

Claiming, Breaking and Creating

A visual response to the experience of constructed social and spatial constraints

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Documentation and commentary on the body of practical work presented for the degree of Master of Fine Art at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, University of Cape Town.

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To my Lord and Saviour, You are Greatly to be praised!

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PREFACE

My personal experiences of patriarchal abusive behaviour have shaped and affected me. Two things in my formative schooling years marked the beginning of deep emotional disturbances in my life. Firstly, the vulnerability of being a female schoolgirl, constantly trapped in fear by threats of potentially abusive boys both within and without school premises. The 'old boys', as we would refer to them, instilled in me a negative attitude towards men that has affected me in later life. Secondly, my Sub A teacher who welcomed me with a 'klap' on my first day at school. This was followed by a long year of misery. I found myself going through a journey of broken emotions that resulted in years of aggressive behaviour, creating havoc in my family. This disturbing turbulence led me to seek internal liberation in order to analyse and deal with my emotional state. My health became affected by constant headaches and other stress related conditions.

In addition to these formative experiences is my experience as a fine art student at the University of Fort Hare. Like many other black people in South Africa, I entered the field of fine art at a tertiary level with no prior art training. My early work was informed by social concerns and focused thematically on the upbringing of children in a safe and conducive environment. This idea emanated from what I observed and perceived as the submissiveness and subordination of women in my neighbourhood, either as mothers or as girlfriends. The failure for women to stand up to their authoritative, abusive husbands has detrimental effects on children. One of the reasons being that children '... attempt to protect a mother who is being attacked by a male companion or a husband, or they are emotionally damaged by witnessing violence and abuse' (hooks 2000: 72).

Once I had obtained my undergraduate degree I enrolled at the University of Cape Town for an HDE (Higher Diploma in Education in pursuit of my career). That was a distressing experience. I constantly felt alienated from the tutorial group as I was the only black person in the art tutorial class. This was my first involvement with 'white establishment'. Language and culture, among other things, created a gap and a barrier between my classmates and myself and I discovered that this was the case with other black students also from Fort Hare. Unlike at Fort Hare, I could not easily approach lecturers at UCT to discuss problematic areas concerning my studies. At the time there was only one male black lecturer, who only came in for a section in the Psychology of Education course. Entering UCT felt for me like an act of trespass. I made up my mind that I would not allow myself to feel as if I was at UCT under protest. It is this approach that is the impetus for this dissertation.

Out of Now-here

She is a fire borne of the same flame
She bears the same name
As any other
Burning her way
Through the baggage and bars
Of convention
Of domination
Of expectation
She is a river borne of the same source
Running the same human course
As any other
Claiming her right
To turn the other way
Dancing to the sacred melody
Of healing
Of self-discovery
Finding her own groove
She moves through her curves
Her shapes
Her circles
She spirals in and out of the darkness
Her own poison of self-doubt
Even more corrosive in this environment
This seemingly endless season of drought
Black
Woman
Artist
Artist
Woman
Black
Which part of this pyramid
Puzzles
Silences
Intimidates you most
Sets her on a distant or opposite pole
Predetermines her potential
Her outcome
Her role
Blinding your vision
Depriving her of recognition
Who knows how ancient her calling may be
Driving her to express that spirit
Shed her skin
Directing the force and flow
Of her artistry
That spirit she fights to liberate
She refuses to deny
The one she reincarnates
On canvas
On paper
Makes vivid
With metal and wood
How is it that she is so seldom seen
Even in her home
So rarely accepted or understood

- by Malika Ndlovu
Written for the opening of the "Voicing the Abstract" exhibition, featuring three young Black South African women artists, Trish Lovemore, Thembeqa Qangule and Ernestine White and curated by Swedish Museology student Stina Edblo

INTRODUCTION

What does empowerment mean to us as black women of Africa and her diaspora? It means social recognition and dignity just as, most of all, it means space to speak, act, and live with joy and responsibility as it has always meant for our ever-so responsible foremothers wherever they were in history. Our work, writings and exhortations as women in various forms and media show that we want to end our silences and speak our truths as we know them. We wish to have power which positively promotes Life in all its forms; power to remove from our paths any thing, person or structure which threatens to limit our potential for full human growth as the other half of Life's gendered reality; power to collapse all screens which threaten to obscure our women's eyes from the beauties of the world.

- Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie (1994: foreword)

My aim and intention is to record and share those personal experiences that, to me, spell the erection of barriers. Inevitably, most of my experiences parallel those of a wider society and this paper focuses on issues affecting black women in social, political, and economical spheres of life, and discusses their contribution and efforts towards restructuring the nation. I employ this gesture as a way of highlighting the strengths of women and to mark their initiative ability in not succumbing to abusive male domination.

The focus in this dissertation, as well as the body of work, is on three areas: Firstly, I identify problematic areas pertaining to the plight of black women and draw parallels between personal and general experiences. Secondly, I comment on and discuss the present status of black women in South Africa, particularly in the urban context. Lastly, I discuss a strategy that portrays the will to transcend oppressive norms.

The paper is divided into two sections. Section one anchors the visual expressions of selected personal narratives to a theoretical context. Section two discusses the practical body of work.

The lack of representation of black women¹ in the art arena in South Africa particularly in the Western Cape area is my research premise. This has been an area of contemporary research that critics (Olu Oguibe (1997) and Marion Arnold (1996)), amongst others, have debated and exposed. I attempt to discuss issues that potentially impede my career progress such as social stereotypes, imbalance and lack of personal developmental strategies.

Chapter one discusses literal and metaphorical spaces, with the aim of identifying constructed barriers. It focuses on the space that is allocated to black people, particularly to black women,

¹ I use black men and or black women from time to time in this paper. South Africa has different race groups, black in this case refers to the indigenous people from Africa.

by society due to manipulative political and economical agendas. It deals primarily with issues of dominance that are evident in sexism. This discussion is built on sexism as theorised by bell hooks in *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Gender*. The strengths of women and the will to transgress the prevailing stereotypical norms are portrayed through the discussion of three black South African women artists namely Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa, Senzeni Marasela and Bongi Bengu. Emma Amos, an African American artist, is discussed for her works that portray a strong resistance to the fixation and misrepresentation of black women.

The limitation of space is also illustrated by the reduction of black artists' production to 'township art'. Consideration of the Bantu education system is included in this discussion, as it was the breeding ground for racial and gender imbalance in our society. The observations of David Koloane and Gill Cowan contribute to verifying the status and future of black people in art, particularly in formal art training.

Chapter two attempts to penetrate the deeply rooted patriarchy within the Xhosa cultural tradition. This approach cannot negate the effects of colonisation, Westernised education and the impact of economic deprivation. The manipulated Xhosa culture and traditions are discussed with the aim of highlighting the evolving oppression that is embedded in the selected traditional practices. This is sourced from oral testimonies as well as written sources.

It should be emphasised that this chapter does not attempt to scrutinise or interrogate Xhosa traditions themselves. I've sometimes wondered whether, in the promotion of some of the patriarchal traditions that unfairly discriminate against women, a political question should not in fact be asked – 'Who benefits from such traditions?', .

The selected cultural and traditional practices, whether manipulated by the system or not, portray strong patriarchal powers within the Xhosa society that oppress and marginalize its women. Stereotypical attitudes are challenged by writers such as Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, bell hooks and Amina Mama. With reference to their writings, this chapter aims at establishing a space for black women within the feminist discourse. It argues and problematises the issue of domination as a site and source of segregation and discrimination in our society.

The problem of domination presupposes the legacy of the oppressed. *Intonjane* (girl's initiation to adulthood) is a ritual practice which is discussed in this paper as empowering to women, as male initiation is to men. This customary practice questions the problem of women subordination within the black community.

Chapter three explores the healing process through forgiveness and the public sharing of personal narratives. It is premised on a personal strategy and follows a process that attempts to liberate. The memory of the Khulumani members concerning the forced removals in Cape Town in 1986 is discussed, focusing on the process of sharing the survivors' narratives. I then

discuss the process of forgetting as part of the healing process, and the discussion touches on the relationship of objects with memory.

Chapter four is a collection of the testimonies of three women from the Cape Town township environment. It aims at revealing various hindrances that black women encounter that affect their career lives.

SECTION 1
Theoretical background

CHAPTER 1

Access and trespass

There are various structures, systems and institutions that can offer a space for initiating and inheriting an attitude of growth in the society, particularly in the life of a woman as an artist. Equally, there are stereotypical social attitudes and perceptions that can negatively affect opportunities and career performance for black women.

The restrictions of the apartheid system had harmful consequences for all South Africans, particularly for black South Africans. Black artists were denied the opportunity to participate in the systems that govern the art world. They could not be gallery directors, curators, administrators, teachers or critics (Pucinelli 1999) and the denial of formal art training was used as a strategy of marginalisation. Unable to enter the mainstream, black artists were restricted by the limited definition of 'township artists'. The label was used to categorise black artists regardless of the nature of the works or the context of their production. Polly Street and Rorke's Drift, among others, are identified as some of the institutions that trained black artists who produce 'township art'. Pucinelli describes township art as being synonymous with resistance art, which depicts scenes of black people under the oppression of the apartheid system (ibid).

Omitting the financial deficiency within the black society in this case will be a serious oversight. From personal observation, the creative production of most artists from black settlement areas is driven by financial desperation. There is evidence of this observation throughout the tourist streets of Cape Town, where artworks present a persistent repetition of township or rural scenes. Due to limited resources, lack of exposure and lack of financial stability, most black artists that I come across (mostly men) seem to be controlled in their art production by tourist interest. Technically, these artists are also limited to cheap materials (lino for printmakers) and as a result certain media have become synonymous with the invented notion of the 'township artist'.

The production of black artists within the acceptable stereotype impedes black artists' exploration and development. In the catalogue of the exhibition entitled *Claiming Art / Reclaiming Space*, at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art (Washington: 2000) Puccinelli, the curator, traces the prevailing plight of black people in the 'interim South Africa'. I concur with Pucinelli's encouragement of all artists, black and white, male and female, to interact towards counteracting the persistent categorisation. She investigates the detrimental

effects of the past oppressive government system on black people. The artist David Koloane² verifies Pucinelli's claims, stating:

'Apartheid was a politics of space more than anything...much of the apartheid legislation was denying people the right to move. It's all about space, restricting space... Claiming art is also reclaiming space. (Koloane in Pucinelli 1999: 71)

Lydia Pucinelli mentions that black artists who conform to the expectations of 'township art' contribute to the representation of black artists' work as the 'other'. The term 'township art' is a marginalizing term that is less accommodative of underlying factors such as lack of formal training, economical and political factors.

Pucinelli recognises that the issue of space is a concern that affects all artists. However, in South Africa the denial of space is further complicated by a socio political economy that results in marginalisation and oppression. The effect on black women is twice as heavy. That being the prevailing scenario, Bongzi Dhlomo-Mautloa observes the gender imbalance and challenges the attitude of women who submit to patriarchal authority:

'In my own outreach work I've found that community art groups are still dominated by men. The women tend to sit together and do nothing during discussions. When I ask why, they say "the boys laugh at us when we talk" sometimes women don't even join such groups because their husbands tell them their work isn't art.' (Dhlomo-Mautloa 2001: 136)

As far as formal training is concerned in various career fields, particularly in the art field, the past education system has had devastating effects on black people. The Bantu Education Act of 1956 was a major source of disempowerment. Black people were denied the freedom to choose the type of education they wanted, and could not attain tertiary level education. Students who were interested in enrolling for art in a tertiary level institution had to get permission from the government (Koloane 1998).

Where disempowerment has had devastating economical consequences, education remains the primary source of empowerment. The following personal testimony comments on the latter in relation to formal skills development, highlighting the seemingly perpetual imbalance across sex, race and class lines.

I encountered this imbalance when I entered the field of fine art at a tertiary level as an undergraduate student at the University Fort Hare. As it is presently the case, art was not

² David Koloane is a painter, writer and curator, from Johannesburg, South Africa. He was a co-founder of the Thupelo workshop programme developed in South Africa. He also co-founded the Fordsborg Artists Studios in Johannesburg, popularly known as 'The Bag Factory'.

offered at High school level³. I experienced persistent negative comments from inside and outside the campus, which spelled a lack of recognition and respect for the course, and particularly for me as a female art student. The gender ratio within the department was two women out of ten first year students. The same imbalance is presently evident at the University of Cape Town (Michaelis School of Fine Art). From the year 2000 when I joined the School of Fine Art, I have been the only black woman Masters student born, raised and trained in South Africa. To this, Koloane (1998) states that the lack of black people in formal art training institutions and the location of art infrastructure, such as art galleries, museums and monuments, in white areas contributes to the lack of creative stimulation in black environments. Consequently, what is seen as 'aesthetic indulgence' is secondary in black areas to interests that are socially, economically, as well as politically related. I spoke to Gill Cowen who concurs with David Koloane with regards to the perception of art in black communities. As reflected in appendix 1 page of this document, Cowen states, ' [Art is] probably being phased out - no teachers, not much commitment and no support from school management for art subjects at SC [Senior Certificate] level despite (fully equipped art rooms now trashed or appropriated for technology). At Intshukumo, the Amy Beale Fund's murals and art development programme was never completed because all the paint and brushes were stolen. Also, the teacher never received any funding for art from the school management committee - it all went on basketballs which were considered more important!' Cowen works in the WCED [Western Cape Department of Education] Directorate involved with Curriculum Planning. She was a curriculum adviser and worked with black schools in Langa, Cross Roads and Gugulethu.

I have observed that in black schools there is an imbalance in the male and female ratio, with male students being of a larger number than female students. There are various other factors that lead to such an imbalance besides the education related argument by Cowen and Koloane. Dhlomo-Mautloa's observation touches on an area that is partly a focus of this paper, that of women conforming to a submissive stereotype. This attitude perpetuates an inequality that is evident in the art world and in other spheres of society in terms of gender representation. From personal observation I have discovered that some women are prevented by their male partners from becoming involved in social activities such as women's gatherings, church gatherings, etcetera, and they are thus confined to serving the interests of their partners. There is a social belief amongst some black women that a woman who challenges the authority of her husband is an undisciplined woman.

