

POSTCOLONIAL MASQUERADING:

**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF MASQUERADING STRATEGIES IN THE ARTWORKS OF
CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN VISUAL ARTISTS ANTON KANNEMEYER, TRACEY ROSE,
MARY SIBANDE, SENZENI MARASELA AND NANDIPHA MNTAMBO**

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PhD in Art

2014

DECLARATION

I declare and undertake that all material presented for examination is my own work and has not been written for me, in whole or in part, by any other person(s). I also undertake that any quotation or paraphrase from the published or unpublished work of another person has been duly acknowledged in the work which I present for examination.

Signed:

Date:

DEDICATION

For Gule, Asfour and myself

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission and Canon Collins Trust for the Commonwealth scholarship that allowed me three years of uninterrupted study time. Sandy Balfour, you're an amazing person and part of the wonderful memories we have of London. My sincere thanks for copy-editing this thesis. Thanks to the National Arts Council of South Africa for funding towards this PhD.

Thank you to my supervisor, Andrea Phillips, for challenging my thoughts, for encouraging me, and efficiently dealing with all scholarship requirements.

My partner Fouad Asfour – editor, uncredited camera-man, researcher, chef, counsellor, comedian. My sojourn to London was made all the better for having him share it with me.

Thank you to artists Ayana Vellisia Jackson, Mary Sibande, Senzeni Marasela, Nandipha Mntambo and Tracey Rose for giving me time out of their hectic schedules in different parts of the world and answering my questions generously.

I am grateful to the written contributors of my artist's catalogue: Fouad for layout of the catalogue as well, Peace Kiguwa (who directed me to articles on Critical Whiteness Studies), Nicola Lauré al-Samarai, Yvette Greslé and, especially Betty Govinden, the woman who introduced me to black feminism, and still engages and challenges my thoughts around it.

Khwezi Gule, my friend, who entertained many long discussions about these issues for many years prior to this degree. I salute his courage in speaking out about racially problematic representations when it would have been far more beneficial for him not to. Respect. Joo Yeon Park, fellow student and friend throughout these three years. She helped me navigate Goldsmiths when I was a fish-out-of-water and then still stuck with me when I chose to remain one. To call such a talented artist my friend is also an honour. Dina Ligaga, beloved friend, who directed me to Hutcheon's work on parody and then read a draft of this thesis despite her own hectic life. Grace Musila, a sister in struggle and intellectual pursuits, who always lives up to her name. Brima van Niekerk, Dee Marco and Andre van Niekerk for being awesome friends and

reading drafts of this thesis at critical points. Special thanks to Seun Olatoye for her friendship, laughter, and proofreading of my work for my upgrade. My radical feminist friend, Akanksha Mehta, for returning books for me and allowing me to hijack her to watch my videos. Sabitha TP who gave me probably the most helpful crit of my practical work early on in this PhD, which allowed me insight into my own work when I was in desperate need of it. I would also like to thank Katty, Dyi, Chinedu, Sarah, Terese and Yvette for their discussions on my work and for sharing their own experiences with me.

Onthatile Modise, Lebohang Kganye, Motlabana Monnakgotla, Jerry Gaegane and Nelmarie du Preez for their time and laughter shooting *No Place*. Nella also assisted me with much of my video editing initially and helped me get started on doing my own. She also graciously proofread my work for the upgrade.

Sara Ahmed whose scholarship on 'being the problem' and 'the killjoy' made a huge difference to me psychically and emotionally. Her words were balm to my soul and I want to thank her for the courage of her scholarship. She and John Cussans' input at my upgrade were invaluable.

Denis-Constant Martin, a generous intellectual, who sent me a copy of his book on the Cape Town Minstrel Carnival when I couldn't obtain one. The wonderful Katarina Pierre, Director of the Bildmuseet, who allowed me full access to the retrospective exhibition of Tracey Rose in 2011. Miss PP gave us a place to stay in mid-2012 when we in a state of unhomeliness – it was without doubt the most generous offer that anyone has ever made to us.

Goldsmiths library staff that was always extremely helpful in every regard. A nod to the Goldsmiths photography lab and woodwork workshop (Mic) who gave much needed technical assistance and advice.

Goodenough College, my home for two years in central London – every minute was special. A special thanks to Caroline Persaud and Mandy Backhouse for all their help in assisting us with our living arrangements and not forcing us to move at critical junctures during this PhD process.

Last, but not least, my family who have never understood what I do but have never allowed this to stop them from giving me unconditional support and love. My strength, my voice and my ability to see things in a different way come from my parents.

To my God and my saviour Jesus Christ, the beginning and end of my strength and my wisdom, I give praise, honour, glory and eternal thanks for all the people you have put in my path and the strength to complete this dream.

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the masquerading strategies employed in the artworks of contemporary South African visual artists Anton Kannemeyer, Tracey Rose, Senzeni Marasela, Mary Sibande and Nandipha Mntambo. Masquerading, in this context, refers to the donning of costumes, make-up and the use of props, in staging one's own body before the camera lens. This study examines contemporary debates in South Africa around such visual art masquerading performances which have questioned notions of identity, autobiography and memory. The first chapter plots the reactivation of blackface masquerades in artwork by young White South African artists, and examines the mechanisms of parodic humour and joke-work in accessing inhibited pleasure through racial stereotypes. The second chapter explores psychoanalytic (Western, black and African), feminist and postcolonial theories on masquerading, and looks at the concepts of mimicry, masking, repetition, and violence as markers of this terrain. The works of Frantz Fanon and Homi K. Bhabha are used to explore racial power relations, but also the possibilities of masquerading as subversive of authorised knowledge in postcolonial contexts. Bhabha's ideas of mimicry-as-mockery, hybridity and ambivalence, as well as black feminist ideas of creative theorisation, are used to frame the masquerading strategies of the four South African women-of-colour artists under discussion in the third chapter, which demonstrates how Rose, Marasela, Sibande and Mntambo engage masquerade as an analytic tool to centralise women-of-colour narratives and personal politicisation as starting points of theorisation. This research attempts to evidence the concept of 'postcolonial masquerading' as an important critical aesthetic tool in black feminist and decolonialising discourses in postcolonial societies. My own practical video engagements employ postcolonial masquerading to interrogate my identity as a South African Indian woman visual artist, actively exploring strategies of mimicry, masking, repetition and ambivalence as tools to voice my subjective position and history framed by apartheid, post-apartheid and postcoloniality.

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INTRODUCTION

We are aware of those who are driven by hope, the supposed victors, and those who are driven by fear, the supposed losers. The danger is that a situation such as this can breed the most debilitating ambiguity in which we oscillate between hope and despair with a frequency that induces underfined bitterness and cynicism. This situation of ambiguity may very well suggest that what we see is a chaotic play of masks: the masks of conciliation or reconciliation whose colourfulness may suggest a fragile essence, the absence of an underlying form. One such mask is the expression 'the new South Africa'. ... Who, anyway, invented the phrase? Was it the anxious 'defeated' or the hopeful 'victors'? Whatever the case might be, at the end of the day we still ask: what exactly is behind each mask? (Ndebele, 1994, p.152)

In 2006, I wrote an opinion piece in an art magazine critiquing what I perceived to be a lack of racial transformation in visual arts in South Africa (SA) (Khan, 2006). The article expressed the opinion that since 1994 transformation seemed to have halted at the point of White women replacing White men in positions of power (South Africa still officially employs racial categories of 'White', 'Black', 'Coloured' and 'Indian').¹ It also questions assumptions that White women understand various oppressions, such as race-class domination, because they have experience of sexism. To put it mildly, I was unprepared for the political fall-out that ensued that changed the course of my life and artistic trajectory making me a pariah in the local art world (this included being humiliated for my racial views at scholarship interviews; struggling to get lecturing opportunities despite having two Masters degrees in Fine Arts and being forced to work as a personal assistant; having emails sent to my White employer warning her about the 'troublemaker' I was; never getting listings of my exhibitions in newspapers and painfully, losing

¹ This research utilises these official South African racial categories as established in apartheid and their continued usage post-apartheid: 'White' (persons of white European descent), 'Black' (local indigenous Black groups), 'Coloured' (persons of mixed race and descendants of Malaya/Indian/Mozambican slaves and prisoners), 'Indian' (persons of South Asian descent that arrived as slaves in Cape Town in the 17th century and, in the second half of the 19th century, first as British indentured labourers and then as merchants), 'Asian' (at one time it included Indian and Chinese but later primarily addressed people of Chinese descent, as well as 'new' post-democracy Chinese, Pakistani, Indian and Sri Lankan migrants). Where the term 'black' (lower case 'b') is used, it is used in preference of 'non-white' and includes Black, Coloured and Indian South Africans also grouped under the term 'previously disadvantaged' (which recently constitutionally includes Chinese South Africans), as does the term 'people-of-colour'. This term is also used to denote identification with blackness as a political self-affirmative project and stance. Generally, quotes and discussions follow the capitalisation and usage of specific authors in their contexts with regard to racial terms such as 'white', 'black' or 'coloured', as well as the US/UK spelling employed by authors when quoting them.

many White friends).² Although I had previously flirted with masquerading as an aesthetic strategy, during this professionally and personally excruciating time between 2006 and 2008, performative masquerading became a vehicle for me explicitly to situate myself in my artwork, and to express concerns over how I felt issues of race, class, gender, religion and education affected me privately as an individual and also publically as a citizen of this new democracy. Masquerading became the critical methodology and visual language which allowed me to assert strongly, sometimes vengefully, my voice and body back into the South African visual arts field, refusing the silencing and invisibilisation³ that I felt forced upon me. Since then, masquerade has become an active research interest, something that I am ambivalent about in terms of the problems I perceive with its uncritical aesthetic usage, but which fascinates me in its popularity with visual artists in South Africa and internationally.⁴ This ambiguity informs this written inquiry.

Although masquerade is proliferous and there are various theoreticians who discuss it, it is often mentioned too briefly and there are few in-depth studies of visual arts masquerading. This practice-based PhD represents my attempt to speak as a subject through my writing and practice on the concept of visual arts performative masquerading, interrogating my own personal struggles with identity and place. It also endeavours to plot out a terrain for masquerading as a postcolonial critical tool capable of subverting dominant social and knowledge constructions in South Africa's post-apartheid context, by extending this discussion to the works of five South African visual artists. In this thesis, I read through the masquerading practices of contemporary South African artists Anton Kannemeyer, Tracey Rose, Senzeni Marasela, Nandipha Mntambo and Mary Sibande, and try to demonstrate how such critical analyses reveal vibrant interdisciplinary discourses built around engaging creative artworks in theorisation in postcolonial societies. The artists chosen for this research are simply based on a long-standing interest in (or concern with) their visual vocabularies. The critical analysis of their imagery could just as well be extended to other South African visual arts masquerades, but

² See Khan (2011) for an explication of this 'fall-out'.

