Chiurai, *Untitled II*, 2010, Pigment inks on cotton rag paper, 72 x 109 cm / Edition of 10 + Demo, Edition of 10

In *Untitled II* (Fig. 20), which was also part of the *Communists and Hot*

Chicken Wings: The Birth of a New Nation (2010), Chiurai employs the same background device as in *Untitled I* (Fig. 19), a backdrop of former President Mbeki on an African National Congress branded cloth. However, this time his model is presented as a political leader – as opposed to the *S'khothane* in *Untitled I*.

Depicting the woman in the photograph with a gold mayoral chain around her neck transforms the idea of *S'khothane* out of its usual contexts of a street performance that is usually undertaken by youths from poverty stricken homes in South African townships. The representation of the *S'khothane* in the manner of a “Mayor” as depicted in *Untitled II* (Fig. 20) gives the subculture a different perceived view – one that embraces it as a subculture that is adhered to by both men and women.

The visual argument Chiurai is making with this piece of art is of a community leader, in the form of a Mayor, who is also an adherent of *S'khothane*. It metaphorically argues that the culture of consumerism and the love of glamour cannot be solely associated with *S'khothane*. The new crop of politicians and community leaders, most of who are associated with the African National Congress (which was led by Thabo Mbeki a year before the exhibitions, hence the background), have been associated on several occasions with crass consumerism characterised by the love of expensive official cars, whiskeys, jewellery and clothing.

In this and the above photograph, Chiurai, appropriates *S'khothane* elements to portray what he sees as a contrast between politicians who are supposedly inspired by Marxist ideology as leaders of the ANC and their love for the expensive produce of a capitalist system. Excessive consumption of bling is not only a status symbol, but an expression of freedom.

As with his subsequent works of political representation in art, Chiurai (Fig. 19 and 20) adopts several *S'khothane* elements in this work - including the spending money and the wearing of expensive clothes and jewellery.

The representation of the government minister in Chiurai's artwork employs *S'khotane* elements to suggest that, like some, the *S'khotane*, government ministers engage in behaviours that may be questionable to society, such the purchase of expensive goods. Some of these goods, such as official cars, are purchased with public money.

Nontsikelelo "Lolo" Vekelo

In Nontsikelelo "Lolo" Vekelo's artwork below entitled *Sibu VIII* (Fig. 21), which was part of her "*Beauty is in the eye of the beholder*" exhibition (Afronova Gallery, 2007), a man in a suit of floral patterned fabric together with what seems to be untidy shoes and sunglasses appears on a backdrop of a wall bearing graffiti motifs of slain Black consciousness activist Steven Bantu "Steve" Biko's face. Biko, whose belief was that blacks must come to realisation of their black power and pride of their own skin. In this case, the portrait by Vekelo express the notion that, no matter where you are positioned, never forget where you come from. The gentleman in the artwork presents a specific ideology with the background presenting Steve Biko image that defines a cultural statement.



Figure 21. Nontsikelelo Vekelo, *Sibu VIII* 2007. Pigment print on cotton rag paper, 36x25cm, 2007, edition of 10

The artwork expresses the idealistic version of new representation in the dynamic (changing) society. The contemporary ways of dressing are fundamentals in the youth today, with fashion changing daily. The use of bright colours is depicted through pattern and over application of flowers and gold accessories which can be viewed as presenting a wealthy person. These forms also reflect on the 1960s generation fabric design and dress code when textiles were floral and used for clothes, curtains, tablecloths, wallpapers and personal accessories, among others this presented a certain fashion style that was popular. Vekelo's representation of using the face of a political figure as a backdrop suggests the subject's allegiance to the Black consciousness ideology. The backdrop can be seen as the artist's way of revisiting history – by making a political statement in reference to South Africa's painful past of oppression and segregation. The political symbolism of Biko stands in sharp contrast to the conspicuous consumption of S'khothane. In her depiction of the floral pattern, Vekelo shows the new regalia of S'khothane that is seen in most of the S'khothane groups in the form of expressions through fashion. S'khothane can also be linked to the rebellious breaking of style rules. Vekelo's view of Biko's ideology of black consciousness is translated by the youth through their fashion sense and confidence in what they wear and who they are as Black consciousness movement was about identity. Furthermore, the artwork shows the postmodern lifestyle and the glamorous life which influences the *S'khothane* culture. Here Veleko used colours as a symbol of brightness and youthful energy, for example, the future looks bright. Hence, with the *S'khothane* culture, brightness is the key and unique trademark.