³ There are presently two black high schools in Cape Town together with a Technical College (presently known as College of Cape Town) situated in Gugulethu, which offer art as a formal subject; Intshukumo Secondary School situated in Gugulethu, Isilimela Secondary School.

South Africa is, in part, influenced by Western civilisation which is built on the culture of difference such as, '...the domination of wealth over the poor, masculine over feminine, western over non-western cultures' (Koloane 1998: 70). Koloane further comments that, while the latter (western over non-western cultures) is the determining order, the market, which comprises among others, viewers, critics and collectors, expects black artists not to adopt Western influence in their work.

Interpretation of space

The space that I refer to has a literal, physical dimension as well as a metaphorical one. I find in my experience that it is necessary to make creative strategies towards a space for work. bell hooks, refers to this space as time, a moment of solitude and reverie. hooks recognises the vitality of an uninterrupted moment of contemplation, which is a breeding ground for creativity. She affirms that:

This solitary space is sometimes a place where dreams and visions enter and sometimes a place where nothing happens. Yet it is as necessary to active work as water is to growing things. It is this stillness, this quietude, needed for the continued nurturance of any devotion to artistic practice – to one's work – that remains a space women (irrespective of race, class, nationality, etc) struggle to find in our lives.'
(hooks 1995: 126)

She further notes that this pleasure is often interrupted and denied by the realities of everyday life, and the time of quietude becomes a forbidden space. Undisturbed, this is a space where creative thoughts are gathered and the capacity for creativity is strengthened.

The 'interrupted moment,' that hooks refers to, is the focus of this discussion which is premised from personal memory and from the observation of personal female friends and general social circumstances. There was a moment in my own life when I demonstrated lack of initiative. I felt controlled by a boyfriend whose interests took precedence over my own and this resulted in constant 'interrupted moments'. The issue of dependency in the life of a black woman is our legacy and cannot be overlooked. With regard to this particular case, hooks reflects that women are threatened by fear of being companionless and as a result, women artists tightly schedule their time to accommodate loved ones within their art practice. On the other hand, she observes that men who have achieved respected status as being 'great' artists have, across race, class and nationality, always been supported and understood by their companions. These men could enjoy undisturbed moments of contemplation (hooks 1995). There is a confessed myth among some black women that 'men don't want to be questioned - if you question them they leave.' Gabriella Madrassi examines the social stereotype that jeopardises women's position in society and traces hooks' accusations regarding the submissive attitude of women towards men, problematising the general perception of 'female biology [as] handicap' (Madrassi 1998: 67). She asserts that this

perception has chained women (perceived as weak) to men (perceived as strong) and is further perpetuated by socio-economic, educational and traditional factors in wider society.

The lack of representation of black women in the art arena supports my concern that space is not equally accessed. Societal values can shape certain career choices through endorsement or rejection. Therefore, I investigate the lack of involvement or participation of black women artists in the visual arts arena in South Africa, particularly in the Western Cape area, focusing on the issue of space. In this context space is rendered or occupied. One is either enjoying the privilege of space or it is denied, and the process of creativity is enhanced or restricted by this privilege. A studio is used as a literal interpretation of space in this discussion as setting up a studio is a preparatory process towards creative practice. Besides the financial constraints and social factors that affected my studies, the size of the studio that I occupied as a fine art student between the year 2000 and 2001, as well as the social structure at the Michaelis School of Fine Art, triggered the approach and focus in the production of my body of work. The space was small and thus not conducive to creative practice and the constant moving and shifting of furniture to accommodate new production, was not only time consuming but emotionally destabilising. The 'moving of furniture' is as literal as it is a metaphorical gesture and involves removal of obstacles towards restructuring. These obstacles are in this case seen as social, economical and politically related circumstances. I also found it imperative to identify with 'my studio space' as a secondary home. As the physical structure and environment were alienating factors, I found it necessary, as a survival strategy rather than as an act of contentment, to personalise the space and extend its identity through music, organisation, smell, etc.

The denial of space enforced by the past education system is particularly evident in the field of visual art. Black women in particular were marginalized. Marion Arnold argues that, despite the assumption that women made a significant (and perhaps unrewarded) contribution to art, where they were seen to play a role, it was by white women. There were controlling conditions which sought to outcast those women that did not 'master the rules of defining art' (Arnold 1996: 1). bell hooks shares the same sentiments, the perception regarding black people was that they lacked 'finer sensibilities that were the breeding ground for art.' She further attests to lack of representation of black people in art stating, 'Whatever African Americans created in music, dance, poetry, painting, etc., it was regarded as testimony, bearing witness, challenging racist thinking which suggested that black folks were not quite fully human, uncivilised, and that the measure of this was our collective failure to create 'great' art' (1996: xiii). Arnold states that in the West, men alone constructed the conditions that defined the professional level in art (Arnold 1996). In South Africa women's involvement was subject to men. Women were not encouraged to take leading positions or to be involved in decision making in the art arena, particularly black women. This is evident in the representation of black women as gallery owners, curators etc. Arnold asserts that the position of women in society and in the art world is dictated by male perception of male -

female relationship and meaning. In South Africa the published art production by black women is nearly non-existent. In the case of art writers, the complete absence of black women is pardoned only by Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa. African critical writers such as David Koloane, Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor redefine the meaning of African art and reposition black artists. International publications such as NKA are aimed at developing African writing and content. Olu Oguibe, Okwui Enwezor and Salah Hassan have been instrumental in drawing attention to the African Diaspora through this publication.⁴

As a black woman, in the act of creating a workspace and making time for creative process, I am constantly reminded of the barriers. The socio-political perceptions or rather stereotypical ideas regarding black women in South Africa, particularly in the Western Cape, reinforce the entrenched inequalities in our society. The historically persistent expectations of me as a woman and as a black person still confront and insult me and my identity and character are reshaped by these perceptions. The struggle is to retain that character and identity which allows the manifestation of creative ability and the possibility of mental stability and relaxation. This is my everyday goal. The expectations and parameters drawn by other people, irrespective of race, gender or class, are potentially restrictive and disowning. Negative stereotypes about black people include the traits of untrustworthiness and ill-manneredness. These arguments and accusations are primarily based on personal encounters. Among others are, a black person is expected to live in the township⁵; black women are objects of sexual harassment; women should submit to male domination (this attitude is self-perpetuated). Tracing the attitude of women succumbing to abusive male domination Ogunidipe-Leslie states that, 'Women are shackled by their own self negative image, by centuries of interiorisation of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy' (Ogunidipe-Leslie 1994: 36).

Domestic executives

Among the myriad of gender related terrains that are revisited in South Africa and outside, is the issue of motherhood in black society. The analysis of black motherhood has, until the emergence of Black feminism in the 1970s, been a subject dealt with from a male point of view. Mothers were seen as, amongst other things, failing to raise their children in a manner that empowered them. These accusations overlook the barriers that black mothers are confronted with, both married and single. These are hardships such as single parenting with no support system, which is in most cases rooted in economical deficiency, political discriminatory laws and social marginalizing perceptions. Feminist thought did not properly come to the rescue of mothers in these accusations since it was more reflective of a white

⁴ www.nka.cornell.edu

⁵ Among many encounters, I was accused of being a confused high minded social misfit by a man - a black man - whom I met in Claremont, Cape Town in 1997. I was living in Rondebosch in the southern suburbs of Cape Town at the time, and this was the issue that triggered the insults.

middle class society. (Collins 2000; hooks 2000). There are critical analysis, discussions and awareness programmes in place concerning the plight and strengths of women. These are forums that reinstate black women into the social and political arena discussing issues related to political women structures, women involved in politics in relation to feminism, gender marginalisation, violence against women, restrictions in career paths and more.

The issue of mothers as domestic workers, their contribution within the home and thus to the larger society is of concern to this dissertation. It is an important terrain as it bears significance for the persistence of black social class outcomes and the deficiency of black economic status. This section deals with the social perception of women as mothers and their social experiences, and commences with a discussion of domesticity and the image attached to women as mothers. The premise of this discussion is the personal observation of many black homes that are mothered and some headed by domestic servants. The aim is to highlight some problematic encounters that these women are confronted with which have a negative effect on them and their children. Equally, this aims to pay reverence to these women for their positive contribution such as educating their children and to acknowledge their courage when facing adversity.

Discussing the image of these women, Patricia Hill Collins argues against stereotypical images that continue to oppress and outcast women as the other. She problematises the elite authoritative power that continues to regard oppressive forms of social injustice as natural and inevitable (Collins 2000). Out of the imagery that is feeding social injustice is the image of motherhood as domestic and she speaks of the 'mammy' image expressing that of a 'submissive domestic slave' (2000: 72). Here women's behaviour, worth and recognition is measured by her nurturing skills, especially of somebody else's children. The image of the mammy is the ideal image for white patriarchal power as it demonstrates subordination as an obedient servant, regardless of the relationship that she might have established with her white employers (Collins 2000). As black women are characterised by the mammy image in white families, they are simultaneously symbolised as matriarchs in black societies. Both these stereotypes marginalise women and affirm the concept of women as the other. The mammy role requires a woman to spend long hours without her children and husband. Matriarch is the role played by mothers that are perceived to fail in their roles as mothers and are imaged as 'bad black mothers' (Ibid: 75). Matriarchy or female-dominated has a conceptual perception of someone ruling the family. Matriarch is a problematic term that has controlling connotations. In the South African context the plight of these women is enshrined in economic exploitation. Many white families historically used black maids as a source of cheap labour and some black families are not exempted from this accusation of exploitation. For an example, even though there is a new basic wage and UIF for domestic workers, many employers threaten to disengage their employees if they demand salary increases. The high rate of unemployment in South Africa enables these exploitative measures. Women have endured acute hardships

as domestic workers, including abuse from employers, and sacrificed family relationships. They have worked in conditions that challenge their human dignity.

A domestic worker Matimba shares her experiences saying,

'It is hard. We are not like the factory worker. It seems madams don't always think we are humans. We work long hours. We don't get proper food or bus money. R100 or R200 if you are lucky. Every month, for many hours work. No overtime. No holidays. No sick. We have to clean big homes. Sometimes 10 rooms or more. And where do we sleep? In the garage or in the backyard. Cold wet little cells. Not enough air, light, electricity. Ow skala madams.'

(Rape crisis document 2001)

Johanna shares how she manages to survive the abuse.

'One day after my off, the char told me that the madam was hitting her. I went upstairs to clean and then madam calls me. When I come down, I want to know what's going on. The madam said "This rubbish here can't do anything, can't cook." And as this girl open the oven, this woman give her a pah, a good smack and this girl just run outside and cry. I asked her, why are you crying. She said because she hit me. She has long red nails like birds claws. Me, I hit her back. I never hear that story again.'

(Rape crisis document 2001)

Growing up, 'girl' was a term used for domestic servants irrespective of her age. This patronising term was gradually acknowledged as disrespectful and was replaced by 'helping auntie'. The first term introduced 'helpers' as slaves as opposed to the latter term that promotes the attitude of working together. Such women truly experience triple oppression – race, gender and class oppression.

The political and socio-economic context obscures the strength and will of women particularly of black women. Domestication of women as well the perception that is attached to that role limits their desires and is restrictive of their progress. Mothers can play multiple roles pursuing leadership. I discuss one of the roles that women play as mothers, in politics. Contrary to the limiting perception that shapes their image, women have, through years of struggle, earned recognition and space in the patriarchal liberation struggle. As mothers they have transcended the barriers that domesticate them.

Black women have made a significant contribution to the overthrow of apartheid in South Africa. Julia Wells contributes in explaining this notion, highlighting the success of women struggles. She lists key achievements as: 'The maintenance of the ANC Women's League through all the long years of exile, a series of special conferences on women and women's rights, the inclusion of mandatory female delegates at the constitutional negotiations, the campaign for the women's charter to be included as part of the new constitution and the

ANC's commitment to a 30% quota of women in its electoral lists...' (Wells 1998: 260). Gertrude Fester echoes Wells as she observes that 'South Africa has the largest number of women in government outside of the Scandinavian countries, the speaker and Deputy Speaker of the National Parliament are women, the Commission for Gender, independent from government, has been set up with far reaching powers, affirmative action legislation has been passed and the office on the status of women has been established in the deputy president's office' (Fester 1998:1).

Representation of the black female body in art

'The overlap between patriarchal, economic and racial oppression has always been difficult to negotiate, and the political priorities of First and Third World women have persisted to the present' (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2000: 103). Feminism has sought to unite the notion of the colonised with that of gender difference. In the analyses of colonial oppression feminist critics argue that racial and gender discrimination of women have to be taken into account as colonialism operated differently between men and women (ibid). Evidenced in the exhibition of Sara Baartman, as discussed further in this section, is the constructed black female body.

In art, the representation of black women touches on issues of difference, amongst others, along racial and gender lines. South Africa is in the process of restructuring a nation into that which is non-racial and non-sexist. The dismissal of the past oppressive and discriminatory system sought to be triumphal through the fraught idea of 'Rainbow Nation'. Idealistically this vision flags an attitude of 'oneness,' however, it continues to draw attention to colour as a prevailing marker for meaning. The issue of blackness and whiteness are ideologically rooted differences. 'Whiteness [is] a resource out of which the trope of the nation, nationality and citizenship is constructed, and everything else that is prior is negated, defaced marginalized, colonised' (Enwezor 1997:20).