³ This thesis uses the word 'invisibilisation' to mark a political process of 'being made invisible' – not simply a condition of 'being invisible', but where one is actively rendered invisible by political processes of exclusion and silencing.

⁴ International artists who predominantly use masquerading in their works include Cindy Sherman, Yasumasa Morimura, Lorna Simpson, Rotimi Fani-Kayode, Yinka Shonibare, Janieta Eyre, Steven Cohen, Samuel Fosso, Gillian Wearing, Zanele Muholi, Shigeyuki Kihara, Tracey Moffat, Kimiko Yoshida, Nick Cave, Kudzanai Chiruai, Oreet Ashery, Kiluanji Kia Henda. See Warr (2000/2012) and Bright (2010).

could also relate to such practices in other post-colonial contexts. This thesis employs the terms 'post-colonial' and 'postcolonial' – the former is meant to refer to a historico-political period after the formal end of colonisation in various countries, whereas the latter refers to 'postcolonialism' as a conceptual framework that developed out of the scholarship that came to be known as postcolonial studies, which examines the historical, economic, political, social and cultural dimensions of colonialism, as well as new forms of cultural and economic imperialism (neo-colonialisms). Postcolonial studies are often inter-disciplinary in their approach to examining power relations between the dominant and the dominated. In this study, the term 'post-colonial' is used in relation to South Africa to signify the process of historical, socio-political and economic redress 'after colonialism', which before the end of apartheid in the 1994, was not subject to a process of European de-colonisation (the question of when South Africa became 'post-colonial' remains contestable).

Various ideas of 'post-coloniality' and 'postcolonialism' are grappled with in the body of artwork produced as part of this practice-based PhD as I engage my own post-colonial 'Indo-African', multicultural, diasporic space in South Africa, but also my sojourn abroad in the former British Empire, as I centralise my body-of-colour, gaze and 'truths' in these various inquiries. I attempt to visualise and harness various psychoanalytic, Cultural Studies, postcolonial, decolonial, race and black/African feminist perspectives as they theorise bodies-of-colour and creative work, and this cross-disciplinary engagement represents the manner in which I approach them as a visual artist, not as distinct fields, but rather as a gleaner of perspectives which help me to 'read through' artworks. Furthermore, I do not see a separation between theory and practice – each actively feeds the other in a non-linear, self-reflective process, and I hope this is evident in what I consider two interrelated manifestations of my role as a creative-intellectual. My practical investigations allow me to move from object to subject through performative masquerading, grafting narratives that are sometimes angry, often distanced and didactic, sometimes frivolous, to display fictional subjectivities that speak of a life under apartheid, and now post-apartheid, that one doesn't often encounter in official South African narratives: a life of an underclass-middleclass 'wannabe' South African Indian, attempting to (re)locate myself as a contemporary artist both in South Africa, and in the larger contemporary art field. This thesis and the artworks produced represent my continued efforts to back talk, talk back, talk through, and talking out the concept of masquerade as a strategy for creative critical inquiry and (self) reflection.

Visual Arts Masquerading in South Africa

Masquerading and performance are immense topics with long historical and cultural variants the world over: from West African religious masquerades, European carnivals and masking balls, to 'competitive' carnivals in Brazil, Trinidad and Cape Town, and TV 'reality shows'. These manifestations of masquerading are largely outside the scope of this thesis, but are occasionally drawn on when their strategies have intersected with certain visual arts strategies.

Masquerading is defined in this thesis as the donning of costumes and make-up by visual artists, along with the use of props, to enact and stage characters, often engaging their own bodies in front of a digital video or still camera lens. But, as the first chapter demonstrates, masquerade can also be explored with regard to more traditional media, such as drawing and painting. Visual arts masquerade has many manifestations in South Africa, but I am particularly interested in the various ways it has played out in evidencing the political imaginations of White cultural producers, as well as women-of-colour visual artists, with whom I share many concerns.⁵ These visuals have, at times, prompted wider South African public discourse on identity and visual representation and some examples are drawn on here.

So strong has this artistic impulse to performative interrogations of the body been since 1994, that art historian RoseLee Goldberg, in her 2011 update of her 1979 book *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, inserted a short section, at the end of her discussion, on contemporary South African performance art in the new century, which featured quite a few visual arts masqueradings. This phenomenon can also be witnessed in South Africa's premier art awards, the annual Standard Bank Young Artist Award, which has among its recipients over the last ten years, nine awardees whose practices include performative masquerading. Two of these artists, Mary Sibande and Nandipha Mntambo, are discussed in this thesis.⁶ Internationally, there have been a number of exhibitions focusing on the resurgence of masquerading practices in postcolonial spaces including *A Fiction of Authenticity: Contemporary African Art Abroad* (2003) at the Contemporary Art Museum in St Louis, USA; *Masquerade: Representation and the Self in Contemporary Art* (2006) at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, Australia;

⁵ Many South African women-of-colour artists use masquerading in their works, e.g. Berni Searle, Tracey Rose, Zanele Muholi, Nandipha Mntambo, Mary Sibande, Nontsikelelo Veleko, Donna Kukuma, Nomusa Makhubu, Gabrielle Goliath and Lebohang Kganye.

⁶ These past masquerading winners include: Hasan and Husain Essop (2014), Mary Sibande (2013), Nandipha Mntambo (2011), Michael McGarry (2010), Nicholas Hlobo (2009), Lolo Veleko (2008), Churchill Madikida (2006), Kathryn Smith (2004) and Berni Searle (2003).

Undercover: Performing and Transforming Black Female Identities (2009) at the Spellman College Museum of Fine Art, Atlanta, USA; *Beauty and Pleasure in South African Contemporary Art* (2009), Stenersen Museum, Oslo, Norway; *Life Less Ordinary: Performance and Display in South African Art* (2009), Djanogly Art Gallery, Nottingham, England; *Disidentification* (2010) at Göteborgs Konsthall, Sweden; *Tracey Rose – Waiting for God* (2011), Bildmuseet, Umeå, Sweden; *Masquerade* (2014), New Photo Alliance, New Orleans, USA; and *The Divine Comedy* (2014), Museum für Moderne Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Germany. There are many more international group exhibitions which include the masquerading artworks of younger South African and African artists, and there is clearly a captivation with seeing black/African bodies on display, contesting the body and identity.

The body, as the physical containment of the ideological, the fantastical, the past, the present, the future, space, has, since the 1960s in Western arts, been actively deconstructed in what became known as ‘performance art’, ‘body art’ and ‘live art’.⁷ The term ‘performance art’ can refer to a range of performance practices such as live performance (or the documentation thereof), still photographs or video, and such performative practice can be traced to the early 1900s, and found across artistic disciplines. ‘Body art’ can be used to refer to the resurgence of the use of bodies as sites of interrogation by artists (in particular their own), which became a major concern from the 1960s onwards in art practices around the world. Interwoven but not always harmonious, these artistic practices provided extensive critiques of the coded body. The body has also been used to challenge staid notions of modernist art by introducing process-orientated temporality and ephemerality through live performance (Fusco, 1995, p.160). Since the 70s, body art has been harnessed internationally by a number of ‘Other’ groups (feminists, people-of-colour) to reveal constructions of colonial-modernist differences subsumed under categories of race, gender, class, nationality, religion, ethnicity, education, sexuality (Fusco, 1995; Hassan, 2000/2001). Artist Coco Fusco (1995, p.174) finds that performance art has drawn many ‘excluded’ persons because it presents “a stage for the presentation of cultural and sexual difference”, that it is revealing of “the unconscious, both individual and collective”, and that its multiple perceptions and unpredictability “is as much concerned with what we can control about our identities as what we cannot”. The body as a site of interrogation, therefore, allows

⁷ ‘Live art’ is used to denote artistic body performances that are staged for a live audience. Records of them may exist, but sometimes only in limited documentation and oral testimony. See Jones and Heathfield (2012), Goldberg (1979/2011), Jones (1997-8/2012) and Warr (2000/2012). See Jones and Heathfield (2012), Goldberg (1979/2011), Jones (1997-8/2012), Warr (2000/2012) and Ugwu (1995).

for layers of social signification to be decoded. In the 80s and 90s, many artists engaged critical race, black/Afrocentric feminist and postcolonial theories, amid the turn to discourses on plurality, multiculturalism, hybridity and migration (as well as sexuality and Aids).

The 1990s witnessed the end of apartheid in South Africa. The breakdown of apartheid state control saw artists using their bodies as sites of critique in unprecedented ways. Performance art entered the South African visual arts gallery as a kind of tour de force. The Black-African body as a motif of ethnographic research, but also autobiographical witnessing, became a strong trend in South African narrativisation, as personal testimonies gave more individual and textured accounts of life under apartheid, and, as will be seen throughout this thesis, increasingly often via masquerading. This performative playing reflects the many spaces this body inhabits, both physically in the space(s) of post-apartheid, post-colonial South Africa, Africa, and of an increasingly globalised, technologized world, but also the various imaginations that attend representations of black/African bodies. It is within these multiple spaces that I seek to theorise this idea of a postcolonial masquerading as a subversive strategy able to reveal various social scripts.

Before the concept of a 'postcolonial masquerade' can be proposed as a creative tool though, it is imperative to introduce readers to the importance of identity struggles in post-apartheid South Africa, and how significant processes of enunciation, naming and subjectivity are to people-of-colour who have been oppressed for centuries. The rest of this introduction will outline the need for a decolonisation of Western aesthetics in post-colonial contexts, while the final section will expound on the concept of 'postcolonial masquerading' as such a possible decolonising creative strategy.

Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa

What we've learned about the theory of enunciation is that there's no enunciation without positionality. You have to position yourself *somewhere* in order to say anything at all (Hall, 1989/1991, p.18).

When Cultural Studies theorist Stuart Hall spoke these words in a lecture in 1989, apartheid was still entrenched in South Africa, a state of emergency having been declared in successive years, allowing the apartheid government to 'crack down' on all kinds of political activity, detaining

people as it pleased, while instituting a black-out on international media coverage of events in South Africa. Two years later when Hall's lecture was published, apartheid was, unbelievably, in its death throes, with the unbanning of all anti-apartheid political parties in South Africa, the release of Nelson Mandela and many political prisoners and negotiations underway for a transition to a one-person-one-vote democracy. The speed with which South Africa would go from a violently legislated racially oppressive country in 1989, to a democracy with one of the most progressive constitutions in the world less than five years later is remarkable, even for those who have lived through these times. 1994 ushered in a dispensation in which South Africa would be in quite a rush to reconstitute itself and reflect its diverse heritage and complex history. Hall's words, on the need for people to negotiate their identity and find a position for themselves from which to speak, embody what has become a preoccupation in various South African representational media.