Figure 22. Nontsikelelo Vekelo, *Hloni* 2004. Pigment print on cotton rag paper, 36x24cm, 2004, edition of 10

The contemporary art of photography and fashion often go hand-in-hand in telling stories. The concept expressed through images of contemporary fashion is a form of everyday life where, in the past, photographers would only be invited on special occasions for documentation. Contemporary art has made an every day life environment into a stage for visualising, depending on its audience. In the artwork above (Fig.22), the artist uses the cityscape as a stage for a specific vision in combination with the color of the artwork in the figure. The artwork addresses the every day lifestyle of individuals whose representation is reflected in how they want to be identified as unique amongst the majority. Living in a multicultural society, an original identity may be lost due to mixed cultural influences. The influence is identical to the *Pantsula* culture. The background is an urban

context which represents *S'khothane's* surroundings. The combined view of the visual artworks gives different aspects of the same concept of *S'khothane* which refuse to let the status quo define their aspirations and encourages them to have their own vision. It is believed that consensus, compromise and teamwork are important to build self-worth, self-belief and non-conformance. The message is that the style, as seen in South Africa, flaunts economic prosperity for most to see.

From the analysis of selected visual artworks it will appear that *S'khothane* influence contemporary visual arts, with most of the elements of the culture represented in the visual artworks by Kudzanai Chiurai, Jamal Nxedlana and Nontsikelelo Veleko. *S'khothane* culture extends further than just their community becoming part of a broader culture seen through art, music videos and television adverts.

It is important to question whether visual artists misrepresent *S'khothane*. It is evident in all of the analysed artworks (Figures 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22) that the *S'khothane* are not misrepresented. Various elements of the *S'khothane* are observed in all the artworks analysed. These include elements such as wearing expensive clothes, gold teeth, colourful attire and wearing shiny clothes and jewellery. Representation of the culture in contemporary visual arts also appears in the figures. The selected artists were influence or can be view as using the act of borrowing as explained through cultural appropriation, however, they did not change the meaning of the *S'khothane* culture, its images or elements of fashion, use of colour and bling. Through interviews that provide context, this research finds that *S'khothane* is about dreaming big, self-belief, self-love, performance, companionship and a unique identity. However, in the mainstream media, only one aspect of the *S'khothane* subculture which includes the burning of clothes, spilling of expensive alcohol and wasteful lifestyle, has been visually projected to the public.

There are degrees to which *S'khothane* identity and culture are misrepresented in the mainstream media and the visual arts practice. The

misrepresentation of youth and black subcultures in the mainstream media is partly driven by focusing and portraying the negativity instead of showing both the positive and the negative side. In Fig. 23: *Sosha S'khotla Kings (SSK) S'khotlane*, my representation portrays an actual *S'khotlane* member belonging to the *Sosha S'khotla Kings (SKK)* in Soshanguve. The photograph was taken in Pretoria before the performance of his crew.



Figure 23. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *Sosha S'khotla Kings (SSK) S'khotlane* (2014)

There is always a subtlety in a way people are represented. Also there is always a degree of manipulation in the way people are posed and the settings are chosen, selected or staged. In both of the Nxedlana artworks discussed, there is a degree of truth. It is clear that, in his representation, he includes the semi-urban area confirming that this culture is practised by youths from townships and other peri-urban areas. The artworks portray a clear contrast of social stature, for example, in Fig. 16: *The real S'khotlane* (2012), a *S'khotlane* character is dressed in expensive gear.. On the other hand, Kudzanai Chiurai's form of representation involves manipulation because he produced his visual artworks in a studio where he uses props and had the ability to control the composition of the artwork.

Veleko made a representation of various *S'khothane* elements, including colourful clothes and accessories such as sunglasses. The background on Fig. 21 depicts Steve Biko, a black consciousness movement icon. He advocated self-love and self-belief which influences the *S'khothane* cultural stance of being exceptional whether their interpretation is correct or not. In Veleko's work, she is constructing it as honestly as possible but there's still a very careful framing in relation to Biko's image and in relation to Nxedlana who depicts the an everyday situation / street scene in relation to the brick wall and dusty ground in the background. There is always an attempt to manipulate, to find, to pose, to construct or to frame. The form of representation is arguably more candid and direct suggesting focus on the part of the artist in capturing everyday contexts and the parts the *S'khothane* play in the context.

S'khothane are also featured in several advertisements of brands such as popular SABC radio station, 5fm, and chicken fast foods chain, Nando's. In Fig. 22: The 5fm advertisement (Life without 5), *S'khothane* are represented accurately as far as their clothing and dance is concerned. The widely accepted conception that *S'khothanes* are consumerist urban youth who come from impoverished backgrounds is incorporated into this representation of *S'khothane*.