Division is also founded on the supposed binary opposition of 'strong' dominating the 'weak', 'rich' over the 'poor' and the question of patriarchy cannot be excluded from this ideology. 'It is a fantasy that, similar to racism, feeds on differences in the perceived appearances' (Piper 1996: 177). How the other is invented is evident in the exhibition of Sara Baartman's body. Sara Baartman, the so-called Hottentot Venus, was a Khoisan woman born in the Eastern Cape of today. Her physique was perceived different to the 'ordinary' and she was consequently exhibited throughout Britain and France (Abrahams 1998). After her death in 1814, her body was physiologically dissected by Baron Cuvier and Henri de Blainville. The representation of Sara Baartman's body was reduced to genital organs and brain, which were displayed in the Musee de l'Homme in Paris as recently as 1985. Her body was kept compromised in Europe as a symbolic spectacle of humiliation until its return in 2001.

The racial assumptions that transformed her into a representation of savage sexuality and racial inferiority are pertinent for many contemporary African women. A recent *Special*

Assignment television documentary, which investigated the trafficking of young black women from Zimbabwe into South Africa, verifies how women continue to be exploited as objects of sexual subjugation.⁶ Collins traces this objectification of women back to the time of slavery, when women were 'used as sex objects for the pleasure of white men' (1992: 263). She traces sexual stereotyping in pornographic scenes: black men are portrayed as being unselective in their sexual involvement, white men are perceived as upholding honour but show traces of sexuality and violence, and black and white women become victims (Collins 1992). Yvette Abrahams suggests that there might have been less interest in black women's sexuality before Sara Baartman was exhibited. 'The credulous came to gape, and having gaped, could return home in wonder of the oddities of the 'other', thus reaffirming the enduring normality of their own world' (Abrahams 1998: 225). The show further established the distance between the coloniser and the colonised 'other'. The association between black people and animals was reinforced through African freak exhibits that presented black people as animals. This becomes a crucial concept of 'othering'. Sara Baartman did not only become an object of sexual fantasy, but the '...sexual objectification became inseparable from the public representations of her' (1998: 226). Her modelling of sexual fantasy is shown in the nakedness of her figure.

The constructed ideology of 'whiteness', associated with power and superiority, assumes propriety to 'speak for' and 'act for'. One of the struggles against apartheid has been against this dictatorship. In the post-apartheid dispensation one of the challenges has been that of unifying the nation, resurrecting it from the traumatic experiences of the past and building a new identity based on a sense of worth. In an essay that sparked much debate in the mid-1990s, Okwui Enwezor problematised a number of artists' work for their appropriation of the black body. These were the *Ghost Series* and *Rainbow Series* by Candice Breitz, *Useful Objects* by Kaolin Thompson and *Zulu postcard* by Minnette Vari. The *Zulu post card* is a photograph of five Zulu women in their traditional wear. Photographed in a thatched domed hut, they are posed smiling - probably for the camera - in seated positions with two women standing on the left hand side behind the seated ones. It represents a black woman at a point of her vulnerability. It seems that this work freezes the past in the present in that it operates in the apartheid era when black people had no voice or the language to speak for themselves. Vari could be genuine in her intention, however it portrays a sense of 'doing it for' instead of allowing or creating a space for black women (in this case) to speak. In one way the interest of empowering someone else is evidenced in the progress that the 'victim' shows. Enwezor problematises the use of African culture as a source of entertainment.

The discourse of power in this context gains its strength in the concept of stereotype. Colonial discourse is built on this strategy. The construction and the controlling of the 'other' is based

⁶ Special assignment 2 Wednesday April 2003 SABC 2

on a stereotypical mindset that tends to identify the other and fix her into a place known and accepted to be her restricted area. These works 'neither empowers the black women they figure, nor do they empathise with them. Instead it is works like these that 'objectifies [black women] and cannibalises them' (Oguibe in Atkinson & Breitz 1998: 22). Using the words of Trinh T. Minh-Ha, to some people difference does not simply mean difference but means awkwardness or incompleteness (Minh-Ha 1995). The consciousness of othering draws feminism into the post-colonial discourse for two reasons. One being that both patriarchy and imperialism have in the same way dominated those they consider subordinate and secondly, the question of saliency in women of colonised societies between gender and colonial oppression emerges as a pivotal issue (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 2000).

How does a black woman image herself or control her representation? Candice Breitz makes a commentary on Rainbow Nation, an idea initiated by the former South African President, Nelson Mandela. Breitz extracts images of white women from pornographic magazines and collages them with ethnographic images of black women. What transpires out of these images is the menial portrayal of the woman's body in that she conflates the discriminatory strategy of pornography with ethnography. It is therefore undeniable that black women are still at the bottom of a hierarchical social structure. The gap that keeps black and white women apart is the fundamental point of investigation for the sake of racial stability. The recognition of the need to focus on empowering and educating white women regarding a strategy towards unity with black women as well as black women with white women is vital and urgent. One would be interested in finding the envisaged audience of Breitz work. The fixed ideological meaning of blackness and whiteness need to be deconstructed. In the interim South African transitional process, proper reconciliation strategies need to be implemented in all spheres of society.

The visual representation of the black body reinforces an extension of the imperialism of the whiteness ideology. The idea of inclusiveness as claimed by artists who use the black body in their work tends to be a conscious or an unconscious strategy for more barrier erection.

Voices of resistance

The following artists who are discussed create a cultural context where their works can be recognised and appreciated. They create an arena where they articulate their response to stereotypical boundaries and confront issues that threaten their existence.

Among the international artists, my focus is firstly on Emma Amos, an African American artist, who voiced strong objection to the marginalisation of black women. Secondly, I discuss a group of artists known as The Guerilla Girls. Other African American artists who challenge issues of race and identity are Lorna Simpson, and Adrian Piper and Sonia Boyce.

Born in Atlanta in 1938, Emma Amos is an African American woman artist who has gained formal training and qualifications in art. bell hooks introduces Amos as one who has an unshakable understanding of issues of womanhood being personified in the culture of domination and powerlessness. Amos made a commitment to art in the 1950s. She attended the Central School of Art in London, from there she went to New York City where she was inspired by the issue of a segregated black culture. She came from a background where art and intellectual black work was respected and valued, and she was familiar with other artists and writers. When she left that secure space to join the art in the mainstream, she was confronted with barriers. Amos states that 'Changing the Subject scrutinizes of what has heretofore been "acceptable" matter for African American artists, by calling attention to problems of self-censorship and the compartmentalisation of artists by race and gender' (1994: 3). Amos demonstrates a rebellious stature against the politics of difference and pursues an act of border crossing. She reveals the narrow definition of "black art" as that which has to include black images that are seen as exciting, noteworthy and sexually charged to the white male artists. She produces works that celebrate the freedom of black artists, whose subject matter, like white male artists, is limitless. She interrogates the stereotypical portrayal of black imagery by placing her own image in her works. Amos announces herself as emerging from the shadows to occupy the space of power that has been occupied by white male artists. She challenges 'the use of blackness as the space where whiteness can be redefined' (hooks 1994:6). In her works *X flag*, *Malcolm X*, *Morley*, *Matisse and Me*, Amos comments on the acceptance of the use of the black body by the white artists and the rejection of black art works by black artists that depict white images. In these works Amos links her work with the resistance of white supremacy, personified by the political activist Malcolm X, whose image appears in her *X flag*.⁷ Commenting on Amos' works, bell hooks states that the rejection of domination does not aim at substituting white power with black power, instead the aim is to allow 'different liberatory visions to emerge' (1994: 10).

A group of artists from New York called the Guerilla Girls protest against the lack of representation of women in the art arena. They are a feminist group whose focus is on issues of race and gender. These artists make their voice heard through posters plastered all around the city, on wall construction sites, kiosk fences etc. and their posters form part of the public and private art collection. They focus on all issues that prejudice women. This mysterious group appear in baggy tops, trainers and leggings with hairy guerrilla masks and use names of dead women artists and are thus unrecognisable and untraceable. They told *Personality* magazine, 'We are anonymous because we want the issue we support to take centre stage, not us as individuals.' (Tahir S. 1995: 44). They question the exclusion of women from major gallery collections, especially after contributing significantly in the experimental art of the 70s

⁷ 1993 acrylic painting, African fabric, confederate flag, laser photo transfer. 58" x 40."

and 80s, targeting the most respected art showcases such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Guggenheim and the Whitney. Their demolitions are aimed at 'deriding the brotherhood of male gallery owners and the dealers who are in control.' (Ibid: 45). One of the Guerrilla Girls by the name of Alice revealed 'Most of the Gallery owners, dealers and art critics are white and male. It's obvious that if you're a white male you see things a certain way. So your vision is going to be limited. We are not talking about eliminating men from the art world altogether, we're advocating an opening up of the field to let other sensibilities as well. That's what the battle's all about' (ibid). Public writings include:

*The advantages of being a woman artist: working without any pressure of success
/Having an escape from the art world in your freelance job / Knowing your career
might pick up after you're 80.*

*'GUERRILLA GIRLS' DEFINITION OF A HYPOCRATE. (hip'o-crit) An art collector who
buys white male art at benefits for liberal causes, but never buys art by women or
artists of color.*

In a South African context, as with the discussed African American artists, South African black women artists through their art production engage issues that threaten their growth as black people and as women. These women have demonstrated and struggled against the fixed perception of black people, particularly women. Gladys Mgudlandlu was recognised in the 1960s as the first South African black woman artist (Arnold 1996: 13).⁸ Marion Arnold expresses the will that Mgudlandlu portrayed entering the field of art at that particular time and that 'Mgudlandlu fought the system in 1960 and made her mark.' (1996: 14). This heroine was confronted with an art world governed by men and where exhibition procedures and art criticism were embedded in a Western conceptual framework. Mgudlandlu struggled against the fixation of black women and changing general perceptions by asserting herself an artist when there were no known black artists at the time.

Women of African descent as well as women from South Africa have made their mark contributing towards the representation of black women in the art arena, responding to political issues that affect black women as artists in the art world. These artists have struggled against the many barriers that exist, and provide both hope and models for me.

Current South African artists such as Bongi Dhlomo–Mautloa, Senzeni Marasela and Bongi Bengu amongst others are black South African artists who have portrayed heroic stance in contributing to the recognition of the marginalized black woman.

⁸ Mgudlandlu came from a Ciskei missionary family, had gained a teaching diploma and was a trained nurse. She was largely self taught as an artist but, like many black children, she had played with clay forms and designed designs for murals for huts. Her paintings are characterised by simplified forms and colour executed from memory and imagination.

Bongi Dhlomo-Mautloa⁹ narrates her background as an artist, a woman, a wife and a mother, roles which most black women can identify with. Her biography attests to the system and structure within the art arena, which continues to marginalize black women. She was confronted with racial and sexual domination within the field as the Rorke's Drift art centre was dominated by men and was run by white men. In an interview with Brenda Atkinson, Dhlomo-Mautloa describes how she was forced by circumstances to become an artist. She has made a remarkable contribution in the development of art in South Africa. As an artist and educator, she was involved throughout the 1980s in setting up and participating in a number of art projects. On arrival in Johannesburg and joining the Rorke's Drift Art Centre, June 16 had just swayed the focus of society. 'There was this siege [which Johannesburg artists] had come out of and they were taking it out onto canvas, lino, wood, clay, etc.' (Atkinson and Breitz 1998:119) Dhlomo-Mautloa defies the term 'black woman artist' in that it continues to dismiss women as the 'other' and she claims the single term 'artist'. She problematises the fact that there are few black women role models in art and that because of their submissive attitude, women sometimes allow their works to be defined outside of art. She calls for more recognition and encouragement of black artists. Some of the best works of these artists are not appreciated in South Africa and so artists leave the country to present their best talent overseas. She traces the lack of representation of artists in South Africa from the long history of isolation of black artists to the international developing art world.

A young South African artist, Senzeni Marasela has made a remarkable contribution in the visual arts in South Africa. Marasela is a black woman, an artist and a mother. Her work focuses on the atrocities of the past. Born in Boksburg, she completed her Bachelor of Fine Art and masters degrees at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. During her residency at the South African National Gallery in June 2000 she produced her *Craddock Four* mixed media works. The four, Mathew Goniwe, Sparrow Mkhonto, Fort Calata and Sicele Mhlawuli, were anti-apartheid activists who were constantly harassed by the Security Branch and ultimately murdered. Marasela's works are a repetition of the Craddock Four image of black and white photographs on a calico tablecloth and form part of a bigger dinner table setting installation. Marasela's installation bridges the gap between the public (political narrative) and the private (family meal). The 1980s events are being evoked for awareness by the younger generations, and also for reconciling the differences in our country towards the new future (Bester 2001). Marasela grew up in a home where she was protected from this information and its persistent events. She brings ...'a sense of intimacy to what are often impersonal political narratives' (Bester 2000: 11). She does this by carefully sewing around the edges of the tablecloth incorporating beads and ribbons.

⁹ Bongi Dhlomo -Mautloa has lectured widely on South African art in South Africa, Sweden, Germany, USA, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin Republic, Namibia and Botswana. As a practicing artist, she has exhibited in Botswana, Germany, England Sweden and South Africa. Her work is in many public and private collections.

Marasela deals with the concept of archive in the *Cradock Four* works as well as earlier works entitled *Stompie Seipei (untitled, 1998)*, *Dirk Coetzee and Alfred Nofemela (untitled, 1998)*, and memories of her Mother (*Our Mother, 1998*). She draws a connection between private and public archives. Bester relates this to the process of the Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa, where private narratives of the past were brought to the public arena. In the private and public realm an amount of the presence and absence of memory is displayed. The sharing of the personal stories in the public space of the TRC was a way of filling the missing gaps in the archive of the private memory. In her *Our Mother* she constructs a mixed media piece using her mother's own dress and reflects on the memory gaps in her personal life due to the absence of her mother while she was growing up. The work is an archive of absences and the process of filling the gaps is cathartic. In the process of healing the nation, looking forward to the reconstructed new South Africa, there is a disturbing pre-occupation of the past political apartheid system in South Africa. Senzeni Marasela's works are making a remarkable contribution to the 'known' past, highlighting, among other things, the missing gaps that leave the private grappling with peace and reconciliation possibilities.