With the democratic vote cast on the 27th of April 1994, already twenty years ago as I finalise this thesis, apartheid – what philosopher Jacques Derrida (1983, p.291) in his article 'Racism's Last Word' called "racism par excellence, the most racist of racisms" – ceased to exist, erasing its host of draconian laws, its monolithic colonial-modernist ideas and its false unchanging narratives of who we, as South Africans, were and pushing South Africa finally into a period of post-coloniality, where political (not economic) power was ceded to the local black majority. The legacy of colonialism and apartheid racism, however, continues to stain the country, especially in the way the segregationist language of apartheid legislation filters down to all levels of South African society, in everyday language and into the way we identify ourselves. A major part of post-apartheid discourse has been re-defining what it signifies to be South African, what our identities signify in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and nationalism, at the same time that the integrity of 'race' as an actual constituent of identity remains a basic ideological tenet. Sociologist Deborah Posel (2001, p.62) has noted that the fundamentalism of racial categories (capitalised 'White', 'Black', 'Indian' and 'Coloured'), as outlined in the South African apartheid Population Registration Act, has not been contested much as race is "widely normalised and naturalised in the experiences of apartheid subjects".⁸ The post-1994 rhetoric is, therefore, not based on questioning the falsity of the category of 'race', but rather on an acceptance of racial fundamentalism, ethnic differences and gender as foundations of identity

⁸ See also Christiansë (2003)

(lower case 'black' is preferred as a more affirmative term rather than 'non-white'; to denote previously disadvantaged racial groups, i.e. Black, Indian, Coloured and Chinese designated for affirmative action; and also as a politically activated identity).

Identity, as defined by cultural theorist Efrat Tseëlon (2001, p.26), is "an organising structure around which notions of 'self' (as a legal, moral and motivational category) and 'other' are constructed ... a way of understanding the interplay between our subjective experience and the cultural historical settings in which it is formed." It is a process which reveals social inclusions and exclusions. Hall (1989/1991, p.16) reminds us that defining Self/Other relations is a coupled process: "And there is no identity that is without the dialogic relationship to the Other. The Other is not outside, but also inside the Self ... Identity is also the relationship of the Other to oneself." Tseëlon (2001, p.3, 26) believes that psychoanalytically, identity is an 'unconscious fantasy' of a unitary, stable identification and wholeness which covers the divisiveness of projections of Self and Other – a performative masking in which performativity *becomes* identity. This relationship is one structured by language and the process of enunciation. Derrida (1983, p.292) reminds us that there would be

... no racism without a language. The point is not that acts of racial violence are only words but rather that they have to have a word. Even though it offers the excuse of blood, color, birth – or, rather, because it uses this naturalist and sometimes creationist discourse – racism always betrays the perversion of a man, the "talking animal." It institutes, declares, writes, inscribes, prescribes.

Language represents, it gives us 're-presentations' of ourselves, each other and society, and has, fundamentally, been structured by a language of European colonial-modernist racism and discrimination. One sees the perversity of such enunciative power in various European colonial projects in categorising, classifying and naming their colonised subjects in relation to their own worldview, and feeding these views of biological and white cultural supremacy as naturalised knowledge to both Europe and their empires⁹ – a condition of coloniality which Argentine semiotician Walter Mignolo argues continues in post-colonised societies.¹⁰ Mignolo distinguishes between the terms 'colonialism', which refers to the historical episodes of colonialism and modernity that resulted in the political, economic and social colonisation of different countries by Western nations, and 'coloniality', which is rather the manifestation of an

⁹ Abrahams, 1997, p.37-38

¹⁰ See Mignolo and Vázquez (2013) and Gaztambide-Fernández (2014)

imperialist matrix of power which continues today and does not need actual nation-state colonisation to exist (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014, p.197).¹¹ Culturally imperialistic language increasingly dominates representations in today's globalised mediatised world.

Thus, Hall (1989/1991, p.16) states, the struggle *with* identity is also a struggle *over* representation, "Identity is within discourse, within representation", it is "that which is narrated in one's own self" (Hall, 1997, p.49). Identity, therefore, is a structured "narrative of the self", the narration of which becomes constitutive (ibid). For feminist scholar bell hooks (1989, p.42, 109),¹² identity is the naming and defining of one's reality and history, which has been denied many exploited and oppressed people in the world through colonisation, racism or sexist oppression, which has "stripped us of our identity, devalued our language, culture, appearance". The ability to name one's reality, to re-name oneself and acknowledge a multiplicity of names is, therefore, an act of revolution and self-empowerment (ibid: 66). Sociologist Himani Bannerji (1995, p. 9-10) reminds us that naming is a significant process, not just for the singular 'I', but for the plural 'I'¹³ as well: "Those who dismiss so disdainfully all projects of self-naming and self-empowerment as 'identity politics' have not needed to affirm themselves through the creative strength that comes from finding missing parts of one's self in experiences and histories similar to others". Thus, naming is not simply an individual process, but locates one as part of a collective redefinition.

Such enunciative acts perform a wilful 'back talk' or a 'talking back'. hooks uses this colloquial African-American phrase but it is also one that I grew up with, where 'back talk' signified rebelliousness or poor manners, speaking when one should not (especially as a child in the company of adults). "To speak then when one was not spoken to was a courageous act – an act of risk and daring" (hooks, 1989, p.5). That unasked-for voice ruptures the dominance of the authorised speaker, moves it away from the official authorised speech. In *The Promise of Happiness* (2010a) and *Willful Subjects* (2014), black feminist Sara Ahmed talks of the 'will-ful' subject as being related to the feminist killjoy, i.e., the feminist 'trouble-making' sister who does not sit at the feminist table with happiness, whose racialized/queer body brings tension to otherwise seemingly homogenous, happy settings (2010a, p.65). Ahmed uses the spelling

¹¹ Mignolo says that the concept of 'coloniality' was introduced by Latin American scholar Anibal Quijano in the 90s who "recast decoloniality in terms of delinking from coloniality, or the colonial matrix of power" (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014, p.208).

¹² 'bell hooks' is the writing name adopted by African-American feminist Gloria Watkins.

¹³ These terms are borrowed from Trinh T. Minh-ha (1991, p.191-192).

‘willful’ to emphasise the agency of the subject’s ‘will’ – having too much will (persistence), not enough will, or the wrong kind of will challenges authorities marked with keeping that will in accordance with acceptable order (Ahmed, 2014, p.3). By placing the onus of ‘happiness’ and accordance on the individual will of a subject, rather than in terms of any larger structural problems, the subject is viewed as embodying wilfulness and that will is made wrong in its non-conformity. The subject then becomes the problem (ibid: 7). Ahmed shows, however, that wilfulness can be used as a theoretical strategy, were one can say ‘no’ to authority and canonisation, and can also read willfully in disciplines one is not a specialist in, to generate other kinds of ‘readings’ and knowledges (ibid: 15).

‘Coming to voice’ and a critical wilfulness can therefore be acts of resistance, transforming us into subjects through our speech (ibid: 12). In post-apartheid South Africa, such agency is a crucial task in acknowledging the many different cultures and histories which were suppressed or rendered insignificant by colonialism and apartheid, and cultural producers in all fields are tasked with recuperating not just personal histories, but the histories of their communities. Mignolo advocates for scholars and producers to theorise out of their “own geo-corporal cultural and material conditions”,¹⁴ as this should, arguably, reflect complex, contradictory and ambivalent situations that characterise post-colonial spaces (Bhabha, 1994; Mbembe, 2001; Adesokan, 2011). This task can be challenging for cultural producers, both positively and negatively.

Post-colonial Spaces and Decolonial Aesthetics

Postcolonial scholar Akin Adesokan, in his book *Postcolonial Artists and Global Aesthetics* (2011), finds that African postcolonial artists are required to speak not only about their societies, but also for their societies. In doing so, they are required to play the role of insider-outsider, but also to act as ‘commissioned agents’,¹⁵ which inevitably brings about intellectual tensions in conveying the ‘deterritorialized rule of Empire’ and ‘contemporary manifestations of colonial modernity’. He examines a range of postcolonial cultural productions and identifies a ‘postcolonial aesthetics’ as the attempt by postcolonial artists-intellectuals to “politicize

¹⁴ Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014, p.205

¹⁵ Adekosan (2011: 4) defines a ‘commissioned agent’ as ‘a mediator of commercial ideas’ who engages representation through acts of commission.

aesthetics, using the standards by which the value of artistic representations is judged to expose relationships between powerlessness and power, including the power to advance such forms of representation". This evidences creative practice as a Bourdieusian 'field' of social terrains of contested power relations between various agents. For sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986/1993, p.163) a field "is an independent social universe with its own laws of functioning, its specific relations of force, its dominants and its dominated", which has its own governing institutions and determining agents, which seek to control, invest and change these fields (education field, political field, cultural field, etc.). Bourdieu also develops the idea of 'habitus', which are 'structuring structures' which generate, regulate, and "organise practices and representations", but in individuals are a set of 'dispositions' which exposes inculcated perceptions, actions, judgements in agentic action which govern various tastes and understandings (Johnson, 1993, p.5.). Postcolonial aesthetics therefore, seeks to expose the politics that govern cultural aesthetics and, Adesokan argues, determines which groups have power of representation over post-colonial people. The understanding that cultural representation is a political terrain and weapon, acknowledges the need for a deconstruction of its values and aesthetics, but also a decolonisation of cultural manifestations.

There is a growing body of scholarship which calls for cultural decolonisation both in postcolonial and in Western contexts themselves.¹⁶ Mignolo understands coloniality as a "process of inventing identifications" and a condition that describes "the hidden process of erasure, devaluation, and disavowing of certain human beings, ways of thinking, ways of living, and of doing in the world" (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014, p.198). Within this framework of coloniality, Mignolo locates terms such as 'representation' and 'aesthetics' as a series of enunciations which emanate from Western local, historically-located discourses, but which purport to a 'universalism'. 'Representation', in Western colonial-modernity, becomes 'representative' of Other cultures/peoples, fixing them as 'knowable', static subjects and counter-points to Western civilisation.¹⁷ Similarly, 'aesthetics' emerged in Western thinking via the philosophical works of German thinkers Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten and Immanuel Kant on Western European ideals of beauty and the sublime, where specialist skill is attributed to the

¹⁶ See Mignolo and Vázquez (2013) for a history chronicling the development of the concept of 'decolonial aesthesis' since 2003, coined by Columbian scholar Adolfo Albán Achinte, among a collective of scholars from South America, the Caribbean and the United States of America. See also the scholarship of Alanna Lockward and Rolando Vázquez.