Figure 22: King James II TVC, 5fm advertisement:Life without 5 (2015)

The *S'khothanes* in the advertisement can be seen looking on as one of them is dancing, however, the producers employ a background of a house built with a mix of corrugated iron sheets and bricks, extended with a zinc shanty – as an inference that, despite expensive clothes, *S'khothane* are from poor backgrounds.

4.4 MY PRACTICAL COMPONENT

My visual exhibition titled “*Nothing can stop us, Siyikhothane*” took place at Unisa Art Gallery and officially opened on 9 April 2016 (Fig. 23 and Fig. 24). Two *S'khothane* groups, *Sosha S'khotha Kings* (SSK) and *Italian Gates* (IG) that I documented for the exhibition attended the opening.



Figure 23. The exhibition (2016)



Figure 24. The presentation of images (2016)

In Fig. 24 and 24, the gold frames were informed by the documentation of *S'khothane* which showed that the colour gold was dominant amongst the groups that were interviewed. The arrangement of the photographs on the wall was deliberately irregular in the style of a grouping which showed the

unstructured lifestyles of *S'khothane*.



Figure 25. Palazzo Pitti sponsored props (2016)

The exhibition was made up of framed still photographs and a video that explored *S'khothane* culture. This included props (Fig. 25) provided by the sponsor, Palazzo Pitti, to demonstrate the expensive tastes of the *S'khothane* lifestyle. The exhibition captured the essence of *S'khothane* and visually narrated the story of the explosive urban youth culture that I believe is wrongly ridiculed by most as a consumerist disruptive and destructive culture. Below I provide an analysis of the still artworks and video, which form part of the research project art exhibition. The intention of the analysis is to dispel the narrow narrative about *S'khothane* culture being directionless.

In the video that was showing during the “*Nothing can stop us, Siyikhothane*” exhibition opening, *S'khothane*, interviews (Fig. 26) performing dance moves on a moving vehicle (Fig. 44), made their grand entrance to the venue as is common amongst *S'khothane* groups. When the Italian Gates arrived, the hall was emptied as people went outside to view their impressive arrival.



Figure 26. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *Telling their side of the story* (2014)

The video work clarified and informed the narrative of *S'kothane* and the individuals who were a part of the group. The video attempted to capture the essence, the performance, the environment and the atmosphere experienced by the audience.



Figure 27. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *Grande entrada, the grand entrance* (2014)

In Fig. 27: *Grande entrada, the grand entrance* (2014) *S'khothane* are making their grand entrance into a venue intended to make everyone look at them because of their clothes, their performance and the loud music from the vehicle. The performance is accompanied by the music that leads them to perform their dance moves from both within and outside the Volkswagen Caravelle (commonly referred to as *Caracara* in South Africa) while the minibus taxi is moving. *S'khothane's* brightly coloured mismatched sets of shoes show off their outfits and the fact that they have more than one pair of the same high end shoe brand.

One of the members on the minibus is raising his half-clenched fist to the air, reminiscent of the gesture made by anti-apartheid activists in protests throughout South Africa's resistance period. A clenched fist represents solidarity and defiance but has also been used politically as a sign of black power. In the instance of Fig. 27, the half-clenched fist can be interpreted as a symbol of defiance. Just as human rights activists raise their fists in shows of defiance, *S'khothane* raise their fists reaffirming their adherence to this widely misunderstood culture.



Figure 28. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *Temporary artistic expression* (2014)

In Fig. 28, *S'kothane* are expressing themselves in front of admiring crowds by writing their names on the tarmac, amongst other things, using custard – mostly that bearing the *Ultramel* brand name. This kind of performance (using custard in their battles) can be seen as an alternative to using paintbrushes and other art equipment in order to express their opinions, feelings and art. When I questioned *S'kothane* about wasting food in their battles, they explained that, unlike graffiti, their art is not permanent and therefore they cannot be accused of defacing property. The significance of using *Ultramel* custard is that, in the townships, many families would have a full meal with dessert only on Sundays and custard is a popular dessert. Showing off with something that may only be consumed once a week or not at all, is a symbol of having an abundance of dessert that can be spilt for fun. It is also a gesture of defiance for the frugal context of their own lives as well as those of others.



Figure 29. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *In my shoes* (2014)

In Fig. 29, *S'kothane* stand in their signature pose, on one leg with the other foot slightly raised while pointing to the raised foot to show off the

shoe brands. The gesture is borrowed from the *Swenkas* (Fig. 30) and *Sapeurs* (Fig. 31) who are known to pose in a similar manner to display their elegant shoes.