Bongekile Bengu is an artist who was born in South Africa but because of her family devotion to fighting against the apartheid system, she spent the first eight years of her life in Eshowe before she and her family moved to Switzerland. Bengu describes her connection to South Africa as 'home'. She studied in the International School in Geneva and in 1987 she came back to Africa to Swaziland to complete her international Baccalaureate. She received her Bachelor of Fine Art degree in 1993 in Mount Vernon College in Washington DC. On coming back to South Africa she pursued what Jacqui Nolte describes as 'a firm sense of her strength as a woman and a desire to affirm her connection to Africa' (Nolte 2000: 48). She completed her master of fine art degree at the University of Cape Town in 1999. Her dissertation is titled *Power gained: power lost. aspects of contemporary African women visualised*. In her work Bengu deals with her experiences of being in exile. She attests that her position (that of spending time outside of the country) granted her a broad perspective that allowed her 'to make choices that she might otherwise not have made' (2000: 49).

Bengu's work mainly focuses on establishing a space for herself within South African society. She makes large-scale figurative works using pastel, chalk and charcoal on paper. Nolte refers to Bengu's strong female figures as a way in which she attempts to create a space in the society, a 'recuperation of lost identity', while at the same time avoiding portraying herself as vulnerable as a woman. She portrays the strength that women have through the positive contribution they have made to society, referencing family members. Bengu's work also serves as a commentary on representations of African women in popular media, photographs and personal memory, and dismisses these as damaging stereotypes. She questions these stereotypes in her *African woman*, where she depicts a frontal view of a woman in a traditional dress and another woman naked with her hands tied from behind. She uses the

two images because they are constantly used in the media to advertise certain products and to make art images. In her *Women of the Toil* Bengu addresses the question pertaining to the power of women within the customary practices.

Bengu's work seems to call women to act upon abusive behaviours that they encounter. She raises awareness of the reverence due to black women and at the same time seems to emphasise her African sense of belonging by placing regular patterns in her surfaces. Nolte speaks of this as a 'space of potential father that potential freedom, especially for women' (2000: 53). In Bengu's interview with Nolte she expresses her concern regarding South Africa being a male dominated country. Domination is evident in the abusive behaviour that is depicted in *Breaking the silence*, which is about women's capability to overcome. She portrays this strength through an image of a woman holding a portrait of an abused woman, which she interprets as an expression of healing in recognising the culprit (symbolised as a mean dog). She portrays that the two women are actually one person, both the victim and as healed victor. Nolte concludes 'Bongi Bengu's bold, simplified, and often luminous presentations of figures directly engage the viewer. If there is one common component, it is their sense of composed confrontation' (2000: 59).

CHAPTER 2

Manipulated tradition

Racial domination is only one form of oppression, as culture and tradition also propagate the negative plight of women. As Amina Mama states, '... 'culture' has long been identified as that pervasive terrain on which patriarchy manifests, resisting change and perpetuating women's oppression'. (1997: 27) She continues to state that, 'Changing the long-standing cultural practices, the traditions and customs which sustain and reproduce gender inequality is therefore fundamental to the agenda of women's movements worldwide.' (1997: 27)

In this chapter I situate traditional culture as a site where patriarchal domination manifests. The focus is on the perception of Xhosa traditional culture or belief systems that are perceived and accepted to be of Xhosa descent. Some of the customs practiced in the Xhosa culture and belief systems that govern the perception of women, perpetrate domination. This argument does not seek to scrutinise or interrogate Xhosa customs and beliefs or that of any African culture. It recognises this approach as one of the facets regarding barriers in the life of a black woman. I argue that the interpretation of tradition – the passing down of customary norms - is in itself manipulated. My argument is drawn from a popular assumption regarding tradition which in my view has lost its meaning. An example of the manipulation of these norms is, among others, the popular assumption that leads to the misinterpretation of '*lobola*' which is interpreted as the 'bride price'. This interpretation parallels slave purchasing'. *Lobola* is rather a way of bringing the two families together. The connotation that is linked to 'bride price' aggravates the violation of human rights which is prohibited by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996. The Constitution provides, amongst other things, that-

- No one may be subjected to slavery, servitude or forced labour.
- No one may be unfairly discriminated, directly or indirectly, on the grounds of race, gender, sex, marital status, conscience, religion, culture, language and birth.
- Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected.
- Everyone has the right to freedom and security of the person, which includes (a) the right to be free from all forms of violence from either public or private sources, (b) not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way.

Cultural traditions of various groups contribute to the entrenched social inequality, towards the separation of black women from black men and towards the domestication of women. My *Pages* and *Ash Bowl series* are premised from this notion, hence the use of 'traditionally' related material. The present cultural practices cannot be separated from the colonial

intervention that sought to domesticate African women (Mama 1997). In his *Vanishing Cultures*, a photographer, Peter Magubane focuses on the broad overview of South African indigenous cultures. He traces the changing indigenous cultures which impact various communities. He argues that cultures in South Africa are vanishing through Christianity that has impacted the indigenous religious practices, the migrant labour and the transformation of rural into urban environments. Besides Xhosa culture, which is the main focus in this chapter, the domestication of Xhosa women is historically traceable in various South African cultures. In some of these cultures history has strong resonance in the present. In Zulu culture the distinction within the society has been and is made according to sex, age and rank. Boys and girls have different tasks: where boys are responsible for looking after cattle, girls fetch water from the river with their mothers. After meals girls are responsible for domestic chores such as sweeping, washing dishes, etc. In the Ndebele community there is evidence of a strong patriarchal practice where men practice polygamy. Male authority and powers gained support through labouring in white farms where men would be given authority to duty his family. In Tsonga society if a married woman died or became infertile, one of her relatives would be brought in to bear children in her place. If her husband died she was handed over to his younger brother to produce children. In the (Ba)Sotho culture the division was based on age and gender. Historically, men were responsible for settling disputes that were brought to the chief. During meals men would be served first and women would wait for leftovers from their husbands. In the Tswana community status was marked according to gender and age. Men were decision makers and women were excluded from religious ceremonies and political gatherings. Women are still subject to male authority of a husband, brother, father or maternal uncle. (Magubane P. 1998)

Contrary to the gloomy picture pertaining to black women, Xhosa traditional custom has a platform that celebrates and receives women to take their rightful stand within the society and family. This is publicly portrayed through the ritual of *intonjane* (girl's initiation to womanhood). I parallel this institution to the feminist approach. *Intonjane* is a Xhosa ritual that is performed when a woman reaches maturity. The woman is introduced to senior women who will assist her with her new role in the society. It is believed among Xhosas that if a woman does not go through the ritual, she is likely to have bad luck in her marriage or in her social life. The ritual has two parts: the first is when a woman is introduced to adulthood and the second part is a celebration of adulthood. Senior women would be in charge of performing the ritual, from the slaughtering of the cow to other tasks pertaining to this ritual. During this process women are not allowed to eat sour milk and village girls go to the forests to get wood for the *intonjane*. They prepare the house of *intonjane* with a soft grass called *inkwandla-nkwandlane*. On the sunset of the day of the ritual senior women sing a particular song that would take *intonjane* to her temporary dwelling room. The *intonjane* will spend some days *emkhusaneni* (behind the curtain) and will not be seen by anyone. She is allowed to come out when the

allowed to come out when the slaughtering of the cow and the dance to welcome her are done. This ritual is still honoured in some of the rural areas of former Transkei and Ciskei. Some believe that disasters that strike the society such as a high rate of pregnancy outside of marriage, are a result of rituals such as *intonjane* that are no longer practiced. This ritual is less honoured in the contemporary environment because of uncondusive urban settlements and senior women are clouded with matters considered crucial for survival such as providing their children with education, shelter, food, etc. In urban settlements this ritual is now replaced with the 21st birthday celebrations. This Western celebration 'to womanhood' often coincides with women being irresponsible and corrupted with alcohol and sex indulgence before marriage. What *ulwaluko* is to Xhosa men, *intonjane* brings women to adulthood. These two rituals are empowering to both male and female. *Ulwaluko* still continues even in adverse circumstances of initiates dying in the process or in the unfavourable urban environments. (Sobopha M. 2001). In a community that portrays willingness to accept tradition as portrayed in *ulwaluko* and more, the under practiced *intonjane* in my view is a tradition manipulated to perpetuate male domination.

I metaphorically use the bride's mat, *umahambehlala* as a symbol to parallel the life of a black woman in an oppressive society. This is the mat that is given by the bride's parents to use in her new home when she gets married. She carries this mat around the home to sit on whenever she is serving the elders or her in-laws. This gesture is coupled with the bride subjecting herself to her husband. She has to be respectful and obedient to him while she, in turn in most cases, is treated like a minor¹⁰. This attitude portrays the stereotypical perception of masculine power over the subordinated feminine in the Xhosa society.

The marginalisation of women emanates, in part, from the socialisation between girls and boys. Anne Mager traces this imbalance from the 1940s and 1950s when Xhosa young men gained and demonstrated their masculinity through stick fighting. Women on the other hand demonstrated their femininity through showing their bodies (Mager 1995). I parallel the bride's mat with the image that women carry, voluntarily or involuntarily, consciously or unconsciously. In order to understand the status of black women in the present era we need to look back on the lifestyle and systems of the past that resulted in the present circumstances. The status of black women in South Africa has been reduced to the lowest level in the society, first and foremost by the system of apartheid. As indicated earlier the black woman is oppressed not only in terms of race but also in terms of gender and class. Anne Mager traces the status of women from the customary law point of view. She states that the law was not only a legal system to court procedures, but was a strategy to control the lives of Africans and its main objective was to separate African families. Mager asserts that

¹⁰ Interview with my mother, Grahamstown, 2002

the political and economical processes that sought to control African people created a shift in how men revered women. The labour market in particular aggravated the status of women. An ex-mine worker Nkoali Nawa¹¹ verifies Mager's statement revealing how living in the mining hostels shifted men's behaviour and attitudes to being hostile and violent 'animals' towards each other, especially towards women. Nawa shared the humiliation of his humanity being stripped off in the process and that abusive behaviour towards women was in one way a manner of regaining manhood. Migrant labour cannot be omitted from this discussion as it impacted negatively on women and children left in what known as 'the reserves' or 'homelands' or 'bantustans' in that the corrupted social order made child bearing difficult.

Hilda Bernstein investigates the plight of women and children living in the reserves. She reveals that in 1989 there were four million African families living in the 'homelands' (Bernstein 1989: 18). The white government was in control of the traditional laws and thus manipulating those laws for its benefit. Women were rendered minors under customary law (1989:19). They could not own property or enter into contracts without the consent of a male guardian. White courts have distorted the position of these women. She asserts that women in actual sense had more rights in the tribal society before the intervention of customary law. In that the right to act rested with the whole family and not with the individual. Each member of the family had its own role to play within the family and the different roles complemented each other as opposed to conflicting with one another. The situation was manipulated so that women were left to live in the reserves without husbands. They had to take the headship of the house and '...all over the country are widows, divorcees, women whose husbands have disappeared and unmarried mothers' (1989: 19). Women in these areas suffer disabilities, loneliness and immense poverty.

Cultural traditions restrain the independence of women on three levels: the social, the political, and the economic, as discussed in the Malibongwe conference.¹² On the social level the woman feels inferior and unable to participate in the matters around the home because this responsibility is usually handled by men. To this the Malibongwe paper suggests that in the process of creating space for women in politics, daughters should be exposed to different aspects of political inclinations. On the economic level the paper reveals that the number of daughters in the home is an indication of the extent of the wealth of a man. Once the daughter gets married, she is then an unpaid worker to her husband. The woman is seen and treated as an object as she is bought and owned. The paper further states that women have

¹¹ pers comm. Cape Town, Gugulethu 2003

¹² The aim of the conference was to provide a forum for an authentic dialogue among South African women of all races, from all progressive / democratic women's organisations, trade unions, community organisations, youth, students, religious bodies, professional associations, etc., as well as individuals on all aspects of women's conditions in racist South Africa, their participation in the struggle for democratic transformation in South Africa.

been channelled to stereotypical female areas of work such as domestic labour, administrative work, nursing and the like, because of the manner in which they have been socialised. Such stereotyping is so much a part of our society that, in 1997 the Constitutional Court gave recognition to the stereotypical role of women as nurturers to determine that President Nelson Mandela's decision to release from prison women who had not committed violent acts and who had children under the age of 12 years, while not allowing male prisoners in similar circumstances such a benefit because they are not nurturers, was constitutional and therefore not unfair gender discrimination against men. (*The President of the Republic of South Africa and Another v Hugo 1997 (4) SA 1 (CC)*)

On the political level, the education system played a big role in sustaining the oppressive system against women. In schools, boys were channelled to subjects such as agricultural studies whereas girls were directed to homecraft and sewing. These systems, together with marriage laws, further perpetrate patriarchal ruling.

Towards women emancipation

This section focuses on discussing the feminist approach to issues relevant to black women in Africa and in South Africa. I commence this discussion with a brief historical background to feminism in Africa. Problematizing the notion of domination in our society, I then focus on sexism as one of the areas that perpetuate domination.

There is currently a heated debate about African women and feminism. Various scholars, feminists, womanists, and creative writers from Africa engage and contribute critically to various issues pertaining Africa, black women and feminism. I refer to these women and praise them as '*Amatsha ntliziyo*' as the Xhosa idiom expresses the highest admiration. Some of the leading activists are: Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie¹³: Bell Hooks¹⁴ and Amina Mama¹⁵. These scholars are, among others, heroines that have made a significant contribution towards recreating the image of black women and consequently elevating their (that of black women)

¹³ Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie has been speaking critically and creatively on the issues of Gender, politics, social transformation for at least three decades. She, among other credentials, has served on the Editorial board of the highly regarded *Guardian* newspaper in Nigeria for which she wrote a weekly essay. From 1987-1989 she was the National Director of Social Mobilisation in the Federal Government with a cultural education and political responsibility of women in anticipation of civilian rule.