¹⁷ See Edward Said's work *Orientalism* (1978/2003) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1994).

individual artistic genius (ibid: 200). Mignolo demonstrates how the Greek word 'aesthesis', which highlighted the importance of the senses and emotions, and, which was taken up by Baumgarten in the mid-18th century to validate these as equally important modes in discourses on rationality and reason, changed in Kant's 1767 work *Observations on the Beautiful and the Sublime*. According to Mignolo and Vásquez (2013, p.2) the idea of modern aesthetics emerged as:

... the regulator of the global capability to "sense" the beautiful and the sublime. In this way, aesthetics colonized aesthesis in two directions: in time, it established the standards in and from the European present and, in space, it was projected to the entire population of the planet.

Mignolo identifies the term 'aesthetics' with Kantian influenced colonial-modernist rationality discourses, which established it as a separate branch of Western philosophy (the separation of rational epistemology, aesthetics and ethics).

Mignolo believes that processes of decoloniality, firstly, need "to be articulated as 'de-identification' and 're-identification,' which means it is a process of delinking" (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014, p.198) from European universalisms. This entails sometimes rejecting certain terms for others – for instance, he rejects 'representation' for 'enunciation' as he believes that enunciation reflects that it is a historically constituted concept by "certain actors, languages, and categories of thoughts, beliefs, and sensing" (ibid: 198-199), and can thus be interrogated and contested. Furthermore, Mignolo proposes the need for the term 'aesthesis', which reflects a human creative impulse that exists in all cultures and is produced in innumerable forms.

Mignolo (ibid: 201) further defines 'decolonial aesthesis' as a politicisation of contemporary arts which interrogates artistic practices and recognises that there are "a plurality of ways to relate to the world of the sensible that have been silenced". An acknowledgment of the devaluation and exoticisation of creativity in terms of context, content, form and genre might open up multiple options for rethinking creative sensibilities. Decolonial aesthesis should, furthermore, locate itself as critical intervention in contemporary Western art galleries and museums, art fairs and biennale practices. Crucially, decolonial aesthesis should not hold the Western distinction between theory and practice. These politics of decolonial aesthesis have also been a key feature of black/African feminist thought on creative theorisation, and in Chapter Two I highlight how these perspectives have emphasised that not only 'can the subaltern speak', but that she has

always been doing so in various unrecognised genres, turning the focus therefore on the audience – can you hear her from the sites in which she has been speaking?

My search for a concept which captured the complexity of post-colonial locationality (location not just used in reference to physical geography but as an imaginary, political, ethical, historical position)¹⁸ was articulated when I came across the term ‘postcolonial masquerading’ by literary scholar Niti Sampat Patel in her book *Postcolonial Masquerades: Culture and Politics in Literature, Film, Video, and Photography* (2001). My initial engagements with masquerading was entirely through feminist and psychoanalytic theories, which focus primarily on gendered identity, whereas Patel’s concept of ‘postcolonial masquerading’ encompasses critiques of race, class and nationality, not as additive social categories, but as intersecting categories of identity that evidenced my life and those of the artists I was interested in.

Postcolonial Masquerading as a Creative Critical Analytic Tool

Patel (2001) presents the concept of a ‘postcolonial masquerade’ as a strategy to critique society in a range of media. She draws on postcolonial literary theorist Homi. K. Bhabha's book *The Location of Culture* where he proposes that an ambivalent identification can possibly be redeemed into a political act of subversion. Masquerade, for Patel, is not a singular, monolithic entity but rather a varied critique that takes on many manifestations, the pluralities of which "mark" moments of instability in postcolonial situations (Patel, 2001, p.xiv). She (ibid: xx) heeds Bhabha’s call to "read between the lines", which informs his notion of hybridity, and which he proposes has capacity for intervention, as Other denied/repressed knowledges come to impinge and question authorised knowledge.

Patel attempts to demonstrate the potential of mimicry and ambivalence through her readings of Hanif Kureishi’s films *Sammy and Rosie Get Laid* and *My Beautiful Laundrette*, Pratibha Parmar’s documentary *Sari Red*, and Edward Said and Jean Mohr’s collaboration in the photo-book *After the Last Sky*, not just in terms of the centralised perspectives of the characters, content and audience identification, but in the aesthetic considerations of the chosen genres.

¹⁸ See Wisker, 2000, p.8

Through her various reflections on the differing strategies of masquerade employed in the field of film, video, literature and photography, Patel (ibid: 120) locates its potential in subversiveness and resistance in its "contradictory, representational, and performative nature". She regards masquerade as a powerful metaphor:

... through which we can understand both the material and aesthetic strategies of varied postcolonial texts and discourses. The trope permits a critical re-examination of the predicaments of postcolonial identities and dislocations in an increasingly aggressive, neo-colonial global world. At the same time it contains within it notions of *changeability*, *metamorphosis*, and *contradiction* (ibid: 119-120).

Patel (ibid: xiv) believes that by not reducing postcolonial readings to binaries of either/or, she can create dynamic/incompatible/complex ways of "articulating and unmasking postcolonialities". She regards the move away from monolithic fixed, stable modernist narratives as more reflective of post-modern,¹⁹ post-colonial societies, and states that "masquerade thrives on specificity and locality" rather than generalisation (ibid: xxv), on traversing borders, subjectivities, and even disciplines.

Tseëlon (2001, p.3) in *Masquerade and Identities* concurs that masquerading "through a dialectic of concealing and revealing... serves a critical function". Calling attention to the mechanics of identity, she provides tentative 'distinctions' between masking, disguise and masquerade, although she often uses these terms interchangeably:

... while the mask represents (it can be symbolic, minimal, token or elaborate), disguise is meant to hide, conceal, pass as something one is not. Masquerade, however, is a statement about the wearer. ... The mask is partial covering; disguise is full covering; masquerade is deliberate covering. The mask hints; disguise erases from view; masquerade overstates. The mask is an accessory; disguise is a portrait; masquerade is a caricature (ibid: 2).

Masquerading can thus be revelatory – it reveals moments of reflexivity "about the otherness within and beyond ourselves" (Kaiser, 2001, p.xiv) and, through its excessive caricaturing, provides a measure of pleasure,²⁰ and a vehicle for a 'politics of desire',²¹ which will be

¹⁹ I've purposefully avoided the concept of the 'postmodern' in this study because it is a complicated social and artistic term. In post-colonial spaces, practices like 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' overlap and often co-exist. Many commentaries on SA assume that post-apartheid ushered in postmodernism, but in terms of art practice, postmodern impulses (if one were to look at it in terms of fragmentation, eclecticism, hybridity, plurality, appropriation and conceptual practices) can be evidenced from the 70s onwards, but became more dominant in the 80s), while modernist-style artwork still continues.

²⁰ Tseëlon, 2001, p.2

²¹ Hall and Sealy, 2001, p.38

discussed further in Chapter One with regards to racial stereotyping, imagination and fetishism, and in Chapter Three with regards to the photographic/video realms as 'spaces of desire' for South African women-of-colour artists. hooks (1995b, p.210-211), likewise, sees a differentiation between using performance as strategic manipulation to simply survive (wearing a mask), and performance as ritual play in art, which can be "a site of resistance".

Tseëlon regards masquerading as an interdisciplinary epistemological tool for interrogating identity and power, which my thesis and artworks attempt to demonstrate. I quote her at length because her ideas on the potentialities of masquerading are fundamental for this thesis:

As a means of self-definition, it constructs, represents, conceals, reveals, protests, protects, highlights, transforms, defends, gives licence to, empowers, suppresses and liberates. It provides a hiding place for the enactment of desired scripts, dreamed of scripts, feared scripts, forbidden scripts. It provides different stages to enact other possibilities – those that escape the narrow, rigidly defined roles we conventionally inhabit. As a means of deconstruction, the mask is a moment of reflexivity. It is the quintessential postmodern device for destabilising categories, questioning, defying overdetermined images, problematizing certainties, subverting established meanings, exposing the seams of crafted facades and the rules of narrative, the practices of ritual, the mechanics of the act, the stylised element of the performance (Tseëlon, 2001, p.11–12).

Tseëlon (ibid: 3) finds that performance enables a slipperiness between 'person' and 'act', between obvious readings and subversive coding in which the 'muddy' characteristics of masquerade are its most potent ones: its penchant for ambiguity, its messiness, diversity, impurity and imperfection. This slippage between a real body, the staging of fantastical narratives and fictional subjectivities, between desire, voyeurism and endless simulacra is exemplified in the works of the artists under discussion here. Their multi-racial, multi-ethnic, gendered, sexualised bodies on display call into question history, socio-political, cultural and economic issues.

In Chapter One, I raise concerns about the use of racial masquerades and autobiography, using masquerade as a decolonising tool to investigate White imaginings of the Black-African body in the work of Anton Kannemeyer, linking these representations to cultural and economic capital at work in the field of South African visual arts. Chapter Two acknowledges masquerade as a historical tool that has been influential at many social junctures, examining a range of

theoretical perspectives on performative masquerading, as well as considering the formal aesthetic elements of masquerading practice. Chapter Three returns to autobiographic masquerading but tries to evidence its affirmative and recuperative possibilities, as well as the formal and conceptual subversions available to artists via a critical analysis of the various masquerades pictured in the artworks of Tracey Rose, Nandipha Mntambo, Senzeni Marasela and Mary Sibande. The concluding section of this thesis attempts to theorise why masquerading is such a popular strategy for post-colonial artists, reading through the decolonising potential of it in my own work and the potential for pleasure, criticality and self-reflection that it offers artists. My thesis and practice seek to politicise the aesthetics of masquerading practices as they currently manifest in South Africa through my black female spectatorial reading of these artists' works but also through my work as a fellow artist-researcher invested in, and exploring masquerading as a decolonial aesthesis.

CHAPTER ONE:

Touching and Fondling the Black Body²² – The Contemporary Significance of South African Visual Artist Anton Kannemeyer's Blackface Sign

The cultural symbolism of blackface performance, like other contentious cycles, is sometimes disdained, other times fetishized, sometimes buried, other times enhanced and elaborated. Along the way it has absorbed its warped interpretations, folding them also into its effects (Lhamon, 1998, p.66).

In recent years, blackface visualisations have emerged in the works of White South African visual artists, most notably in the works of Anton Kannemeyer, Conrad Botes, Brett Murray and Pieter Hugo. In 2010, Kannemeyer published a collection of his works in the book *Pappa in Afrika* (Figs.1-15), notably marked by its use of blackface, which has been lauded by fellow White contemporaries for using blackface as a trickster to expose deep-seated White prejudices. Although mention is often made about the discomfort that Kannemeyer's work inspires, this is seen as necessary in the politically correct climate of post-apartheid South Africa (see Rossouw, 2013; Marais, 2010a).