Figure 30. Chris Saunders, *Swenkas* (2013)



Figure 31. Cristina Hadwa, *Sapeurs* (2014)

Some trends transcend age as you can see on Figures 30 and 31 where middle aged men are showing off their shoes in a way similar to *S'kothane*. Fig. 29 also transcends social stature in terms of expensive outfits as the men shown look elegant which translates to economic viability.



Figure 30. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *The Puller* (2014)

In *The Puller* (Fig. 30), *S'kothane* are performing an act which includes pulling a Toyota Quantum minibus with one hand while holding an alcoholic drink in the other. In the background, a *S'kothane* wearing an UZZI (clothing brand) top is seen dancing, with a crowd of spectators watching. This is a symbolic pose, intended to represent the crowd-pulling characteristics of *S'kothane*. The subject of the photograph represents the culture itself. By using the illusion of pulling the minibus full of young people, he symbolises the attraction of the culture to youngsters in South African townships (as mentioned during interviews done with SSK on 6th September 2014 and with IG on 11th October 2014). *The Puller* represents the flamboyance of *S'kothane*, but also the way that many township youths are drawn to it.

Reminiscent of the *Swenkas'* (Fig. 30) and *Sapeurs'* (Fig. 31) style of dress, *Ultimate swag* (Fig. 32) shows a sense of swagger which is the way that *S'kothane* show that they are the best dressed at the event. They

also wear colourful sunglasses pretending that their future is bright. Based on the interviews I conducted, they see themselves as “dressed to kill”. Their walk shows their confidence in the fashions presented on the day. A sense of pride and self-determination is obvious from their swagger as shown in Fig. 32, 33 and 34 showing one of the *S'kothane* subculture's cornerstones of self-belief.



Figure 32. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *Ultimate swag* (2014)



Figure 33. Nawissi, *Sapeurs* (2015)



Figure 34. Chris Saunders, *Swenkas* (2013)

In Fig. 35, *High on something*, two *S'khothane* are performing their dances on top of a slow-moving minibus taxi. Another *S'khothane* is hanging through the open door displaying expensive alcoholic drinks. The entertaining the crowds of spectators performance is known as “*ukukhothana*”. They appear to be carefree whilst finding the best position to attract the attention of the onlookers. There is a risk factor as standing on the roof of a moving vehicle is dangerous but, this is a risk taken willingly. In this case, alcohol might be the main motivator.



Figure 35. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *High on something* (2014)

The colourfully dressed *S'khothane* in Fig. 37 demonstrates his free-spiritedness by spreading his hands and smiling. In the pose, the young man, displays his gold teeth. This relates to Chiurai's *The Minister of Foreign Affairs* (2009) (Fig. 18) because the grin is not joyful but is more of a snarl or a grimace with the lips drawn back, threatening rather than smiling (Fig. 36). The young man is saying that he is both proud and defiant. This can be seen as internalising the expensive lifestyle chosen by the young man as gold is associated with value.



Figure 36. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *Expensive grin* (2014)

His style is intended to attract crowds while being defiant and subversive while the mess and disorganisation in the background show reality as it is in the township. In Fig. 37, he seems to be a man content with life wearing a hat matching his t-shirt and a colourful jacket and spreading his hands as a gesture. The background depicts the activities of the *S'khothane* functions with many empty alcohol bottles and cars. It appears that the gesture is used in other subcultural groups such as *Sapeurs* and seems to have come through to *S'khothane*. For example, Fig. 38 reiterates the fact that some trends transcend age and stature. Although dressed differently to Fig. 37, both figures portray freedom because of the open outstretched arms however in figure 38 there are spectators.