¹⁴ bell hooks is a distinguished professor of English at City College, City University of New York

¹⁵ Amina Mama is the chair of gender studies and Director of Gender Institute (AGI) at the University of Cape Town. She was based in Nigeria before joining University of Cape Town. She holds a Doctorate in Organisational Psychology from the University of London. Her current research interest is around bringing gender analysis to bear on subjectivity, social relations and politics. Her major research project has addressed women in government and politics in a variety of African contexts, militarism, women's organisations and movements, race and subjectivity

value within the society. They have challenged issues around gender, politics and social transformation on an international level. They have challenged patriarchal stereotypical barriers such as the exclusion of women from public affairs; and the tutelage need, which is set out as a condition before they contribute in politics, so as to be compatible with their male counterparts (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994:30); the role of an African woman within the context of feminism; issues around the heritage of tradition and other burning matters.

In South Africa, as America, black people 'engaged in struggle to resist racism in which clear boundaries were erected which separated the roles of women and men' (hooks, 1981: 5). Racism was seen by black women as more oppressive to them. These women could not join the struggle to fight against sexism because it was not seen as an important aspect of the identity of black women (1981:1). When the concept of feminism was introduced to African women, it was received 'as a foreign ideology, imported into Africa to ruin good African women' (Aidoo 1998:46). In South Africa it was perceived as having 'divisive effects' concerning the struggle. It was moreover separating women from men and women from other women (Meintjies 1997:2).

In relation to the history of feminism in Africa, Meintjies (1997) traces the historical background that led to the present conflict between feminists and black women. In the conference held at the University of the Western Cape in 1997, Meintjies revealed the origins of the term feminist as accommodating and beneficial to the Western bourgeoisie. This term 'origins in the struggles of women in Europe and North America, and of white women in colonial situations, for equal rights and equal status with men' (1997: 1). During the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s the struggle for equal status of women to men was challenged as bearing no liberation impact on the bondage of subordination of women. Concerning the problem of dominance of a male-centric theoretical, political and social world, intellectual challenge was sought to be an effective way to deal with the universal subordination of women.

bell hooks defines feminism as 'a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression' (hooks 2000: viii). For a black woman, race remains a crucial terrain to visit because of the international economic order that is divided along race and class lines.

Abrahams states that, 'Black South African women's history has been one of defiance against not only white supremacy, but male supremacy as well' (Abrahams in Agenda1998: 125).

Amina Mama came out with three distinct schools of thought regarding the misinterpretation of the term feminism.¹⁶ Firstly, she states that 'There are those who argue that feminism is not African and thus has no relevance to Africa's political, social and economic realities. Rather, it is seen as an elite, bourgeois phenomenon, an invention of the West with no real value, or

¹⁶ I have discovered from personal friends both male and female the misunderstanding of the term 'feminism'. The term 'feminism' is interpreted by the uninformed as being anti-male.

meaning for African women.' Secondly, it '... acknowledges the importance of feminism as an ideology that recognises that women's inequality has to be overcome, but suggests the need to name it differently' (Mama in Agenda 50 2001 :124). And thirdly '... to retain the concept of feminism and make it our own by filling the name with meaning' (2001 :125).

The barriers that I attempt to visually articulate in my work are mostly erected out of the problem of a patriarchal mind-set. The term patriarchy is mentioned in this context as being a form of dominance, or a dominating figure for example within society or in relationships. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie stresses the importance of focusing on sex and gender oppression. Here sex is characterised as being biological and gender as 'socially defined capacities and attributes assigned to persons on the basis of the alleged sexual characteristics' (Ogundipe-Leslie 1994: 153). As discussed earlier in this chapter 'sex and gender conceptions are manipulated conveniently in patriarchal society to better assure the status quo of male domination' (ibid).

In my experience men irrationally resort to threats and violence. bell hooks traces this predicament as an obligation for men to support male domination (hooks 2000). This 'bondage of patriarchy' affects most men regardless of race, status etc. This scenario has personal implications, hence I am referring to black men in particular. I have experienced within personal male friends of mine, concern regarding women abuse inflicted by men. I have been surprised to discover the same men being perpetrators of such behaviour. As the Xhosa saying goes, they fail to sweep their own houses first. One of my many encounters regarding patriarchal domination is a threatening comment, which I received from a male friend artist. In our conversation regarding our age difference, I placed myself in a position that challenged his manhood, that which automatically placed him at a higher social status than myself. He aggressively attempted to regain his position by saying 'I will *'klap'* you so hard' in Xhosa.

Male domination together with female subordination results in an imbalance and this is evident in several career fields. bell hooks problematises these actions as being enhanced by the 'bondage of patriarchy'. This 'bondage' holds the perpetrator captive and denies the 'victim'. This calls on the interrogation of the existing repressive and dominating structures in our society, either within the self or outside. Women however remain subject to patriarchal authority that tends to accommodate and attend to the needs of men and control the activities of women.

CHAPTER 3

Memory, narrative and healing

A layered process of personal art production informs this chapter. The process involves firstly a contemplation of past and persistent personal and social events, particularly those events that lay siege to personal liberation. Secondly, thoughts of the past are transformed into images in the mind, which are then constructed into art pieces as a way of recording the events. They are then made visible to the public as a way of public sharing of personal narratives. As with Senzeni Marasela, the focus centres on the relationship between the private and the public archive.

Sharing personal narratives with the public is a gesture that allows and welcomes the response of the viewer, and so this is a reconciliation platform. The importance of the public sharing of private narratives, particularly for black people in our country, is vital for the emancipation of the nation. Steve Biko echoes the value of testimony. Mamphela Ramphele recalls Biko in her book *Mamphela Ramphele* saying,

'Steve had identified the need for documenting the lives of black South Africans as vital to encouraging them to become agents of their liberation. It is also true that documentation and research among blacks were, and remain under developed for a variety of reasons. The oral tradition which is strong among Africans did not lay a firm foundation for respect for the written word. Then again the deliberate under-development of blacks by means of Bantu education discouraged the emergence of the love for the written word and good recording keeping.' (Ramphele 1996: 68)

The approach is premised from a personal strategy for healing which involves forgiveness. It follows a process that attempts to liberate through the process of sharing of narratives. In chapters that precede this one, as well as in the explication of art works, I attempt to express issues that arouse anger and bitterness. It appears that authentic forgiveness is an antidote for anger, bitterness and vengeance (Adonis 1999). This draws on ethics of Christianity as well as Judaism, which call for forgiveness in our relations with others (Schimmel 2002). 'Many Christian scholars are of the opinion that forgiveness has its origin in Christianity and that a discussion of forgiveness will inevitably include a discussion of religion.' (Adonis 1999: 32). The attitude of forgiveness is for me a strategy to dismantle barriers in the mind. Here the mind is discussed as an archive site where information that can impede or enhance productivity is concealed. In the book *Art of Memory*, Andreas Huyssen's asserts, 'It follows that the strongly remembered past is inscribed into the present, from the feeding of our subconscious desires to guiding our most conscious actions' (Huyssen, 1994: 0). He continues to state what forms the focus of this paper that memory '...may become a stumbling block to the needs of the present...' (1994: 9). In view of the approach of the mind being an archive, forgetting can also be regarded as an integral part of healing. To this, Adrian Forty refers to the case of a professional mnemonist and his strategy to create space

in his mind (Forty 2001). The mnemonist gave performances where he could accurately recall numbers, poems or prose given to him by the audience. The mnemonist encountered a problem of unwanted memory chaotically congesting his mind. To this end he experimented on various strategies to forget, to create space. His first effort was to use the same method that people use to remember, writing things down. His approach was based on an assumption that writing down would rest his mind from having to remember. He would eventually burn the pieces of paper as an attempt to forget after all had failed.

Forgiveness is, as Holiday asserts, a form of forgetting. As a point of clarity, forgetting does not refer to erasure of the past events, but rather to deal with the attitudes such as vengeance which are in themselves 'a form of memory' (Holiday 1998: 44). Forty traces the techniques of the mnemonist as that which include the making of an artefact performed in the form of recording, and an iconoclastic act in the form of destroying the recorded information. Historically 'Western tradition of memory since the Renaissance has been founded upon an assumption that material objects, whether natural or artificial, can act as analogues of human memory' (Forty 2001: 2). Artefacts that vary from funerary sculpture to information technology have been used to substitute human memory. Similarly, my creative process is an act of giving form to memory and personal experiences. As Richards states, 'Art can unveil and create meanings in ways that words can't. Visual art arouses hidden or buried memories, subliminal feelings and subconscious associations.' (Richards 2002: 112). The art of forgetting is thus an important point to be discussed in this approach.

Forty refers to an Aristotelian theory which explains and relates memory to imprints of various experiences and where forgetting is the decay of the memory of those experiences. Jasper Johns memory piece entitled '*Memory piece*' 1961- 70 is an articulation of this process. The piece is a wooden box with three opening drawers. The last drawer is open and filled with sand. Above the three drawers is a vertical lid with a positive cast of a foot on the inside. This arrangement allows the foot to be printed on the sand if the lid closes. The imprint will remain on the sand as long as the box remains unshaken. The process of losing the imprint is a metaphor for forgetting. According to Forty, 'if objects are made to stand for memory, their destruction (as in act of iconoclasm) is taken to imply forgetting' (2001: 2). Within this context he refers to monuments as referring to a general sense of the passage of time rather than constituting historical knowledge. Metaphorically, this is associated with the mental decay of images and experiences and is a component of forgetting. A memorial example of memory decay is the Hamburg memorial which was unveiled in 1986 by an artists Jochen Gerz and his brother, the Gerz brothers. This consisted of a 12m high square column covered in lead. Over several years this structure was gradually lowered into the ground which left to reveal only the top part. In another memorial Gerz made a paved surface done in front of the palace at Saarbrücken. Under each stone was carved a name of one of the 2146 Jewish cemeteries

at Saarbrücken. Under each stone was carved a name of one of the 2146 Jewish cemeteries existing in Germany before 1933. The paving is now said to be indistinguishable. These are a type of anti memorial.

Forty denies that memories can be transferred to material objects. He argues that it can not be taken for granted that material objects can substitute human memory for three reasons. Firstly, he refers to a phenomena usually known as the ephemeral monuments. These are memorial artefacts which are abandoned immediately after they are used.¹⁷ Secondly, he refers to Freud's view that nothing that has been formed or registered in a human mind can perish. The information in the mind is revealed as circumstances allow it. Thirdly, the assumed relationship of objects to memory is questioned by the natural reaction to forget, particularly with regards to the Holocaust unbearable memories.

One can then conclude that objects or artefacts cannot be taken for granted as substitutes of memory. They can be referred to as 'enemy to memory' (2001: 7)

In my work the relationship of objects with memory is that of expressing the effects of memory. The decay of the effects of personal memories is visually expressed through the inside view of Wall series metal plates. The peeling off of the plate is symbolical of gradual forgetting, which is informed by a conscious decision to forgive.

Artefacts have constituted part of the process of social forgetting. The overthrowing of memorial statues demonstrates this gesture. The question remains though if this gesture successfully achieves its intention. To this Forty refers to some of the demonstrative signs of Soviet communism and the old regime in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the form of the statues of Lenin and Marx, among others. The gesture of demolition is a challenge in that by erasing history the future may be denied access to tracing the past. The destruction of these statues is rather an act of reclaiming of memory that has been symbolically blocked by these statues.

Khulumani

The urge to 'forget the past and look into the future' calls for forgiveness. It is the process that potentially closes the gap between victims and perpetrators. The aim of sharing narratives is that of re-uniting a fragmented people 'characterised by strife, conflict, untold suffering and injustice, and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, democracy and peaceful co-existence and development opportunities for all South Africans, irrespective of colour, race, class, belief or sex' (Holiday 1998). These are also persistent struggles that black men and women are confronted with in a larger social sphere (Amadiume & Abdullahi An-Na'im 2000; Jacqueline Nolte 2000). They are responses to the effects of those memories and they

¹⁷ For instance in Malesian society, the artefact is secretly carved after the death of an individual. The *malangann* - as it is called - is then revealed to the villagers at a certain moment. Afterwards it is left in the forest for decay or is disposed by being handed over to tourists.

are suggestive of a plan of action towards liberating the self. The making of art can be a form of recording, preserving information - an archive.

The process of sharing narratives sought to bring South Africa to a new era, moulding a new identity through the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)¹⁸. The commission attempted to reconcile the society by intertwining the experiences of political oppression from the viewpoint of the victim. It was a platform that allowed communities and individuals to hear and tell the 'truth' about the atrocities of the past, to fill in the historical missing gaps.

Khulumani, a Zulu word which means 'speak out', is a support organisation for victims of torture and violence. The organisation consists of over one thousand members from the former informal settlements of Nyanga Bush, Nyanga Extension, KTC, and Crossroads communities (according to the chairperson of the Khulumani Western Cape group Shirley Gunn) Khulumani is a national organisation has assisted victims to:

- Create a collective voice and presence within the community;
- present their case to the TRC;
- access services they require through referrals, including psychological, legal, social and medical services to address their problems;
- empower themselves to build sustainable lives; and
- work for a just reparation policy.

In 1986 disaster struck when people from Nyanga Bush, Nyanga Extension, KTC, and Crossroads communities of Cape Town were brutally forced out of their dwellings and out of Cape Town. 70 people died and 70 000 were left homeless. People were picked up at midnight by buses that would take these people about a thousand kilometres outside of Cape Town, where they would be dumped. Tragically, on one of these trips from Cape Town to Transkei a newborn baby died. The bus driver was forced to stop outside of Worcester where the baby was buried there. These are the stories that deserved to be raised in a forum such as the TRC. However many of the members never made their statements to the TRC and thus were not considered for reparations.