Viewing Kannemeyer's works over the years, one of the issues that concerned me was how little discussion was raised about his use of coon imagery.²³ In 2010, an opinion piece published in the *Mail and Guardian* newspaper by then Johannesburg Art Gallery curator, Khwezi Gule, provided one of the few criticisms of the work, calling into question not just the depictions themselves, but the very intentions and politics of the artist himself. Gule's criticism can be summarised in the follow excerpt:

One of the questions that *Pappa in Afrika* raises is whether art that is somehow transgressive or subversive necessarily implies progressive politics. *Pappa in Afrika* is awash with imagery of African atrocities, the buffoonery of its leaders (Idi Amin appears a number of times) and

²² The reference for this title comes from Okwui Enwezor's (1998, p.24) article 'Remembrance of Things Past: Memory and the Archive'.

²³ Denis-Constant Martin (1999, p.80) traces the word 'coon' to Englishman Charles Matthew who used to sing a song about an opossum that was tricked by a racoon and then "by a 'cunning Nigger'". The Coon became a popular slave character in US minstrel acts, and by 1834 was given the name 'Zip Coon', a servant with aspirations of being the master.

corruption, but also the complicity of the West. In the world of art, as in the world of political and social satire, evidence that the audience is offended is seen as affirmation that the medicine is working. ... It is not only on the level of race that I find *Pappa in Afrika* reprehensible. In one of two works, titled *Thank You, Black Angel*, a black angel gives the artist a blowjob. Whether they are intended to be subversive or simply funny, much of the imagery is condescending. Indeed we are supposed to look and laugh—because ‘Anton Kannemeyer is not racist’. [Sic]

Gule notes the complete lack of agency of Black representations in Kannemeyer’s works, in that they seem to be serving solely the desires and fears of Whites, and appear active only as agents of disaster and ‘freaky’ sexual fantasies. Black subjectivity seems completely erased in Kannemeyer’s work, and there is no potential for any kind of Black subversiveness in his tightly controlled universe. Gule criticises the structuring of Black and White bodies exclusively in binary relationships as evidenced in colonial and apartheid history. Unlike real life situations where oppressed people can find ways to disturb and negotiate power relationships, Kannemeyer’s big lipped, bug eyed and kinky-haired blackfaces remain static depictions forever stuck in the cycle of master-slave relationships. Gule is not immune to the modus operandi of satirical devices, but does not feel that Kannemeyer’s usage of stereotypes under the banner of ‘parody’ and humour mitigates his orgy of racial stereotypes. Importantly, Gule asks if quoting alleged fears does not, in fact, repeat the established and overused performance of inscribing onto the racialised bodies of Others, feeding and reaffirming those same fantasies.

Viewing the book, I was also troubled as I felt what psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1905/1991, p.150) would call a ‘suspicion’ that the joke was concealing other intentions. Equally interesting were the defensive reactions to Gule’s criticisms. Part of my intent is to explore what happens when I approach Kannemeyer’s work as a woman-of-colour reader, who both shares his South African context, but is simultaneously alienated from it by the sharp cultural divisions that mark the landscape. My concern is to investigate how jokes ‘work’ (or don’t) in cross-cultural readings; and to understand, as a fellow artist engaged in such practices, the complexities of masquerade. This discussion is my attempt at ‘trying to peer behind’ the joke, and to understand the danger posed by blackface representations in a society still steeped in racism.

Psychiatrist Carl Jung in *Four Archetypes: Mother, Rebirth, Spirit, Trickster* (1959) discusses his idea of four archetypes in which the collective unconscious is invested in, one of which is the trickster figure. Although he believes that each person has a personal unconscious, he also believed this 'rested' upon a deeper layer which he termed 'collective unconscious', which he believed was universal and shared, more or less, by all people, everywhere in its "contents and modes of behaviour" (Jung, 1959, p.4) – this content he defined as 'archetypes'. Jung (ibid: 5) explains of the archetype: "The archetype is essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived, and it takes its colour from the individual consciousness in which it happens to appear". The four archetypes he identified was mother, rebirth, spirit and trickster. The trickster is an important figure for this study. The trickster figure is a "collective shadow figure, a summation of all the inferior traits of character in individuals. And since the individual shadow is never absent as a component of personality, the collective figure can construct itself out of it continually" (ibid: 150). Jung believes that through processes of 'civilising', this trickster figure is overcome and his "brutal, savage, stupid, and senseless fashion" (ibid: 146) gives way to sensibility and usefulness, even to a saviour complex. Even so, the shadow of the trickster always threatens and hints at things repressed, of a disaster looming, but the bringing to consciousness of these things allows for the 'bringing of light and healing' (ibid: 152). The trickster/clown/fool figure can be found in many different cultures and has also been drawn on in art discourse.

In her article 'Towards a Metaphysics of Shit' (2002), Jean Fisher talks about the trickster figure and its role in carnivalesque humour, noting how manifestations of the trickster figure in contemporary protest and art enable agency and subjectivity, that its excesses (of language, of bodily functions, morality) allows spectators to move beyond themselves and 'institutional fictions' of normalisation and order: "in effect, it means to enable the viewing subject to let go of its policing ego and open freely onto what is beyond it – to experience *otherness*" (Fisher, 2002, p. 66). Moreover, Fisher says the trickster's function is not "the resolution of conflict but the revelation of complexity" (ibid). What follows in the rest of this chapter attempts to analyse blackface as such a trickster, which permits agents to 'experience otherness', but problematizes this experience in terms of race-class-gender and locationality, witnessing the blackface trickster figure at historical junctures in the United States of America (US) and Cape Town, South Africa, in the late 19th century, which are then drawn on for a reading of the contemporary usage of blackface in South African visual arts. This thesis uses this historical framework to show how

blackface's discursive slippages and its aptitude for revelation of social constructs of racial difference, and the complexities of racial identities premised on these.

An understanding of blackface requires dredging up its origins in the US in the 1800s, and, in the section that follows, I present a short history of US blackface, concentrating on early minstrel manifestations and the work of cultural historian W.T. Lhamon Jr. in this regard. This is followed by a section discussing blackface as it travelled trans-atlantically' to South Africa and developed into the Cape Town Minstrel Festival, and then a return to a discussion of Kannemeyer's contemporary use of blackface, and the questions it raise about visual art production in South Africa.

The Development of the US Blackface Sign

Although there is significant research on blackface, W. T. Lhamon Jr.'s book *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (1998) is particularly interesting as it details the evolution of blackface performance in the US from the late 1820s to the 1850s, and argues that it was a sign of subversion of white middle-class authority. There are many different stories about how blackface's most (in)famous and defining character Thomas Darmouth Rice's 'Jim Crow' came about,²⁴ but Lhamon posits that stories about the spontaneous emergence of the Jim Crow character erase the evolution of mimetic gestures performed by generations of African-Americans in markets in New York, as they circulated and developed into a blackface lore cycle since the eighteenth century (he defines the blackface lore cycle as a "series of expressive behaviors – moans, narratives, steps, gestures – that function as racial shorthand that gets used, adapted, forgotten and recovered from generation to generation").²⁵ Lhamon focuses on New York's Catherine Market and the 'dancing for eels' practice by African-American slaves who entertained the mixed market crowd in exchange for money or food. Catherine Market, in the nineteenth century, represented a melting pot of race and class, where miscegenation was the order of the day amid a city climate of slave oppression, runaway slaves,

²⁴ White American actor T.D. Rice is supposed to have appropriated the gesture from an old limping African-American or a Pittsburgh baggage man named Cuff.

²⁵ Lhamon, 1998, p.60

slave manumissions, 'mudsill'²⁶ labour, merchants and white youths streaming into urban centres as the apprenticeship system disintegrated and industrialisation gained momentum. In this environment of class and racial interaction, the market dances for eels became so popular that it was to influence T.D. Rice who had grown up seeing these wheel-about gestures, and which became an instant hit when he brought it to the stage of the local Chatham theatre (as opposed to the English plays largely performed there).

Part of the meteoric rise of blackface in the Chatham theatre, therefore, was due to its audiences being primed in the market gestures, as well as early blackface entr'acte performances by George Washington Dixon and then T.D. Rice.²⁷ Lhamon believes that Dixon and Rice's portrayals of black characters were working against the tide of existing abolitionist and pro-slavery caricatures of blacks. He suggests that Rice's genius lay in his ability to pick up on old African-American stories, songs (Jim Crow was such an African-American agricultural song with roots probably in Nigerian Ibo tales of buzzards), dialects and gestures, and mimic them so convincingly that he enthralled both black and white audiences. Lhamon believes that blackface became the first mass cultural production, as it was circulated by performers who came out of working class conditions, and validated by young white urban youth and African-American audiences who applauded *for* the runaway or free blackface characters and their ability to outwit their middle-class masters. In 1834, Dan Emmett's Virginia Minstrels heralded a full-format blackface minstrel show divided into three acts of music, skits and slapstick.²⁸ Minstrel shows became as popular in Europe and the United Kingdom as they were in the US, and began to spread to various parts of the globe.²⁹ By the 1850s, as US segregationist laws began to take hold, blackface performances began embodying more racist manifestations caricaturing black

²⁶ Lhamon (1998, p.63) uses the term 'mudsill labour' to define the group of poor white men (particularly Irish immigrants) and slaves that had to work alongside each other in the early days of industrialised America, particularly in the development of the Erie Canal in New York.

²⁷ Some attribute blackface to the performance in blackface makeup of British actor Lewis Hallam Jr in 1769, as well as British actor Charles Matthew in 1822-3 that enacted the character of a plantation slave. In the early 1800s, blackface clowns were popular in circuses in the US. The popularity of these early manifestations undoubtedly influenced Dixon and Rice (who, like many other performers in the US, trained in circuses) – see Martin, 1999 and Young, 2013a and 2013b. Catherine Cole (1996, p.192-193) traces a longer history of blacking-up in Western theatre (to the late 14th century).

²⁸ Lhamon claims that Emmett's group is perhaps most responsible for creating a kind of "faux anthropology" which aimed to capture the Southern plantation life of African-Americans set to the backdrop of songs created by white Northern urban composers, like Stephen Foster.

²⁹ See Thelwell (2013) for a discussion on the popularity of Jim Crow and blackface among English colonialists, even as far afield as South Africa, where it was used as a justification for colonial racial segregation.

laziness and stupidity, with imaginary Southern 'slaves' singing their wishes to remain under the control of 'Massa'.