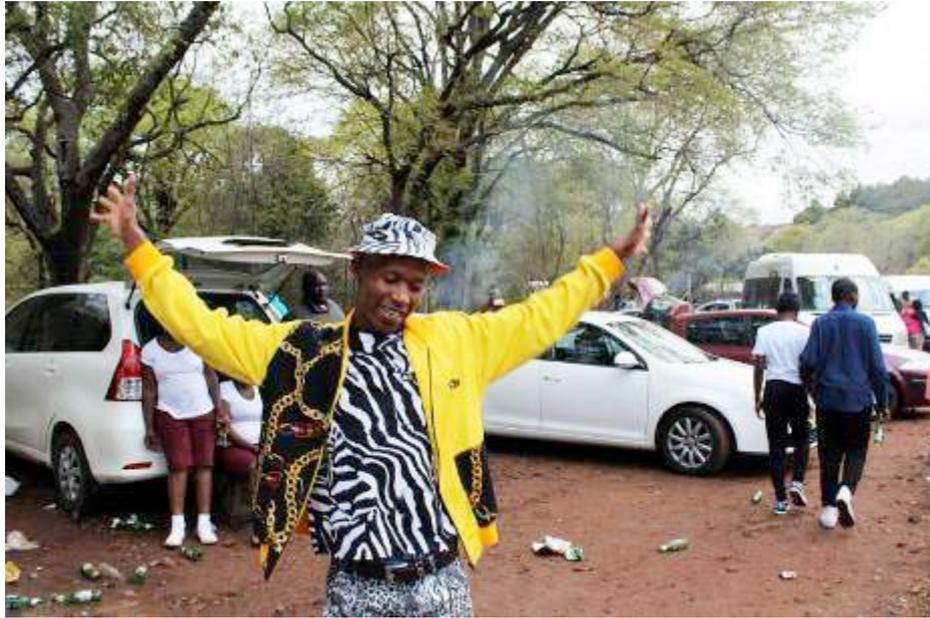


Figure 37. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *Free* (2014)



Figure 38. Blanda Ucongo, *Sapeurs Street cheered the fire* (2014)

S'kothane in Fig. 39: *Expensive footprints* are displaying their taste in expensive designer shoes by slightly raising their feet into the air. Some of them are wearing unpaired sets of expensive shoes showing a

collaboration of colour and style. The patterns on their trousers show a mixture of many colours, tiger prints and zebra prints (black and white) for attracting maximum attention. Raising one foot up to display the shoe is a sign of ensuring that this is the most expensive item worn with the days' outfit.



Figure 39. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *Expensive footprints* (2014)



Figure 40. Blanda Ucongo, *Sapeurs show his Versace footprint!* (2014)

Fig. 41: *Two tags for my legs* features a *S'kothane* who is wearing two pairs of trousers at the same time, both expensive Italian designer labels. This is usually done to give the impression that *Sapeurs* and *S'kothane* have the most expensive outfits. Fig. 42 depicts a participant in a public performance wearing four ties on a single shirt and a silver light scarf to add to the attire. These two figures are making a statement that they are

wearing these items because they can afford to and their unique sense of dressing style.



Figure 41. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *Two tags for my legs* (2014)



Figure 42. Blanda Ucongo, *Why bother to choose one tie?* (2014)

In Fig. 43: *I got none to give*, a young woman is holding an alcoholic drink during a performance. However, the photograph gives prominence to the crowd reaction to *S'kothane* performances instead of the women performers. While most of the crowd seem to be enjoying the performance and taking photographs or videos via their cell phones, others are expressionless. A young man among the spectators is showing the gesture of defiance to the performer, perhaps as an indication that he is not enjoying the performance which is in line with the carnival mode where anything goes.



Figure 43. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *I got none to give* (2014)

The relationship between fashion and dancing has played a crucial role in constructing *S'khothane* identity. Their mission in this respect is to create a dialogue between dancing and fashion, which gives the *S'khothane* cultural status in an artistic manner. Fig. 44: *The Show Stopper* (2014) shows the performance in which the Italian Gates *S'khothane* is performing to crowds of spectators both from the ground and from the moving stage on top of a vehicle. Dancing on top of a moving vehicle is a popular way to enter the venues and is used to draw crowds into *S'khothane* performances. The whole performance shows how the *S'khothane* transform, revive and introduce gestures of *uMswenko* while “*pimping*” the minibus, music, dance and the colour gold.



Figure 44. Nkosikhona Ngcobo, *The Show Stopper* (2014)

The first most obvious benefit of being *S'khothane* in the visuals discussed is the sense of pride, self-confidence and self-determination illustrated by the people in the photographs. Secondly, there is the sense of solidarity/belonging as they parade in teams. Thirdly, there is the benefit of competition and winning the battle. Fourthly, there is the performance, display, provocation and risk/fun. Fifth is the sense of self-belief gained through peer and audience approval.