Healing is a developmental strategy in the South African post apartheid era. It focuses on memory and the public sharing of these memories. The Khulumani testimonies reflect the effect of these strategies in society. The narratives depict memories of social injustices that are still evident in South Africa, whereas untold narratives have a profound impact on the transformation procedure and are a hindrance towards healing. Some of these memories are preserved in memory banners that were made by some of the survivors. The banners were

¹⁸ Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in 1995. It was an explicit and institutionalised attempt to forge a public memory and awareness of the past. The purpose of the commission was to investigate the causes and extent of human rights violations between 1960 and 1994 and was aimed at disclosing the perspectives of all those involved

made by firstly negotiating past experiences and the living effects, of those and then drawings were made to visually depict the different scenes. These were later transferred to canvasses and painted. These banners are presently shown to the public whenever the Khulumani group holds a gathering that reflects the past. This is a process of recalling of real events which invite moments of reflection. It is acknowledged that reflection can be a moment of reliving the past, however the focus here is on the future.

I was involved with the project in early 2001 as a facilitator working towards making a collective memory banner of the 1986 disaster. This was a project towards the building of a museum. At this critical point, Khulumani members voiced their concerns and discomfort regarding the researchers and academics that pester them for information from which only they (the researchers) benefit. Their memories were in this way once again stolen and used for a benefit of others rather than to liberate the beholders.

This attitude extends to the government's response towards the group while in pursuit of reparations. Regrettably, many feel that government has not shown any interest regarding the matter and as such undermined the incidents. The following is extracted from the Khulumani Indaba Report on TRC recommendations:

- d) Ms Mosikare from Khulumani JHB. expressed her disappointment and frustration with government's refusal to respond to the seven memorandums that Khulumani Gauteng has submitted. These were sent to President Mandela and Mbeki, and letters were sent to the Justice Minister. "they sometimes acknowledge our letters, but never is there a response" she said. The lack of proper and respectful communication and consultation was a recurring theme running throughout the indaba. Instead of working on restoring victims dignity, which government say they are committed to, they have actively undermined and frustrated victims efforts to communicate with it.

The discussion in this chapter favours healing through a narrative memory that works though the past by telling intelligible stories about it. Such narratives may speak of the emotional distress or intense personal conflict that precedes and makes way for the redemption at the end of the narrative.

CHAPTER 4

Testimonies

I could never have realised my talent as a bronze caster if I belonged to the ruled class, many must have died with their skills undeveloped for fear of taboos. In this continent of Africa, generally the furnace, bellows and smelting pot were regarded as secret things and women at menstrual time regarded as polluting the elements. They were not allowed to touch the bronze caster for fear of causing accidents during casting. In such a time the women in such a time would not talk directly to their husband except through an interpreter.

(LaDuke B. 1991: 31)

These are the words of Princess Elizabeth Olowu, a Nigerian sculpture. Unlike her, most black women in South Africa, particularly in the Western Cape area, never had the privilege of exploring their interests within the art field. The following testimony intends to reveal one of the reasons that contribute towards lack of representation of black women in the art arena. Black women particularly in township areas are not receiving the support that will expose their strength and skills. This was evident for me when I was invited to apply for the position of an assistant co-ordinator in the North Sea Jazz Festival Craft Showcase in 2001, held at the Good Hope Centre, Cape Town. It was a forum and opportunity for participants to network with various businesses and other artists for marketing purposes. Artists had an opportunity to improve their products, so as to be aligned with what is nationally or internationally accepted, as well as improving other skills. An appointed product developer had the responsibility of improving certain underdeveloped products. Language barriers impeded this process, as the product developer was English and most of the artists were Xhosa speaking. The project illustrated an under representation of black art practitioners, particularly women. Out of sixteen participants there were only five black artists who exhibited. As an assistant co-ordinator I was responsible for the selection of the products. To this end I managed to involve several artists whose products were viable in terms of quality and quantity. These few black artists had an established market beforehand both nationally and internationally. The W.E.S.G.R.O report congratulates the South African white crafters as generally revealing highly sophisticated products as opposed to their counterparts whose products are limited to the use of recycled material. That being a matter of fact, this comment reveals the assumption that products reflect the economic background of the artist. There are myriad of her factors that are overlooked by this statement which hinders 'high quality production'.

I have spoken to three of these women who testify to barriers encountered by black women artists. The names of the artists are Xoliswa Sigonyela presently teaching at Isilimela High School in Langa, Nontembiso Mkonto presently living in Tambo Village near Gugulethu, and Judy Mbebe presently teaching Art at Gugulethu Comprehensive School.

Talking to Xoliswa Sigonyela

How did you become an artist?

I was doing Didactics at UWC (University of the Western Cape) and it did not suit me *yonke lanto ndandiyenza* (all what I was doing) and I decided *ukuthi* (that) let me go to another institution since I was still very young and exploring. I decided to go to Sivuyile College. When I arrived there they told me that only art was still available and all the other courses were full and I thought my goodness how am I going to do this. So let me go do it. I was still young but I fell in love with it, it started talking to me. I started to become inquisitive in whatever involved *i-art*.

What kind of comments do you receive from the society as an artist?

You know art is for people who don't want to learn. Art is for people who are lazy so whatever staff member that I talk to *okanye* (or) to my learners they say 'go and do art because art is one of the subjects that you can just go and do, it's not a subject that you can learn or you can be taught. So, in our societies art is still not one of the best subjects that you can do at school and study art as something that you think that at the end of the day you think 'I will benefit from this' in so much that maths and science are still one of the best subjects that you can do.

Most of the people who used to talk to my mother would say, 'Oh! You cannot let your child do art she won't survive. There won't be anything she can gain from that and where will she work? Who will employ your child? It used to hurt me but there was this driving force inside of me telling myself that I want to do this and I'm going to do it and that I love it. I think that there must be places where one can get employed in, and who knows because now people go to my house and see all the work that I'm doing and always want some. They always order things for me to do, it became a` business in that way.

What kind of art works do you do?

I've got seasons. In winter I love doing wheel-work. I love working with clay. I love to build coil pots. I like to work big. It makes me feel more superior, a woman. You know I want to be recognised I want to be someone. When I do small pots it seems like I'm inferior and people look at me as if I'm down there. In summer I like working with fabric painting, making tablecloths and place mats. Now I'm into traditional clothing with rock art painting.

Tell me about your future plans.

I don't think I will stay teaching in Langa for long. Langa is very rich. Langa has professional artists in the communities. Langa has art centres where people can go to and get information and involvement with art, but I'm staying in Stellenbosch and I haven't made my mark there yet. Because Stellenbosch is a small place and there is a black community that is also small. They don't have art at all there only in the high schools and in the primary. I know that there is

Arts and Culture but I've been helping those teachers. There are no professional artists who can teach kids in the streets those that are standing in the shops without school. That is what I want, to drag all the artistic knowledge that they have got because I know they do have it. My dream is to give all that I have in my hands to give to the community of Stellenbosch.

There are very few known black women artists particularly in the Western Cape. In your opinion, why is that.

The place of a woman is still in the kitchen. More especially if you are a married woman. You sit there and you have all these good ideas, planning all your art works. What happens at the end, you end up... You want to be this good wife to your husband, a good mother to your kids. So you end up hiding all those good ideas that you have. I think it takes a person to tell herself that 'I'm not going to put myself in a closet, I'm gonna go up there and do exactly what I want'. Men do whatever they want.

Was your class male dominated? If it was how did that affect you or your performance?

My husband saw me as making the house dirty with all the junk at first. Because of the money that has been coming in and all the orders that I had to do by the end of the month. He started to see, you know... this is a business. One day I heard him talking to his friend saying, 'My wife is an artist and I've never seen a woman artist around here, she is the best of all the women that I've ever seen.' I thought Yho! Because I'm thinking of the junk. Now he appreciates all that I do.

At Sivuyile that is where I started crawling. I didn't know anything about art. I was very inquisitive. The works that people were selling there already, they looked so alive. I thought I'd never be able to do that. I used to bring more projects in class because I wanted to be the best. I became one of the top students in class because of that. I used to be very jealous of the guys that I used to be with in class, because they were artists from the community. They knew exactly what they were doing. I told myself that I have to beat them. In order to do that they would come up with one and I would come up with four.

How many female students were there?

There were only three. Guys were about eleven.

I think in art it takes one person to go out there and make your self known and recognised. You have to go and exhibit if there is an exhibition. You go and find out things sit there and expect things to happen. You don't let Christmas come to you because it comes once in a lifetime- what if it doesn't come? I think you have to show what you can do.

Talking to Nontembiso Mkhonto

How did you become an artist?

From my mother's womb. In my younger age I grew up with an interest of art but I didn't recognise that it's art. I was always very close to my grandfather, my mother's father. He was

doing those cars that are used by white people for wedding, even an axe, he start from making a fire and fire an iron or hammers even the ceramic staff he used to do.

Were you producing any art works before you came to Sivuyile College?

Ja, because in early 80's I was involved in Mowbray at CAP, it's where Shoprite is now.

How did you find out about CAP (Community Arts Project)?

With other lady they call Hazel in Constantia. I was relieving someone there and while in my rest time I used to do my art which is embroidering pillowcases and she promised to find out from any place which can polish my art.

Because of ups and downs of the marriage I used to go but from 1989 I used to go part time I think one year and the following year I decided to start full time until 1992 June. I lack funding at CAP and I start teaching until 1995 January teaching drawing.

My husband was so jealous for me and he doesn't want those rubbish I come with like-the papers, the paintings and all kind of material so he used to say I make the house dirty, I'm always going to the workshops but we end up fighting from 1993. Everybody at CAP knows that he doesn't like art. He used to hit me a lot. I used to go to CAP with a blue eye. It's whereby I decided, it's me, I won't stop because I'm born as an artist. Even in those private houses I go there to generate income and he is not even able to maintain me. I used to fight there because even when I see an interesting paper the owner would fight with me saying, 'You are not here to look at papers but to clean my house.' Sometimes, a year I used to work for ten or thirteen houses because I used to be fired this place for two months, that one even one week because I used to show that I'm an artist, even when I watch something on the wall, I use to spend time watching that thing.

What are your future goals as an artist?

I always have these dreams of having a studio in my yard to work there. Make a tourism centre even a rondavel it's where I'm going to sell my staff. I want to make a flat like this bungalow you see here. I organised this bungalow to work in it to exhibit at Sivuyile. I'm not working there now because of economy wise because I have four kids and two grandchildren. I use my studio for a boarder since last month but for two years it was just empty. I'm struggling a lot. That selfish guy told me and my children she is working, so it's difficult for me to do what I want to do.

Tell me about your art works?

Sometimes I use paper maché vases. I want to show that I'm a ceramicist. I only work on my front as you see my house is squashed. I'm at CAP for a short time now because I have a part time job at Stikland to clean the office Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I do want to be full time at CAP because it's a nice space for me to utilise.

What are the problems that you have come across as an artist?

Sometimes I do have problems with exhibiting like in 1994 I exhibited in Stockholm in Sweden so there was a misunderstanding because I'm not familiar with contracts to sell. One of my works 'My culture' the lino cut was bought by the Wits University. I didn't know that they were going to illustrate a book. That book was published and distributed in Sweden. Those guys saw my picture in a book and they came to ask where is this lady and they find me at CAP. They ask also that picture of 'My culture' but it was finished because it was on demand. I only heard about the book. If that guy of Sweden didn't come to South Africa to ask for that picture I wouldn't know.

How does the society respond to you as an artist?

It's terrible you know as I'm sitting here most of my neighbours they know that I'm a witch because I'm always painting in the mornings, evenings, lighting candles for what, how can you see a woman successful with art, what is important in art? The only thing I use my witchcraft, especially this woman next door, I have an interdict with her. But if they want to run a workshop they come to me to make a burner. Even the burner that I have done last year, it's not even paid now. They undermine, 'how can you charge R400 for a burner although the painting is not expensive and the material.' They don't know about my energy and my idea. It's frustrating to be a woman as an artist. They blacklist you all your life.

I have to go forward with my art, no body can stop me because it's from God and from the ancestors. I can't stop it no matter what they gonna say or what they said already. It's not going to damage my life otherwise it's pushing me forward.

Talking to Judy Mbebe

Are you trained as an artist?

Yes I went to Cape Town College doing it and on my fourth year in 1996 I specialised with it.

Do you presently produce any art works?

I used to but now I don't have time. There's teaching, family. There is a lot of stress. The work is strenuous and there are many things I'm involved in so it makes it difficult for me to produce art works not unless there is some project that will require some work done.

I print on paper with lino. My work is inspired by social events. The last work that I did was A painting more about what is happening in the township, summer in the shebeens, people in the township.

What are your future goals as an artist?

If time allows or if things could go my way, I could be happy to have a place to produce some. If I can have time I can be happy to produce works to be exposed as well. If I'm not doing that

I can be involved with the communities, try to expose especially the youth that do not have anything to do, to try to equip them. If you look at it now in our schools other kids are not academic, by doing art you are equipping them. They can have something to live on. The problem is money. One of the students came to me this year. He was supposed to register at Cape Technicon for graphic design. He did have the registration fee but in terms of art material he couldn't and he dropped out. Those are the things that are letting them down.

How does the society respond to you as an artist?

I think it's more about exposure and knowledge because if people around you are not informed they just take it lightly. They hardly recognise it. It's for men or for white people.

SECTION 2

Visual documentation and explication of art works

Introductory note

Claiming space in my work engages with problems of subordination, marginalisation, oppression and domination. It deals with the personal process of breaking and transcending these confinements. The process is simultaneously an act of catharsis and destruction. Metaphorically, the breaking of the identified barriers alludes to the acquiring and the claiming of space. The claiming of space bespeaks loss. The loss mainly touches on, among other things, loss of power, identity, dignity etc. The persistent traditional indoctrination, as we know it today, of Xhosa women, among others, as subordinates is a marginalizing factor. In response to this, my intention is to portray the strength and will of black women.