Early minstrelsy should be differentiated from later blackface minstrelsy, Lhamon (1998, p.44) argues, because Jim Crow was a sign for underclass workers, for freedom, fluid identity and the new metropolitan spirit. The plight and migratory status of the black characters were seen to be one with which white youth could identify, and blackface "gradually molded those gestures into the first comprehensive enactment of blackness as a disturbing idea that the United States had", enabling the youth to "give lip to power" (ibid: 188, 211). Lhamon views blackface as a vehicle of fantasy for the black and young white audiences: "It is part of the double power of the blackface move to have the trickster agent, the minstrel performer, do the penetration for the throng that stays chaste" (ibid: 95-96). He further claims that audiences that patronised the Chatham theatre were able to decode the layers of blackface performance as they had been 'schooled' in such codification in the early market dances. They were, therefore, 'in' on the jokes and understood who was being made fun of. He believes that reading blackface as 'realistic' portrayals of black persons was part of the slippage of blackface and an indicator of ignorance of the popular culture codes developing at that time. In other words, the audience either 'gets it' or they don't, which reveals their social standing (ibid: 175).

Lhamon prods us not to judge Jim Crow and the blackface tradition as homogenous, and that blackface theatre provided one of the few avenues by which African-Americans, Asians and women were able to enter theatre and be paid more than what was usual at that time. It can also be understood as working against prevailing black stereotypes of the day. Before it became a vehicle of black stereotyping and denigration after the 1850s, blackface drew to the stage codified 'blackness', where it was applauded, appreciated and began a cycle of identification with 'black coolness' via comedy, music and dance. Blackface acts, although reviled after the 1930s, still endured in comedic routines until the 1960s, and even later in the UK.³⁰

I focus most on Lhamon's theorisations about white youth rallying around the blackface sign as a subversive vehicle which antagonises authorities, because it seems to continue today whether in the form of rap music, 'bling-bling' hip hop culture or the mimicry of ebonics. African-American commentaries on blackface seem wary of engaging with Lhamon's work particularly, I

³⁰ Blackface was used to sell every kind of product and Negrobilia constitutes a huge market for blackface products, which continues today.

would think, *with* the benefit of hindsight, i.e. in the lasting effects of blackface visualisations in popular culture.³¹ Lhamon's *Raising Cain* can indeed resurrect Jim Crow in hindsight due to a century of lobbying by various African-American organisations against its damaging racial stereotypes. In blackface, black bodies and blackness are tropes upon which the pleasures, fear and fantasy of non-black people are externalised. Blackface operationalizes disembodied blackness (black 'essence'), but this does not translate into engaging, accepting or validating black people (black presence), as was evident in white audiences choosing to read blackface as 'real Negroes', as well as the initial refusal to accept African-American actors without blackface. We are reminded that blackface had very real consequences for black people in the US. In his book *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (2010), theatre studies scholar, Harvey Young theorises that disembodiment of the black body has allowed acts of racial violence to be perpetrated on the black body: Young cites incidents of lynching and the dismembering of black bodies during US slavery, as well as the physical humiliation and violence perpetrated during racial segregation that was embodied in the 'Jim Crow' laws in the US. Thus, whereas Lhamon's research skirts the effects of blackface racism on African-American society by re-centralising a white gaze and white motives in his discussions, asking the reader to understand and identify with white 'intent', whereas Young (2010, p.4), as an African-American, asserts that the "*idea of the black body has been and continues to be projected across actual physical bodies*", therefore having real consequences for real communities.

I would also argue that, far from blackface only affecting the African-American community, the popularity of blackface shows internationally has contributed to a lasting negative impact of racial stereotypes of black people globally. Yet, in another slippery act of blackface ambivalence, in its Trans-Atlantic transmission to Cape Town, South Africa, it became a vehicle for self-definition for an oppressed community situated at the tip of Africa in the late 1800s.

³¹ It has been argued that African-Americans' enjoyment of blackface performance stems from their recognition of the unrealism of the stereotypes and, therefore, enables them to laugh at these crude depictions (i.e. precisely because it was not 'them' but rather the White man's fantasies) (Lhamon 1998).

Deurmekaar – Blackface in the Cape Town Minstrel Festival

Blackface minstrelsy became part of Cape Town culture in the 19th century and, over time, evolved into the Cape Town Minstrel Festival. More popularly known as the Coon Carnival,³² it occurs every January as part of the city's New Year celebrations, and is primarily organised by the Coloured communities of the wider Western Cape province. Early on the morning of the 1st, the minstrels dress at their *klopskamers* (the club quarters of the different troupes), and apply the traditional blackened face with the white eyes and white mouth, before setting out to sing at various homes (Martin, 1999).³³ An important feature of the 2nd of January, what is called the Tweede Nuwe Jaar ('Second New Year'), is the Minstrel street march through the centre of Cape Town and on to Green Point stadium. Local people and tourists line the streets to watch and cheer the free spectacle of colourful festivities. On consecutive Saturdays, stadium competitions are held to judge the troupes for songs, dances, parading and outfits. According to scholar Denis-Constant Martin, who documents this rich heritage in his book *Coon Carnival: New Year in Cape Town, Past to Present*, the Minstrel Carnival represents a "time of the year when one can have fun, when one can 'let go', whatever your circumstances, whatever pains and scorn have been endured during the past year" (Martin, 1999, p.8).³⁴

The history of the Minstrel Festival reflects the intersection of indigenous (KhoiKhoi, San and Xhosa) and colonial history – i.e., Dutch settlement and colonisation of the Cape, which brought slaves from Malay, Indonesia, Madagascar, India and different parts of Africa, freed 'apprenticed' African-American slaves, the settlement of French Huguenots, Belgians and Germans, and the establishment of British colonial rule. This mixed group of citizens in Cape Town, as well as their descendants, would come to make up the Cape Town Coloured communities, while the majority of Dutch, French Huguenots, Germans and Belgians would be amalgamated under the term 'Afrikaner', which denoted the White non-English community (English colonisers were simply termed 'White'). These cultures produced localised forms of homeland celebrations, such as Emancipation Day, Guy Fawkes Day (5th November), and various indigenous and European renewal festivals, which were realigned with summer and the

³² The event is also colloquially known as Cape Town Coon Carnival, the Cape Town Carnival and the Kaapse Klopse.

³³ Martin attributes the first appearance of the black/white face make-up to Charles Matthew, an Englishman who performed in America (1822 – 1824). Blackface make-up is used less often in the Cape Minstrel Festival since 1994, reflecting more the idea of the rainbow nation (Davids 2013).

³⁴ See also the articles on South African manifestations of blackface in Davids (2013) and Thelwell (2013).

beginning of the New Year in the southern hemisphere (Martin, 1999). All of these festivities contained elements of band music, dance and parades, out of which grew a local street culture of band music and serenading. This was the base onto which American blackface performance sedimented when it arrived in Cape Town in 1838. Between the 1850s and 1880s, the popularity of blackface performance was so great in all communities, that many local minstrel groups formed, and the 'coon' became a key element of these routines adapted into localised caricatures. Martin believes that many troupe members do not associate the word 'coon' with racist stereotypes, but instead think it means "people playing carnival in a costumed band" (Martin, 1999, p.80).³⁵ The formation of African-American minstrel troupes created new waves of excitement in terms of dancing and musical styles. One such group, The Virginia Jubilee Singers performed in South Africa for two years between 1890 and 1892 and then again in 1895. Black minstrelsy was viewed as an empowering performance of 'colouredness' by Cape Town Coloureds in the 1800s and 1900s, as they saw African-American culture as embodying a proud, upwardly mobile trajectory since the end of slavery (Martin, 1999; Davids, 2013).

The first 'Coon' Carnival through Cape Town occurred in 1887, with stadium competitions being introduced in 1907. As the Carnival format took hold, Coon troupes marched from their homes in Bo-Kaap and District Six through the city centre to Green Point Stadium – these living areas, located close to the city centre, were racially and class mixed, but dogged by poverty, crime and unemployment. When the Afrikaner National Party came to power in 1948, they began ushering in new policies to segregate all forms of South African life, including The Population Registration Act of 1950 which classified all South Africans into a racial group and provided the basis for a racially segregated society; the Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 which racially segregated all public facilities, transportation, services and premises; the 1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act which prohibited marriage between White people and people of other races; and the Group Areas Act of 1950 which divided urban spaces according to race and restricted ownership and residence accordingly.³⁶ In the 60s, a number of districts in Cape Town were rezoned 'Whites-only', and this included District Six and the Bo-Kaap from which all inhabitants were forcibly removed. Relocated to far-out segregated townships, familial, neighbourly and community ties were destroyed. These forced removals and racial segregation

³⁵ Criticisms of the continued usage of the word 'coon' by other Coloureds has resulted in less frequent usage since 1960, with people preferring 'minstrels' (Martin, 1999, p.146).

³⁶ See the list of apartheid legislations at *South African History Online*: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/politics-and-society/apartheid-legislation-1850s-1970s>.

directly impacted the Minstrel Festival thereafter. Coon troupes no longer had easily accessible clubhouses in vicinities close to marching routes and stadiums. The Green Point Stadium, rezoned for Whites, denied Coloureds access to it. In 1968, the Minstrel Festival was forbidden to march the traditional routes through the city centre and, for the first time in almost a century, the city was devoid of the Coon presence over the New Year. The Minstrel Festival did not return to the Green Point Stadium until 1979 and organised competition happened sporadically until 1989 (Martin, 1999, p.151).

The dawn of democracy in 1994 saw the minstrel troupes finally legitimised as part of Cape Town's social heritage. Support for the Minstrel Festival became a political tool for local parties, and for the first time, state funds were provided for the organisation of the Carnival. Martin's (ibid: 170) research recognises that the Cape Town Coloured communities bred a completely unique creolised "mestizo" culture, which the Minstrel Festival is an expression. While it is largely organised and peopled by the Cape Town Coloured communities, a cross-section of this event reveals the heterogeneity of people defined by apartheid as 'Coloured'. Far from it all being celebration though, carnival revelry has elicited much criticism by Whites, middle-class and by Muslim Coloureds for its noise, dancing, bawdy lyrics and drug/alcohol usage.³⁷ These criticisms, though, often mask the concern over the elision of boundaries that occur during the Carnival: namely class distinctions, cultural/religious behaviour, stereotypes of Coloureds, perceptions of 'Coloured' respectability, the flamboyant displays by moffies (self-identifying gay men who sometimes accompany the drum majors),³⁸ as well as the non-exclusion of gangsters. As with carnivals throughout the world, 'normative' behaviour is redefined for the duration of the Carnival, and despite these oppositions and economic challenges, the Carnival survives because it exemplifies a bottom-up, 'grass-roots' initiative. Many Minstrel leaders see the Carnival as an expression of their unique community history and identity, one in which freedom of expression is a positive character.