4.5 CONCLUSION

Findings from the interviews with *S'khothane* and group leaders have not only confirmed that this subculture is being used as a source of emotional and psychological well-being, but that the creation of this subculture was a response to social challenges experienced by youth. *S'khothane* groups interviewed confirmed that their main intention in wearing expensive clothes is to get noticed and recognised for star dresser and “blessed beyond measure” (to quote one *S'khothane* leader). Against all odds and in difficult financial circumstances, a plan is made either by finding a job or organising events and charging for appearances as a form of raising funds for their lifestyle (as mentioned during personal interviews done with SSK

on 6th September 2014 and with IG on 11th October 2014). What is evident in all of the analysed selected artworks, including my own photographs and video, is that *S'khothane* is represented in, and influences on contemporary visual arts practices. This is significant as it suggests that *S'khothane* culture and the associated flamboyance and authenticity extends into and affects other forms of visual art practices. Various elements of *S'khothane* can be witnessed in all the artworks analysed. These include elements such as wearing expensive, colourful clothes, gold teeth and wearing shiny clothes and jewellery. As can be seen from the discussion of the various artworks selected for this study, there is a certain degree of manipulation in Chiurai's work without denigrating *S'khothane*. Nxedlana and Veleko, on the other hand, present the culture of *S'khothane* in contemporary visual arts as being close to reality. The artists above use the act of borrowing, called Cultural Appropriation, while retaining the meaning of *S'khothane* culture, its images or elements of fashion.

To truly understand societal defiance, one needs to understand the political, economic, and cultural living conditions of a particular subcultural group. The study reveals that cultural changes include the individual's or the society's beliefs and values. For example, *S'khothane* found an existing subculture with groups such as *Swenkas (Umswenko)*, *Sapeurs (La Sape)* and *Pantsula*, and modified, changed, brought new experiences and introduced new ideas to develop their own unique identity.

S'khothane is a youth subculture that expresses itself with expensive clothes and "custard art" while entertaining themselves and others with creatively orchestrated and sometimes dangerous dance moves, sounds and gestures. They manage to rise from the generalised statements, stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes, and perpetuate behaviours that may be detrimental but are not harmful or violent.

During my investigation, *S'khothane* indicated that they engage in their conduct in order to gain recognition, self-confidence, popularity, fame, self-

fulfilment and respect, amongst other benefits. Nxedlana (2012) suggests that *S'kothane* has all the characteristics of an art form and, with time, will find acceptance by the general public.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion and recommendations

The purpose of this chapter is to present the main contentions made in the chapters above, highlight any limitations this study has to be understood in light of, and make recommendations for further study, wherever necessary.

5.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

It should be noted that the data collection phase of this study relies heavily on group and personal interviews and, as this requires the researcher to rely solely on the respondent's memory, it could prove to be a limitation (Leedy and Ormrod 2001 as cited in Valcik 2013). However, this drawback is overcome by having multiple respondents with subject-matter knowledge as respondents and also by complementing group interviews with individual sessions.

I would also like to reiterate that this is a qualitative study which serves as representation of a social phenomenon; which may be it is subject to weaknesses that may be found in studies employing this kind of research approach. Chiefly, generalisation of the results and conclusions of a qualitative study is almost impossible (Rubin and Babbie 2009:230). This study concentrates on several groups of *S'khothane* who are based within the Gauteng Province. Within *S'khothane* groups that participate in this study alone, variations in practise and elements are observed, for instance, the Italian Gates crew do not utilise custard in their performances but only employ dance moves and their clothes whenever they engage in battles with their rivals. On the other hand, the *Sosha S'khotha Kings (SSK)* employ custard in performances but denounce the destruction of clothing and personal belongings. While these are noted as findings in the study, it is my belief that, due to fact that this research observes and interacts with only a select number of *S'khothane*, the results may not be entirely generalised as a representation of *S'khothane*

throughout the country.

It is worth noting that the research approach utilised by this study is suited for the task and that the results delivered could have not been delivered using any other method due to the fact that qualitative research is best situated for “studying subtle nuances in attitudes and behaviours, and for examining social processes over time” (Rubin and Babbie 2009:230).

5.2 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study primarily set out to determine the extent to which *S'khothane* is represented in, and influences the selected contemporary visual arts. Furthermore, to highlight any possible misconceptions in the way *S'khothane* is represented in contemporary visual arts practices. Several participants were selected at several *S'khothane* events that took place within Gauteng towards the close of 2014. In addition to these, a *S'khothane* “legend” (a title usually bestowed on retired *S'khothane* by supporters of *S'khothane* culture) in the form of Bongani Skhosana was approached to participate in this study (see Chapter 1).

The interest around *S'khothane* was generally perpetuated by mass media, sparking this as a stimulating subject matter which prompts thought beyond visual interpretation. The careful selection of key members of an active *S'khothane* crew together with a renowned former icon to profile this sub-culture in the study, assured its credibility. Before embarking on this journey, the following are some of the things I believed represented the essence of *S'khothane* (most of which were contested in this study):

- *S'khothane* were described as a bunch of kids engaging in a form of “bling obscenely gone mad” (Patta 2012).
- They trample on and destroy expensive clothes, food and alcohol (Patta 2012; Nkosi 2011; Capron 2013).
- *S'khothane* are young people from poor families and born to

working class parents (Mabandu 2012; Mathebula 2012 as cited in Bristowe 2013).