The work has allowed me to express and confront areas and experiences of my life that up to this point I feel reluctant to expose. Constructing the works confronted me with the reality of the effects of these experiences. Some of these areas intentionally remain visually opaque. This is discussed in the explication of the art works.

The body of practical work comprises a set of monoprints, which serve as more literal preparatory works and a departure point towards a metaphorical approach. These are not part of the presented works. The main body comprise four groups of works. A. The pages series; B. The statistics series; C. The wall series and D. The ash bowls.

CHAPTER 1

a) Fire

An important feature in the use of fire in my work is its ability to evoke paradoxical interpretation. The execution of breaking of barriers in my work is carried through the process of burning the surface. Fire can be either destructive or constructive. In the light of South African history fire has negative connotations: the enforcement of 'justice' in the townships through the 'necklace' system in the 1980s and the likes of the 1986 informal settlements forced removals in Cape Town¹⁷. Fire is also used in rural areas for cooking (in some homes) and is usually in the centre of the house as well as outside. *Iziko* (the hearth) is a communal place for members of the family. There is also a religious aspect attached to the hearth and a burning hearth is seen to promote fertility in women, cattle and fields. In ancient Rome the hearth-fire was extinguished when a member of a family died (Sanders 1967: 933-4).

Fire is the natural phenomenon that improves vegetation '...fire and man has had - separately and together - have had a tremendous impact in shaping or altering vegetation' (Ahlgren 1974: 1). Responsible for the continued ecological cycle, it is essential for the propagation of certain indigenous tree and plant species. Under the right circumstances fire speeds up decomposition and recycling of scarce nutrients. (Agricultural News 2 July 2001). As much as the above approach is more on a literal level, the approach that I employ in my work has a similar aim.

There are other symbolic associations that have been attached to the use and existence and meaning of fire. In a Greek religious parable, fire is figuratively used for affliction and trouble (Bietenhard 1975).

In Christianity, fire is interpreted as an expression of God's wrath. It is again used as an element of purity where God is interpreted as the consuming fire, (referred to purification of the people). The same meaning is attached to gold purification through fire.

In Greek orthodoxy, the soul is believed to be purified by fire where as in Greek philosophy, fire is regarded as the basic element of all things. Fire is said to be the force that makes the world move. Sanders writes that fire has 'ambivalent character' (Sanders 1967: 933). He speaks of fire as the gift from gods which comes as an organic destructive substance to destroy the injustices of the world.

My intention in using fire is constructive and optimistic. The thematic execution of breaking barriers in my work is carried through the process of burning the surface. The surface

¹⁷ Township communities in different parts of South Africa during the 1980s (particularly 1985 and 1986 in the Eastern Cape) embarked in an act to eliminate most government servants such as police, councillors etc for serving the government of the minority. A tyre would be hung around the victim's neck and lit to burn the victim to death.

metaphorically refers to different perceptions that bear an overpowering or paralytic effect. This is a symbolic act and an initiative towards liberating the inner self.

b) Frame

The 'frame' and the rectangular format that I employ in my work acts as a metaphorical symbol for boundary. In the course of this dissertation I explicate the symbolic meaning and relate it to persistent man made structures.

The first three series of my art works, Pages series, Statistics series and Wall series, take geometrical forms of rectangular shapes of various sizes. For me, the symbolic meaning of the chosen structure is profound. The frame symbolises confinement and stereotypical norms or structures particularly pertaining to the plight of black women in South Africa. I interpret the frame as a parameter which within, among other things, the interpretation of value, as set out by one person for the other is contained.

The metaphorical approach of the interpretation of the frame is related and is traced back to the use of frame in the fifteenth century. The historical background reveals literally the idea to contain, to compartmentalise, to structure. Frames were made to isolate individual decorations from each other such as sculpture, architecture and painted representations.

c) Monoprints

The body of practical work presented in this document developed from a series of monoprints based on figurative self-portraits. Initially these images were printed on paper, which later developed to prints on perspex, as seen in the Statistics series and Wall series. The drawings are derived from the observation of different masks or facial expressions worn, as well as gestures which are expressive of personal inner mood or feeling.

The process of developing monoprints started with self-portrait drawings on paper. In these drawings I portray myself as a heroic figure, resisting subordination and passivity. Each drawing is life size, which intentionally fills up the page. In these drawings I have manipulated facial expressions to attempt to articulate the inner mood, such as anger and pain. Most of the images are drawn with arms that are cut off at the edge of the rectangular drawing paper. This is a visual articulation of transcending barriers. In later works the breaking of barriers is expressed through the burning of the surface which allows the figure to be shown through the burnt hole as discussed in the Statistics series and the Wall series. The format of the paper in earlier works – which is rectangular - for me suggests the very barriers I attempt to break hence the cropping of the arm on the edge of the paper.

Technically, the monoprint process of each print started with a drawing placed under a sheet of perspex. The perspex sheet was inked, and additive and subtractive methods were employed. Once the whole image was copied or transferred onto the Perspex, it was then

printed onto paper. In later works the focus is on the transparency of the perspex the images are made directly onto the surface.

The method of multicoloured monoprint allowed me to work with layers of colour. The idea of layering conceptually extended into the final works.

CHAPTER 2

a) Pages series

The material used in this series signifies personal struggles that I find myself confronted with as a woman and as an artist. The material in this series has subjective, personal reference and comprise of: German fabric dresses worn by Xhosa brides, Sorghum, rusted corrugated iron, Xhosa Text, mats, children's clothing etc.

The questions that I address in this series concerns I find to be hindrance to success in the life of a woman. This series acts as a memorial to my prevailing experiences. It body seeks to serve as commentary on social issues as well as serving as a personal narrative.

Figure i: Education

The schools that I went to had a system that was not structured to accommodate my personal desires and needs. The talent that I desired to nourish was harshly discouraged.

My matric science teacher envisaged that I would pursue a career in a medical field. My parents shared his interest. There was respect for the career in the sciences as well as students pursuing this career. Due to lack of career guidance, teachers made decisions for us. Teachers themselves had limited knowledge as far as different careers were concerned. Teachers would sometimes make career decisions for students from personal favour. What caught my attention and interest as a science student was not the content of the subjects as such but the drawing of the experiment apparatus, human body parts in biology class and other scientific illustrations.

Corporal punishment as a disciplinary measure, lack of equipment, under qualified teachers, irrelevant subject contents and gender discriminatory subjects were some of the causes of high dropout rates in our schools.

The slate in this panel symbolises education in a literal sense as well as in the symbolic sense. Slates are no longer used in schools and here symbolise the old education system.



Figure 1
Pages series
Education
2002
Mixed media

Figure ii: Domestic work

My mother was a domestic worker. She grew up in a village just outside of Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape. With little education she attempted to pursue qualifications towards a sewing career but could not further her studies due to financial constraints. It is still the case with many women and sometimes young girls in my neighbourhood that they, without much choice, become domestic workers. Young girls are often dragged by their mothers to assist them at work, and sometimes end up in the same position.

The pink dress in this panel refers to domestic workers. A certain portion of the dress is underneath the blue and white dress which, throughout the series symbolises a black woman. The aim is to place a woman as a person before being a domestic worker while recognising the existence and need as well as hardships of such person.



Figure 2
Pages series
Domestic work
2002
Mixed media

Figure iii: Poverty

This piece focuses on the economic status of most black people in South Africa. Most black people have to work for their parents after finishing their schooling. One is expected to renovate and improve one's home, among other things, before acquiring personal assets. Other tasks that one is confronted with on completion of one's studies involve assisting siblings with their studies and basically maintaining the well being of the household. It brings pride and joy to our parents when the son or daughter who has now completed her or his studies shows the results their parents' hard work. One almost feels obligated to fulfil the dreams of parents. Career choice is no longer about the field of interest but about whether one can get a sustainable income.

The rusted corrugated iron in this piece symbolises poverty. This is the material that is most commonly used in the informal settlements to build houses.

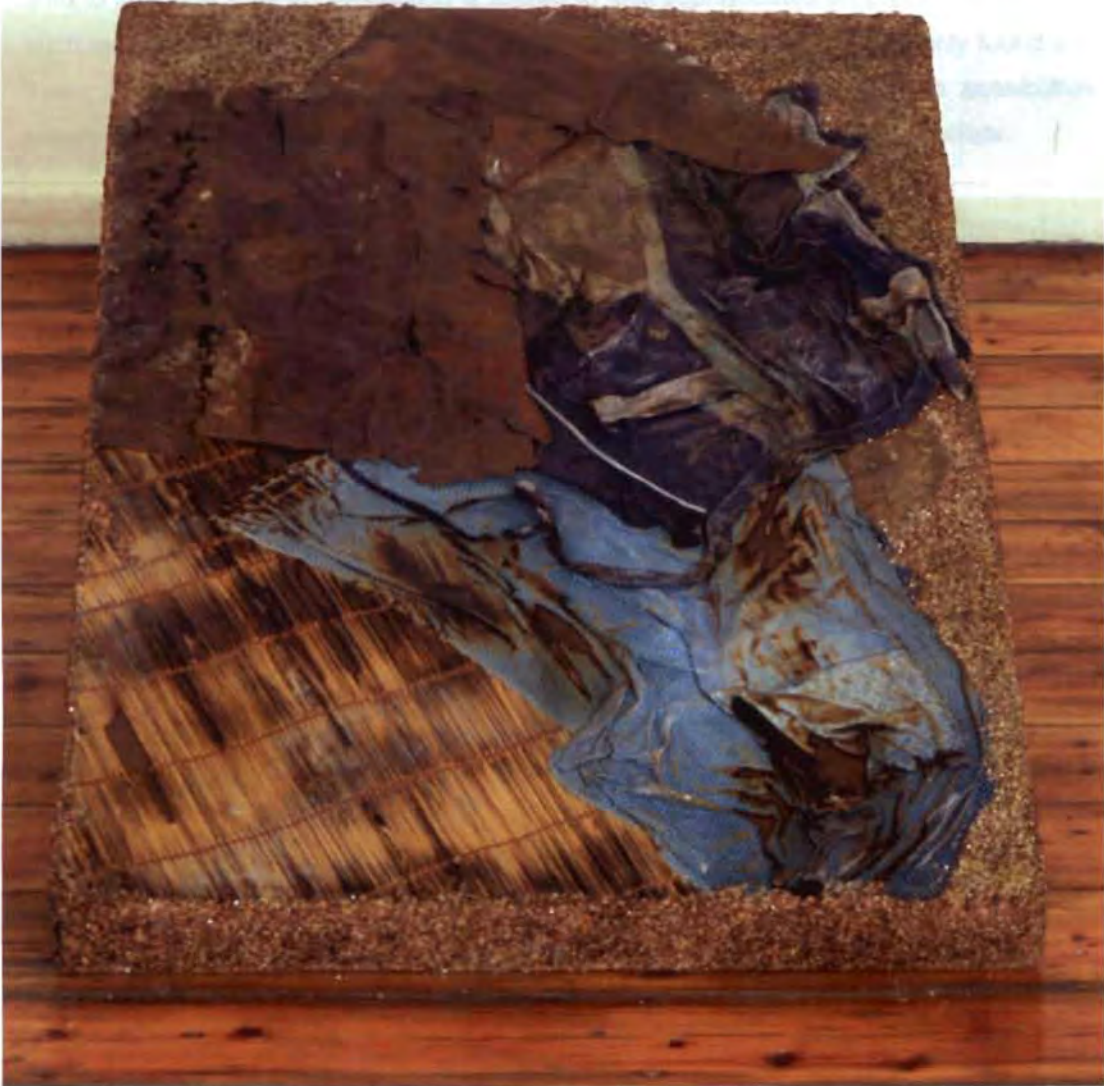


Figure 3
Pages series
Poverty
2002
Mixed media

Figure iv: Art

Contemporary art production relies on a sophisticated technology that is not accessible to all economic groups. I have discovered among black art practitioners that I come across from time to time that their art production is limited to less sophisticated art production. techniques such as lithography, digital printing, photo-etching and more are not commonly found among these artists. This notion is accompanied by the question regarding the possibilities of progress towards the establishment and recognition of these practitioners as artists.

In this piece I have used objects such as stiffy disc, piece of a painted canvas, moneybag and other material. The aim is to express the effect of economic status particularly of an artist, whose art production is controlled by economic deficiency.



Figure 4
Pages series
Art
2002
Mixed media

Figure v: Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment bears effects that most women are confronted with in their everyday lives. From personal experience it is annoying, belittling and has the potential of psychological paralysis. This attitude has no respect of age or social status. One is confronted with everyday expressions in the form of whistling men (this is normally done by males in my experience) on the street corners, and at the back of vans etc. These comments are usually about the enticing shape of the woman's body and can lead to rape.

I have filled up most of the panel with a woman's dress, symbolically placing a woman in an important and potentially influential position in the society. The dress is slightly twitched at the bottom as a way of symbolically portraying sexual harassment. Text is placed in the position of the breast as well as the position of the sex organ. The aim is to counteract the perception of women as vulnerable and defenceless when confronted with sexual abuse. Text in this piece is the voice that objects to these behaviours, screams to the attackers and exposes the perpetrator.



Figure 5
Pages series
Sexual Harassment
2002
Mixed media

Figure vi: Tradition

This piece focuses on the plight of black women as *abatshakazi* (young wives). Traditionally young wives had to serve their mothers in law until they reach a stage where they could be elevated to being *abafazi* (mature women). During these stages these women would be recognised by the clothes they wore, which clearly indicated their status within the home. The type of clothing would be; covering of the head up to the nose level with a black cloth, they would have a blanket around their breasts, a blanket over their shoulders, etc. They would wear dresses of blue and white material, or brown and white material. This would be the attire regardless of the weather. This is not only found in the rural areas but is evident in the urban areas as well. This piece problematises the process that *abatshakazi* have to go through to prove their worth and value. In an attempt to raise this point as a barrier which the society can overcome, I attached fish wire over the fabric. The fish wire is symbolic of patriarchal dominant power that can be challenged and overcome. It is fragile but appears to hold the fabric together.