³⁷ Factionalism and criminal activities dog the Carnival, with continued struggles with the Cape Town municipality over parade routes and funding.

³⁸ Dressed in extravagant women's clothes, moffies represent defiance, autonomy and the freedom to choose one's own appearance. According to Martin, the image of the moffie embodies the spirit of the Carnival where marginalised persons come together in organised 'chaos' to have fun, and temporarily take over the streets of Cape Town, engaging in cross-community bonding, a display of pride in their identity and group affiliations, channelling competition into something "they look forward to ... for eleven months of the year" (Martin, 1999, p.38).

'Cooning', moreover, is seen as healthy competition; a chance to shine and regroup and be renewed as an individual and a collective over the New Year. Mikhael Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* regards carnival play not just as art or spectacle, but as life itself. Carnivals, for him (1968/1984, p.81-82), are invested in universal laughter which temporarily upsets hierarchical order, "casting the high and the old, the finished and the completed into the material bodily lower stratum for death and rebirth",³⁹ laughter buries in order to rebirth, to regenerate and transform, and is inclusive of all participants (ibid: 20).⁴⁰ Martin (1999, p.39) finds a similar idea of transformation in the Coon idea of 'deurmekaar', which normally denotes 'confusion', but during Carnival signifies fun and craziness which allows "... revellers to believe that they are no longer who they are, that they have the power to own the world". Martin (ibid: 40) believes there is a sense of freedom and pleasure that is gained in playing the Coon – and those watching and supporting the Coons – is like a state of trance that transcends temporalities and connects people. The Minstrel Festival continues to grow and cause controversy as it exposes social boundaries that affect daily life in Cape Town.

This journey into US and Cape minstrelsy has tried to read possible positive affirmative stagings of blackface at different historical momentums (noting also the racial stereotyping and essentialising that they could not escape), but also to demonstrate that the 'under-class' politics and self-affirmative transcendental spirit of 'Coonism' that mark these historical moments, are not as apparent to me as a reader-of-colour of Kannemeyer's blackface imagery. Although Fisher (2002: 68) notes that while the trickster figure is marked by an appearance of a 'lack of morality', it is still conditioned by an ethical dimension which she says is "the gift of interpretation and the acquisition of respect for the otherness of the other in its social dimension". While early US minstrelsy evidenced this in the underclasses rallying around this anti-authoritative sign and the Minstrel Carnival demonstrates this in its inclusivity of different religions, ethnicities, sexualities and factions – in its respect and celebration of 'otherness' – Kannemeyer's coons, as the next section will argue, lacks morals, intelligence, agency or respect. Without Fisher's 'ethical dimension' of respect for otherness then, what is the significance of this contemporary re-activation of blackface imagery? The next section of this chapter attempts

³⁹ Bakhtin (1968/1984, p.21) clarifies his use of 'degrading': "Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time."

⁴⁰ Bakhtin (1968/1984, p.94–95) does acknowledge laughter as being limited and utopian in its external potential and a luxury afforded by the carnival atmosphere.

to answer this question through a critical analysis of Kannemeyer's blackface sign, drawing on Lhamon's research on early minstrelsy to examine and understand this next cyclic phase of blackface.

The Reactivation of Blackface in South African Visual Arts

Thus jokes can also have a subjective determinant of this kind. ... It declares that only what I allow to be a joke *is* a joke (Freud, 1905/1991, p.150).

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa, images of blackness and disembodied black bodies are such a dominant visual trope that sociologist-curator Okwui Enwezor called attention to this in a provocative article in 1997 entitled 'Reframing the Black Subject: Ideology and Fantasy in Contemporary South African Representation'. Enwezor (1998, p.24) questioned what he felt was an "alarming and solicitous usage of the black image and body parts in the work of many white artists as a way of dealing with the past", and found that his criticisms were not well received in an artistic and wider climate of White defensiveness and liberal moralism. Similarly, Gule's 2010 critique of Anton Kannemeyer's *Pappa in Afrika* met with responses that since White artists like Kannemeyer had fought against apartheid and their intent was above reproach, and claiming that their role as social aggressors was much needed in lagging racial discourse. Not much analysis has been done on the technique and content of Kannemeyer's parodic joke-work, and the rest of this chapter unpacks their mechanisms in terms of the blackface sign.

Pappa in Afrika

Kannemeyer's *Pappa in Afrika* continues the kind of 'outrage art' that defined his and Conrad Botes' collaborations on the Afrikaans comic book series *Bitterkomix*. This work was meant to shock and offend Afrikaners through its representations of White paranoia and angst in neo-colonial settings, as well as stereotypes of the Other and social taboos. *Pappa in Afrika* (Fig.1) is a solo catalogue, produced by two galleries,⁴¹ and showcases reproductions of Kannemeyer's

⁴¹ The publishers are Michael Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town, Jack Shainman Gallery in New York, and Jacana publishing house.

drawings, paintings and prints produced between 2006 and 2010, which feature his cartoonish blackface coons maiming and killing each other, raping and torturing White men and women, interacting with an aging Tintin figure (which represents Kannemeyer himself), along with realistic renditions and commentaries of Black/African politicians. The anonymity and rampant killing and torture of the Black coons is, no doubt, part of Kannemeyer's strategy to show it as a colonial pleasure and justification for violence in which he actively tries to implicate the reader. The resultant 'humour' is unsettling and thus betrays the innocence of the cartoon format as he forcefully reinserts violence back into the African landscape, referencing not only European colonial rule but also Black-on-Black violence.

Kannemeyer's blackface coons/'golliwogs'⁴² are often handless and undistinguishable, and crawl/sit around the generic African landscapes. Although using blackface frequently, he does not relate it to its American origins or usage, nor to the Cape Town Minstrel Festival. Without this kind of contextualisation, blackface is a depoliticised short-hand symbol for Black/African helplessness, laziness, violence and stupidity. Coons are victims one cannot empathise with not only because they are pathetic in their apathy to their situations, but also because in the next scene they are able to rape and murder without conscience. They appear merciless, lacking morals even though they are often the victims of the colonial Tintin/Kannemeyer figure. For instance, in the work *Pappa and the Black Hands* (2009) (Figs.2a/b), Tintin/Kannemeyer repeatedly shoots what he thinks is the same coon only to discover, thereafter, that he has shot dead a number of indistinguishable coons, the hands of whom he cuts off, referring no doubt to Belgian colonial rule (in what is now the DRC) where the hands of the Congolese were cut off as trophies.⁴³ Due to Kannemeyer's continued hero worship of Tintin, it is unclear when Tintin is a criticised colonial figure, and when he is simply a vehicle of fantasy enacting Kannemeyer's revenge and a revised colonial order on Black coons. He is the central axis in the book around which blackface revolves, and appears, even in this disturbing, violent episode, to be less terrifying than real African politicians like Idi Amin.

⁴² Danie Marais (2010b), who contributes the text for *Pappa in Afrika*, writes to the newspaper defending Kannemeyer, "But Kannemeyer is certainly not trying to tell us that rapists are always black or that they look like golliwogs (or 'coons', as Gule calls them)." Marais's phrasing seems to suggest that he is not familiar with American blackface minstrel tradition and the golliwog doll as a manifestation of it.

⁴³ *Pappa in Afrika* is heavily influenced by Hergé's *Tintin in the Congo* (1931), which was dictated by the publisher's beliefs that Belgian colonial sentiment should be promoted through the book. Hergé never visited the Congo and relied on missionary writings of it. His images of the Congolese have been criticised as "semi-naked imbeciles, lazy, and almost unable to think for themselves, patronised by their pith helmet and safari suit-clad Belgian rulers who help introduce them to 'civilisation'" (Ritman, 2011).

This can further be seen in images of Black/African politicians and complicated by the book format, where the left-to-right layout of images allows further associations to be made in the act of cross-page reading. Signifiers and interpretations from the left page – which often relate to real people/incidents – can be read across the comic visualisations on the right. Two instances exemplify this: *Sharp Teeth* (2009) and *Zuma and Friends* (2009) (Figs.3-4); and *Idi Amin Dada: Hitler in Africa* (2009) and *Birth* (2009) (Figs.5-6), placed left and right respectively. In the first example, *Sharp Teeth*, a realistically redrawn anthropological article depicts four Black Africans from an unidentified Central African ‘tribe’, three of whom are smiling as they peer into an open car, exposing their sharpened teeth. The text below (as probably appears in the original source material) reads: “The natives of Central Africa above believe that filed teeth lend character to their smiles, which they are displaying when examining a white man’s motor-car that seems to afford them great amusement”. On the opposite page, *Zuma and Friends* demonstrates a similar drawing style and colouration, depicting a centrally dominant smiling portrait of South African President Jacob Zuma, while below him are the disembodied heads of various political ‘comrades’ including Julius Malema, Blade Nzimande and Mosiuoa Lekota (despite Kannemeyer’s title, at this stage this group of people are certainly not friends due to party splintering).⁴⁴ *Sharp Teeth* draws on an ethnic African beauty aesthetic which inspired imaginations of African cannibalism.⁴⁵ This image manages to simultaneously portray the natives as feared cannibals, but also as a pre-modern, child-like group, gleefully inspecting the white man’s car, and clearly references the ambiguity that can be found in colonial anthropological stereotypes of Africa.

Bhabha illuminates such contradictions in terms of the psychoanalytic notion of fetishism. Fetishism-as-identification, he (1994, p.115) explains, is a “non-repressive form of knowledge”, which allows for a person to hold simultaneously contradictory beliefs – “one official and one secret, one archaic and one progressive, one that allows the myth of origins, the other that articulates difference and division”. At once, in both the original depiction and in Kannemeyer’s

⁴⁴ The works depicts ex-African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL) President Julius Malema, South African Communist Party General Secretary Blade Nzimande (also South Africa’s Minister for Higher Education and Training since 2009) and, set slightly apart from them, the image of Congress of the People (COPE) party leader Mosiuoa “Terror” Lekota (a nickname he earned as a soccer player). COPE was established in 2008 by several members who split from the ANC, notably Mosiuoa Lekota, Mbhazima Shilowa and Mluleki George, and the party has contested the general and provincial elections since 2009. At the time of this drawing, COPE has split from the ANC and there is a lot of political slander between these parties.