Findings from this study indicate that there are several misconceptions about this culture. For one, the study uncovered that not all *S'khothane* are from poor working-class homes as previously reported in various popular media. Furthermore, the assertion that *S'khothane* tear their clothes and burn banknotes is found not to be applicable to this study's respondents. However, it is worth noting that some other groups, of *S'khothane* not in this study are known to burn their clothes and bank notes. As demonstrated in the personal interview with Bongani Skhosana, *S'khothane* groups that engage in these destructive activities represent only a small number of supporters of this culture.

Most of *S'khothane* engage in informal business activities to support their indulgence in expensive clothing. In the case of the Sosha S'kotha Kings (SSK), the respondents reported that they fund their lifestyle from informal businesses they own – including a car wash business they operate in their community. On the other hand, the Italian Gates *S'khothane* of the Tembisa Township in Gauteng have attained celebrity status in their community due to their performances and, as such, club owners usually book them for appearances at their venues for a fee. The money collected from appearance fees, together with savings contributed by individual members over a period of time, are distributed equally on a chosen date to enable the crew members to buy expensive clothing, jewellery and alcohol, amongst others. The *S'khothane* desire for quality products and good life has served as a motivator for them to find ways to make money, which resulted in some venturing into entrepreneurship, as witnessed from the discussions in Chapter 4.

Various similarities between *S'khothane* and the *Swenkas*, *Pantsula*, and *La Sape* in the Republic of Congo were observed. Akin to the *Swenkas* (*Oswenka*) and the *Sapeurs* (*La Sape*) whose subcultures are predisposed with wearing the nicest and priciest of clothing items,

S'khothane wear clothes that reflect their elegance and expensive visual tastes. And like the *Pantsulas*, *S'khothane* incorporate choreographed dance moves into their performative battles. While some sources suggest this is a subculture created by youth, it is clear from the findings of this study that *S'khothane* is a culture appropriated from various other youth urban cultures (such as *Pantsula*) and early adulthood cultures (such as the *Swenkas* and *La Sape*). It is therefore, safe to say that this culture likely evolved from the likes of *Swenkas*, and *Pantsulas*, with a dash of influences from movements such as *La Sape*.

Having observed *S'khothane* crews and appreciated the elements that form part of their performances and culture, there is no doubt that the culture involves the performance of creatively orchestrated dance moves, sounds and gestures which are a result of skilfully and thoroughly thought-out choreographies that are accompanied by costumes meant to complement the flamboyance of the very performances. I am, therefore, inclined to agree with Nxedlana (2012) that *S'khothane* has all the characteristics of an art form and, with time, will find itself enjoying acceptance by the public.

In as far as the representation of *S'khothane* and its influences on contemporary visual arts practices are concerned, Chapter 4 shows there is a certain degree that the sub-culture is represented in the selected visual artworks of art by Jamal Nxedlana, Nontsikelelo Veleko and Kudzanai Chiurai. Elements of the culture, such as the wearing of colourful or shiny shirts and jackets have been accurately appropriated by Chiurai and Nxedlana in artworks such as *The Minister of Foreign Affairs* (Fig. 18), *Untitled I* (Fig. 19), and *The real S'khothane* (Fig. 16). Their fixation for bling in the form necklaces, watches, gold teeth (otherwise known as "grills") and sunglasses is also well represented in all of the selected artworks. This wide-ranging representation in contemporary visual artworks serves to attest that *S'khothane* has an influence on selected contemporary visual artists.

This study has not exhaustively explored *S'khothane* youth culture in depth but was able to discover variations in practise and principles among *S'khothane* supporters which resulted in subgroups that warrant further study. I believe that further study into this subculture will provide a better understanding of this phenomenon. Having identified that this culture qualifies to be classified as a form of art, this study also lays the foundation for future research that may enable this phenomenon to be developed into an art form from which more *S'khothane* crews can generate a living as *Pantsulas* did from the early 1980s.

The identified *S'khothane* subgroups which are proving to be dominant, and may thus evolve into dominant cultures independent of *S'khothane* culture, in the form of *AmaVenkel* and *Amatariana/Matariana* ought to be studied in order to assess their differences/variations in relation to *S'khothane* culture. Furthermore, it is recommended that comparative studies of *S'khothane* and these dominant subgroups be conducted in order to identify the extent to which their values and systems are embedded in *S'khothane* culture. Further studies can be conducted in order to:

- assess why the selected contemporary visual artists chose to use the *S'khothane* dominant elements such as gold, bright colours and Italian brands when they produced their artworks;
- determine how *S'khothane* visual display, dance moves and performance can be presented in a confined space such as a gallery space with a different audience; and
- determine ways in which *S'khothane* can be developed into a professional performative art because there are crews, such as the Italian Gates, that are already benefiting from it as a commercially viable art form.