The intention is to create a barrier and at the same time exposing the weakness of the barrier.



Figure 6
Pages series
Tradition
2002
Mixed media

Figure vii: Extended family

This piece addresses the issue of extended families in the Xhosa culture. It addresses the effect that extended families have on everyone concerned. It problematises as well as embraces the obligation of family relationships. In my own home I grew up with different cousins who lived with us until they were equipped to move to another level in their lives.

It is often the case in the townships, where, in a household, one family would consist of several children either from relatives or completely outside the family. This bears both positive and negative effects and consequences. Firstly, it encourages sharing among the children, which is very respected and appreciated in my culture. Secondly, due to economical reasons, children in such an environment sometimes do not and cannot pursue their envisaged careers or have their various needs fulfilled. If they do study they are often forced by the family to study a quick course so as to allow them some opportunities of employment.

The shoes in this piece is reflective of poverty. This is taken from a Xhosa expression that 'one walks next to his / her shoes.'



Figure 7
Pages series
Extended family
2002
Mixed media

Figure viii: Child labour in public hospitals

In 1999 I accompanied to hospital a very close friend of mine who was in labour. Her 36 hours of labour was spent in a company of unsupportive nurses, in a hospital that lacked sufficient equipment and service. While lying in a hospital bed still very weak, a nurse doing her regular rounds carelessly kicked the catheter that was attached to her, which led to bleeding, leaving her in severe pain. After a while newborn babies had to be delivered to their mothers, in a cold, unwelcoming hospital ward. These babies were clothed in hospital night-dresses which were open at the back, causing them to tremble with cold.

This piece laments the general procedure in public hospitals. I have in the past few years accompanied friends to different hospitals during labour. My point of discomfort is that economical status determines their treatment and levels service provided to certain class of people in our society.

This narrative is expressed by selected public or government hospital material such as; child sleep wear and blankets. This is selected for its design and for the rough texture of the fabric. The child sleep wear is placed on the woman's dress and other material used as the main focus of this piece.

The works are presented in a sequence to suggest personal narrative. The angle and the position that the works take include the viewer into their territory.

The placement of the pieces suggest an open book or pages that have been torn from their binding. The elevated position signifies the resurrection from the issues that have a potential to bury one and emphasises the gesture in the dresses, which give the illusion of a figure in motion. The movement of the 'figures' seem to reach the edge of the frame, which to me signifies first the recognition of the barrier as well as the will to transcend.



Figure 8
Pages series
Child labour in public hospitals
2002
Mixed media

b) Statistics series

There are three important areas of focus in this series: the different heights of the structures; the strength that is portrayed in the images (which visually articulate an act of transgression, resistance and border crossing); and the burnt openings.

The long structures in this series are placed slightly away from the wall in a way that does not allow access to the rear view. The vertically rectangular structures are meant to be free standing alongside each other.

This series is triggered by the statistics of black women in art institutions of higher learning as well as those, if any, that are represented in art competitions and exhibitions particularly around the Western Cape. Not assuming the non-existence of these artists, this questions the number of artists in the township environments that are not represented on the art arena. In the changing South Africa how the art world is impacted is indicative of the transforming society.



Figure 9
Statistics series
2002
Monoprint and mixed media



Figure 10
Statistics Series i
2002
Monoprint and mixed media



Figure 11
Statistics Series ii
2002
Monoprint and mixed media



Figure 12
Statistics series iii
2002
Monoprint and mixed media



Figure 13
Statistics series iv
2002
Monoprint and mixed media



Figure 14
Statistics series v
2002
Monoprint and mixed media



Figure 15
Statistics series vi
2002
Monoprint and mixed media

c) Wall series

This series employs the symbolic burning of wood as a reference to the dismantling of barriers. This is also a symbolic act towards reclaiming space and personal liberation.

The rusted metal plate has positive and negative interpretations. It signifies the interior, the state or the condition of the inner self. I associate it with the impact or the effect that domination has. The flaking off of the metal signifies the wearing off of the inner frustrations.

The works in this series are arranged in two free standing triangular formations that suggest an interior and an exterior. The panels are positioned with small gaps between them that does not allow the viewer to walk into the interior. The interior is a private space, and access to the viewer is denied. The three panels allow three gaps in each structure. Each with a different view point. The interior is the visual expression of the intangible. The welded image of a scar for instance attempts to suggest the trace of a wound, an emotional wound. The rusted steel plates signify the shedding of bitterness. The restricted interior is symbolic of my personal character, which restricts an intervention of a second person. The gap attempts to limit access to the viewer and to symbolically deny domination.

Light is placed behind the layers of Perspex. The two layers are shown through the burnt area viewed from the outer burnt side of the panel. The work is unevenly illuminated, with the intention of further restricting the viewer from gaining easy access to the text. The triangular structure allows, and to a certain extent, leads the viewer to the next panel. The illumination shifts as the viewer moves from one point to the next. Motivation is drawn from street graffiti, from walls, which I interpret as barriers that are in turn barriers in a literal sense. Lastly, I draw on personal emotions and the inner person.

In this body of work text is used on three different levels and surfaces. First, in my own handwriting which is engraved on Perspex. Secondly, it is stencilled on the wooden burnt front side of each panel. Thirdly, it is etched on the steel plates. Each text has a different value. My handwriting and wording changes, depending on the emotional status and effect of the matter being recorded. Text here is a record and sometimes a voice.

Text plays an important part of my work. In one way I interpret it in the wall series as a voice written in my personal language, Xhosa. In this series the voice is the tool or the medium that I use to communicate or contemplate the effect of the oppressive measures.

For as long as I can remember, I used to document the disturbing and frustrating experiences and personal memories. The idea at the time was not consciously to document or diarise my

personal experiences. It was more of a confidential conversation with the paper. This information could have been shared with anyone or exposed in some way, but that stood a risk of being misunderstood or misquoted, which would open wounds instead of healing them. The use of text therefore is triggered by the personal gesture of recording of personal memories. The use of text is also a strategy employed to break from imagery towards textual articulation.

My use of a stencil technique refers to the history of the stencil in political context. This technique being an 'immediate commentary' for me it is appropriate and necessary for quick communication. This is as much of a commentary as it is a response, an expression of dissatisfaction emanating from issues of domination, among other things, of sexism and racism.



Figure 16
Wall series
2002
Monoprint and mixed media



figure 17
Detail from Wall series
2002
Monoprint and mixed media



Figure 18

Outside view of Wall series i
2002

Monoprint and mixed media

Figure 19

Inside view of Wall series i
2002

Monoprint and mixed media



Figure 20
Outside view of Wall series ii
2002
Monoprint and mixed media



Figure 21
Inside view of Wall series ii
2002
Monoprint and mixed media



Figure 22
Outside view of Wall series iii
2002
Monoprint and mixed media

Figure 23
Inside view of Wall series iii
2002
Monoprint and mixed media

d) Ash bowls

Some of the experiences that I once recorded as pertinent are presently an issue of the past. I find returning to these issues an act of reliving the past and thus an inability to transcend barriers. In avoiding the state of regress, I burned the records that I once treasured. Some of these records expressed fears, bitterness and anger. They contained scars and pains that were once a part of myself. What remains from the ash serves as a reminder of what used to be. Symbolically, this is a gesture that expresses the decayed or the effects of memories that are in the process of decay but the actual memory of events still lives. For me, ash still holds unpleasant memories of the past but strongly recalls a sense of victory, transgression and liberation.

Here, ash is as symbolic as it is literal. On a literal level, I burn certain areas in my work and the residue is an evidence of the work done. The exhibition of the residue is the public display or a public declaration of a task accomplished. Ash is exhibited in bowls covered with fabric. The fabric is known as the German print.²⁰

Having once been worn, these fabrics are loaded with human experiences. Some of these were dresses were worn by personal family members. They are linked to social passages within the communities where they come from, they are also linked to political and economic history and so they are a record of these experiences.

The use of fabric in this series can be related to the works of an artist Yinka Shonibare. Born in London to Nigerian parents, Shonibare is known for his installations and tableaux, including Victorian costumes made from Dutch Wax (batik) fabrics, and multi-part paintings mounted as wall installations. He uses Dutch Wax as a prime motif for the complexities around postcolonial identity. Produced in the Netherlands and Manchester, the brightly coloured and patterned fabrics are influenced by Indonesian textile design. The influence in his work, as he claims, comes from the historical missing gaps with regards to feminism and Pop Art.

²⁰ Produced originally in Manchester, this fabric found favour with the Zulu and Xhosa people in the early 20th century. Among Xhosas, this fabric is sewn into dresses mainly for Xhosa brides. *Isishweshwe* (its Zulu name) is now manufactured in KwaZulu Natal.



Figure 24
Ash bowls
2002
Ash, fabric and sorghum



Figure 25
Detail from Bowls
2002
Ash, fabric and sorghum

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University of Cape Town

APPENDIX 1

Interview in 2 June 2003

1. *Please give me a brief background of how you are involved with schools*

I work in the WCED [Western Cape Department of Education] Directorate: Curriculum Planning. I interpret national policy, design provincial policy and monitor policy implementation and quality assurance, standards setting etc. I am a member of the national ministerial writing group for the new. NCS [National Curriculum Statement] FET [Further Education and Training] Design which will replace the current 550 SC [Senior Certificate] art and design subjects in 2006 (maybe). I was a curriculum advisor and worked extensively in black schools in Langa, Cross Roads, Gugulethu - although I am now based at Head Office and spend a lot of time in Pretoria, I keep in close contact with the Curriculum Advisors in the EMDCs [Education Management and Development Centre] and with teachers, NgeOs INSET [Non Governmental Education Organisation Inservice Training Programme] and ABET .

2. *How many black schools offer art as a subject in Cape Town*

Theoretically, all schools must offer the learning area: Arts and Culture in GET [General Education and Training] phase (Grades R - 9) This has a visual art and design component. In the FET phase - currently Senior Certificate - 550 subjects – only 02 black schools in the Western Cape officially offer art subjects:

EMDC Central: Isilimela Secondary School, Langa

EMDC South: Intshukomo Secondary School Gugulethu*

EMDC East: Luhlaza High School - phase out

NB none of the black teachers have higher qualifications than a training college diploma but Isilimela is the only black school where art is taken seriously and that is due to the energy and enthusiasm and dedication of the art teacher and her new design teacher - which has made the community and the school management realise that there is a need for Art in the school as a valued specialist SC option.

* probably being phased out - no teacher, not much commitment and no support from school management for art subjects at SC level despite (fully equipped art rooms now trashed or appropriated for technology). At Intshukomo, the Amy Beale fund murals and art development programme were never completed because all the paint and brushes got stolen. Also, the teacher never received any funding for art from the school management committee - it all went on basketballs which was considered more important!

3. How do you foresee the future of art in black schools

In 1973 there were only 3 high schools offering the ex DET SC art subjects.

in 2003 there are only 2 high schools - this is nothing short of tragic. Re-phrase to "the future of black schools" and then you might have a future for art in black schools - good management, dedicated well trained and well paid teachers and a supportive, discerning school community that values art education as developmental - both socially and emotionally, provides a basic understanding of art history and contemporary art as contextual cultural studies and aesthetics – and preparation for vocational or professional studies in art and design careers

4. Can you share some of the difficulties that you come across from time to time that hinders progress in black schools. These problems might be from the WCED side or from the schools that you work with.

The DoNE and WCED right sizing policy and teacher: learner ratios for post provisioning were real blows for all art teachers - non essential subjects such as art, music, phys ed and guidance were the first to get the chop. and as the remaining art teachers left their schools (to move on or retire or take the package) their permanent WCED posts were allocated to the more essential subjects - maths science - and new art teachers could only get contract posts - no government subsidies pensions or med aid etc.. and their salary was paid by the school management committees – so if you have poor parents who don't pay school fees you are not going to offer the luxury of an art teacher at your school - let alone the perceived expenses of art as a subject

In the GET phase there are very few black teachers with the capacity or confidence to teach art - and we lose out to music and choirs and drama even dance - with which generalist teachers are more familiar through their own education and their own teacher training. Art has never been regarded as a compulsory subject for qualifying as a primary diploma teacher. In addition school principals and management committees do not want to "waste" precious resources on art materials - and teachers do not know how to access cheap materials and work with waste and scrap. As a consequence, while the new GET curriculum and the introduction of the RNCS Grades R-3 in 2004 provides the space for art to be taught in Arts and Culture, until the HEIs [Higher Education Institutions] start to train teachers and until national government provides bursaries, and until teaching becomes a respected and worthwhile profession again, we are going to struggle with decent education in schools let alone art education. Young black men and women do not see any sort of career in teaching - they are being head hunted by industry and the other more glamorous professions - better status better pay better working conditions - who can blame them!

There is no governmental lobby group to support art education unlike maths science and technology - and history - until we get the ear of Kader Asmal or his successor/s - we will flounder - there's always money for the sciences but none for the arts.

In the FET phase there's no support from the fine arts faculties of universities - they are not interested in training high school teachers and regard art education in high schools as a waste of time - they would rather have an "untrained learner than have to undo the damage done by art teachers in schools" (quote) and there is no interest therefore in training teachers. Without art teachers art will die in black schools in particular - no role models .. no advocacy ...no interaction with university departments to develop teaching materials and INSET skills programmes to enrich teachers (as the science and language faculties are doing with great success) However, in the technikons there's great interest in training design teachers ... and planning is progressing in this regard -many young black learners want to study design subjects - see them as a career option - and in the suburban ex model C schools where middle class black youngsters are being educated or in the urban model C schools where working class youngsters are being bussed in - art and design are in great demand - but we haven't got enough teachers – black or white !!! also same pattern in some of our WCED art centres

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