

## Thando Mama (University of Fort Hare)

*Thando Mama graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts at Durban's Technikon Natal in 2001, and with the MFA Photography (with Distinction) from Rhodes University in 2017. I was part of 3rd Eye Vision, an art collective of visual artists, poets and musicians. I am currently affiliated with the University of Fort Hare, lecturing in Art History, Visual Arts Literacy and Studio Practice. As a practising artist I work in film and digital photography, in video art and installation, drawings, printmaking and digital prints. My subject matters have included Black masculinity and the marginality of African subjects amongst others. For the most part I use my own body as a subject in my videos while referencing popular media, popular culture such as hip-hop, racial stereotypes as well as films. Over the past five years, I have been engaging with national (South African) heritage memory markers, monuments and site of memory. Using my own personal narrative of place, heritage and connection to the land, I have been developing images and practice that uses the media of photography as conceptual and philosophical critic of materiality vs object, and photography as a devise memory interpretation. I am pursuing an art history and visual culture study based on ongoing research at the Ntaba kaNdoda Mountain/Monument in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. As an independent artist I have had a number of solo exhibitions and been in group exhibitions both here in South Africa and in International venues, including biennales, triennials and art fairs. I have also had some prestigious arts awards, and my work in South African public art gallery collections. For about five years between 2007-2011, I worked in heritage conservation environment at the Robben Island Museum in Cape Town.*

## Ntaba kaNdoda: a contested place

*Le ntaba kaNdoda yisikeleleni!  
Le ntaba kaNdoda yithamsanqeleni!  
Nditsho kini, zizwe zasemaXhoseni,  
Kwakuni, zintlanga zaseLuhlangeni.  
- S.E.K. Mqhayi*

There is a place in the Eastern Cape known as Ntaba KaNdoda located in the area called Debe Nek in Kieskammahoek, Eastern Cape. The former Ciskei government under Lennox L. W. Sebe commissioned *The National Monument of the Republic of Ciskei*, to be built at Ntaba kaNdoda, it was opened on 14 August 1981. Although the mountain has had a symbolic and spiritual meaning for the local people, Sebe placed a totalitarian architectural structure in the form of the commemorative monument. In Sebe's mind, Ntaba kaNdoda was to become a place where people came to idolise and worship him (Leroy Vail 1989; Janet Hodgson 1987).

The Monument is identified by its materiality as a built environment, and it is generally perceived to stand for the great Xhosa history and warrior spirit of the nation, a memory that is somehow intangible. In a way the monument is a visible manifestation of the memories of the communities of this region in South Africa. The construction of this memorial was meant to be a representation of the collective memories of the history and of the former Ciskei, yet it imposed at this place a new narrative - An apartheid 'nationhood' and self-governing.

Ever since the late 1980s and early 1990s, Ntaba kaNdoda Monument as a place of memory have been contestation. This is evident in how the public or rather the local communities reacted towards it, by vandalism, abandonment, or forgetting about this place's significance. In a way "...the feelings and emotions of the community of Ntaba kaNdoda, and perhaps those of the people of the former Ciskei, are shown in the destruction and desecration of the Monument" (Mama 2017: 23). To some extent, public memory supposedly validated by the erection of the Monument that was meant to signify Xhosa unity, in actuality erasing a place that had existed before (Hodgson 1987: 27).



*Thando Mama, Umhlahlo (2017)*