My observations of the *S'khothane* show that they are negatively

portrayed by the television programmes and the print media. Group members do not always pour custard, burn money or tear their clothes when they perform. Sometimes their performances only consist of dance moves. In most cases, the media portray *S'khothane* in a negative light and, by doing that, they create the wrong impression of the group. The study finds that *S'khothane* culture is constructed by youth who have been influenced by other subculture groups. All they want to do is to perform and stand out from the crowd.

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APPENDIX A: DATA COLLECTIONS QUESTIONS

1. What factors or aspects influence or attribute to the definition or labelling of '*S'khothane*' or '*Izikhothane*'?

2. What defines you as *S'khothane*? or How do you define yourself as '*S'khothane*' or '*Izikhothane*'?

3. Does the art industry have an influence on the lifestyle or culture of *S'khothane*?

I. If yes, how?

II. If no, why?

4. Does the lifestyle or culture of *S'khothane* have an influence in the freedom of expression?

I. If yes, how?

II. If no, why?

5. How does the community perceive your lifestyle?

The analysis of the study will focus on:

- (a) The visual analysis of selected artworks by various artists (Kudzanai Chiurai, Jamal Nxedlana and Nontsikelelo Veleko).

Elements in the artwork that support the main contention in research.

- (b) Existing writing/research as a main tool to contextualise the analysis.
- (c) Primary research (interview and photo document) to formulate and conceptualise points to enable analysis to the given examples: visual language, pose and identity.

APPENDIX B: ETHICAL CLEARANCE

DEPARTMENT OF ART HISTORY, VISUAL ARTS AND MUSICOLOGY

✉ SUNNYSIDE CAMPUS, BLDG 12C, PO BOX 392, UNISA 0003 ☎ 27 12 429-6419 📠 +27 12 429-3556

03 December 2014

Reference number: 2014_AVME_STUDENT_0008

Proposed title: S'khothane: Representation in, and influence on, contemporary visual art practices.

Principal investigator: Nkosikhona Ngcobo 55794920

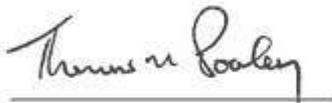
Approval status recommended by reviewers:

Dear Mr Nkosikhona Ngcobo

The Ethics Review Committee of the Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology at the University of South Africa has reviewed your proposal and considers the methodological, technical and ethical aspects of the proposal to be appropriate to the tasks proposed.

Ethical clearance has been granted on the understanding that the proposed research involves qualitative research, including interviews. Informed consent must be documented in all cases involving human participants, in accordance with the Unisa Research Ethics Policy. The Department wishes you success with the proposed study and eagerly awaits its outcomes.

Sincerely



Dr Thomas Pooley
Lecturer in Musicology
Chair: DRERC
Department of Art History, Visual Arts and Musicology
pooletm@unisa.ac.za
012-4296537

APPENDIX C: A DETAILED ELABORATION OF ITALIAN GATES NAMES

- Pastor prays for the group before they travel anywhere, including other *S'khothane*. Moreover, he is regarded as the king of the dance because, when he dances, he looks up to the heavens and everyone is blessed.
- Bill Gate is the man that would be found at the gates of Italy representing the Italian Gates. He receives a salary even though he is not working because he is the primary negotiator for the group.
- The Captain is the one who controls the ship, making sure that it does not sink in times of trouble; he distributes wisdom and knowledge and always fights for the group.
- Mesh is the naughty one in the group because he is a Facebook celebrity who enjoys talking about people and promoting the group.
- Jovies is the tallest guy in the group and the group's own Goliath, therefore, other groups will be scared of approaching them.
- King Helpa (taken from the English word help) is the guy with the big heart; he always provides assistance and will never leave anyone in a bad situation.
- Killa is always "killing" others with his million-dollar smile and attire because he is always surprising everybody with his new outfits.
- Vodka was named after Tsar Nicolas (the man after whom this brand of vodka was named). He used to provide the group with Vodka before each performance and he does not dance unless he has had a shot of Vodka.
- RM was named after Rossi Moda, master of all shoes, because he changes his shoes so regularly that one would believe he is a shoe manufacturer.
- Cooper is portable like a Mini Cooper car; he is a charmer and drives all the girls crazy.