⁴⁵ Teeth filing/sharpening has occurred in many cultures – see DeMello (2007).

re-inscription of it, the black African native is rendered both fearsome (in that he can consume the physical body of the white man), but simultaneously available to white conquest. The proximity of Zuma and his bodiless friends on the opposite page, the similarity in graphic ink drawing style, the whitened smiles (particularly the inverted teeth shape of “Blade” Nzimande and “Terror” Lekota) and eyeballs of the Black South African politicians, create visual congruency with the representation of the natives, allowing for a comparison with the pre-modern, child-like ‘cannibals’. The cannibalism of the politicians is clearly a metaphoric one, but are they cannibalising South Africa as a whole (White South Africans included), or their own Black masses through governmental greed and mismanagement? Like their native counterparts, perhaps they have become amused and carried away by the wealth and toys of White colonialism and are then re-enacting this old scene in a new capitalist context? More problematically though, is the reading that South Africa’s Black leadership, like the childish natives, should be ‘(re)colonised’ in their best interests, as they seem not to have the capacity for modern governance.

The second example, *Idi Amin Dada: Hitler in Africa and Birth* features a realistic drawing of a 1977 book of the same title which portrays a young Idi Amin in army attire seated on a chair. The book header reads that it is authored “By the Last US Ambassador to Uganda, Thomas Melady and Margaret Melady”.⁴⁶ On the opposite page, in graphic cartoon style, is a picture of a White nurse in green scrubs and theatre mask holding up a coal-black coon baby with her left hand and slapping the baby’s back with the other. At the bottom of this drawing, white script over a black banner reads: “**Birth**, *n.* The first and direst of all disasters.” Thomas Patrick Melady, ambassador to Uganda during Dada’s reign, was expelled from Uganda in 1973, publishing the book four years later, and it is not clear whether Kannemeyer is critical of Melady’s text or considers him an international political authority on the subject. An online review of this book criticises it as reductionist in its portrayal of Idi Amin Dada to African stereotypes, and several renditions by Kannemeyer of Idi Amin seem to suggest that Dada is a signifier for extreme African dictatorships, greed and stupidity (one of the more terrifying aspects of Dada was that he was believed to indulge in cannibalistic practices).⁴⁷

Reading across Kannemeyer’s *Idi Amin Dada* to the image of the Black coon baby and the text of

⁴⁶ Melady served as US Ambassador to Burundi (1969), Senior Advisor to the US delegation to the UN General Assembly (1970), and Ambassador to Uganda (1972).

⁴⁷ See *Google Book Review* (n.d.)

birth being the “first and direst of all disasters”, Kannemeyer could be saying that Blacks/Africans from birth are heralded into disasters, or, more problematically, that Blacks/Africans *are* heralds of disaster for others by the mere fact of their birth. The Black African man is both the harbinger of disaster and its victim – again, a familiar African colonial trope. In these works, as with the work *Yo Dumbfucks!* (2009) (Fig.7), in which a giant White hand points down to a landscape littered with handless, helpless coons and a heavenly speech bubble which reads, “Yo Dumbfucks! Which one of you miserable cunts will suck my holy cock today?” the parodic joke which makes Kannemeyer’s offense supposedly palatable is not apparent. It is clearly not being made at the expense of White characters, but instead at the Black characters. Unlike his other parodies with violent actions against Black bodies, these works appear to be much less aggressive, but there is a hostility and denigration underlying them that is wrapped up in the mask of a nuanced joke, the mechanisms of which warrant analysis.

In *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud (1905/1991, p.210) notes that allusions in jokes work with a brevity of information, and that “in our complex psychical business too, economy in detail remains a source of pleasure”.⁴⁸ An ‘economy of expenditure’ thus enjoys the use of stereotypes because the “allusions made in a joke must be obvious and the omissions easy to fill”, thereby creating pleasure in the easily understandable symbolism (ibid: 202-203). For Freud, allusions in jokes are similar to dreams in that they are ‘indirect representations’ in which an objectionable element is displaced by one “that appears innocent to the censorship... or small” (ibid: 229). This innocent, objectionable symbol does not denote any of Kannemeyer’s White characters who, though traumatised by their own imaginations of Africa(ns), do not evoke less dignity. Rather it is blackface which is rendered “small, inferior, despicable or comic”, thereby using laughter to overcome them (ibid: 147). Freud (ibid: 248-249) notes that people can be made comic by “putting them in a comic situation, mimicry, disguise, unmasking, caricature, parody, travesty”, which includes making a person contemptible or depriving him of dignity or authority (I will return to Freud’s theory of joke-work a little later). Whether Kannemeyer intends it or not, his ahistorical use of coon stereotypes, further continues to degrade and devalue ‘blackness’, while he, in the guise of Tintin, remains the sympathetic

⁴⁸ Freud’s analysis is mainly concerned with verbal jokes, but his theory on joke-work as betraying unconscious power relations and wish fulfilments is relevant for visual material as well, although more consideration needs to be given to differences and similarities between visual and oral narratives.

explorer amid the chaos, whose violent exploits involving blackface are then laughable. Blackface, thus, remains a source of entertainment for Whiteness.

“Yo Dumbfucks! Which one of you miserable cunts will suck my holy cock today?”

Writings on Kannemeyer’s work laud his biting ironic satire and his use of intimate autobiography as public confession, which supposedly enables individual and collective catharsis; praise his courageousness in making his critique of White Afrikaner patriarchy; suggest that his work is like a translation which uses critical distancing to re-engage a painful past and argue that the ambiguity created in his parodies demands more from the audience, implicating readers by making them consider their own identities in readings of the work.⁴⁹ These commentaries reveal the possibilities that Linda Hutcheon associates with parodic practice. In *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms*, Hutcheon (1985, p.2) examines parody as it has developed into a major mode “of formal and thematic construction of texts” in art in the twentieth century (particularly in the turn to self-reflexivity). She (ibid: 15, 101) defines parody as serious criticism in the form of “playful genial mockery of codifiable forms”, which is marked by some of the following elements: the dependence of one text upon another (an intertextuality which calls into account a ‘historical consciousness’), ironic inversion, satire and allusion, hybridity, ambivalence, and repetition marked by critical distancing:

A critical distance is implied between the backgrounded text being parodied and the new incorporating work, a distance usually signaled by irony. But this irony can be playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive. The pleasure of parody’s irony comes not from humor in particular but from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual “bouncing” ... between complicity and distance (ibid: 32).

This ‘intertextual bouncing’ happens between apartheid norms representing the background script upon which the problems of the ‘new’ South Africa are foregrounded and revealed. Kannemeyer thus relies on a certain amount of awareness of racial history and coding, as well as current affairs by the viewer in order to understand the humour of his parodies. These workings of parody further enhance the joke-work, and I return to Freud’s analysis of joke-work.

⁴⁹ See Millan (2012), Tyson (2012), Meesters (2000) and Marais (2010a)

Freud (1905/1991, p.39-41) defines a joke as an evocation of something that is comic, attached to an action of ours that it is entirely subjective which we can never relate to as an object, especially as it contains a playful judgement on that which is cast in comic contrast (between sense and nonsense, similar and dissimilar ideas), and must, furthermore, always be contextualised so to be understood. Jokes, as mentioned earlier, are characterised by their brevity, by what is actually said in a few words, and, sometimes, by what is not, and this can bring forth that which is hidden or concealed (ibid: 44). This mechanism functions, Freud posited, in the same way as dream-work, where repressed thoughts and desires find a way to surface. This similarity made Freud believe that jokes perform similar tasks to dream-work in releasing tension from that which is repressed.

This can perhaps be seen in two motifs which are persistent in *Pappa in Afrika*: that of black penises and rape (Figs.8-15). Penises populate the African continent; they rage out of control and chase down the White man. The association of Blackness and Africanness goes beyond just stereotypical associations of black sexual potency, visualising what psychoanalyst Frantz Fanon (1952/2008, p.130) describes of white imagination, “the Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He *is* a penis”. In *Pappa in Afrika*, the White man/Tintin rapes and is raped in return (Figs.12-14). Fanon (ibid: 120-121) reminds us that the fantasies or dreams of being raped by black men can be viewed as latent sexual desires or wish fulfilments: “Basically, does this *fear* of rape not itself cry out for rape? That is because the Negrophobic woman is in fact nothing but a putative sexual partner – just as the Negrophobic man is a repressed homosexual”. Fanon’s hypothesis led me to believe that Kannemeyer was subjected to sexual abuse as a child, which he alludes to when speaking about the development of his Tintin character in an early comic of his called ‘Buty’, which depicts a young Tintin who is molested by his Afrikaner father.⁵⁰ Kannemeyer’s parents separated when he was three and he was left in his South African father’s custody, which is apparently when the sexual abuse occurred (Guilbert, 2012). His Dutch mother never visited, but instead sent him comic books, which became his young obsession and later part of his career). In an essay for *The Big Bad Bitterkomix Handbook*, Andy Mason (2002/2006,

⁵⁰ “But it was really with that story, in English it’s called ‘Sonny’ and in Afrikaans ‘Buty’, and it’s about this little boy who’s been sexually abused by this father. That story was the first time that I really incorporated Tintin and used it as a way of looking back at my prepubescent years, and sort of created a dark and bleak history. The thing for me is that I realized, when I finished that, that because I was such a fanatical Tintin reader when I was young, it was just natural for me, if I wanted to get back to that frame of mind, to that space and that time, was to use Tintin as a kind of medium to do it” [Sic] (Kannemeyer quoted in Guilbert, 2012).

p.7) indicates that the comics are a sustained effort by Kannemeyer to wreak revenge on the “authority figures of his boyhood – his father who abused him, ‘Barries’ who caned him, and all the headmasters, *dominees*, policeman and rugger buggers who in one way or another attempted to indoctrinate, punish and belittle him”. I would venture that the violence, maiming and rape of, and by, blackface coons may not represent White colonial guilt or fears in relation to imaginary blackness, but rather Kannemeyer’s own guilt or shame of homo-eroticism sustained during his sexual abuse, as well as abuse at the hands of other White patriarchy, which he then projects and externalises onto the Black body. Kannemeyer-as-blackface is then repeatedly punished. As African-American novelist Toni Morrison (1992/1993, p. 17) observes, “the subject of the dream is the dreamer” – thus Tintin and blackface seem to be two sides of the same whole that is Kannemeyer.

Kannemeyer has sustained the myth that his work deals with race relations in South Africa, while it can be read entirely as a landscape of his psyche, a kind of ‘White-on-White’ violence. Fanon’s (1952/2008, p.6) oft quoted statement is relevant here: “I shall demonstrate elsewhere that what is often called the black soul is a white man's artefact”. I find Kannemeyer’s use of blackface for his personal trauma and therapy makes it difficult to engage and critique his blackface representation. The personal is served as national trauma, and while as a black feminist, I am certainly not opposed to the empowerment that personal narratives bring to creative practice, in such a case of personal trauma, it is difficult to cast a critical lens over the narrative and not seem insensitive when one doesn’t agree with the choice of representation. I find myself torn between feelings of silence and empathy, but also alienation from his discourse.

Hostile Jokes and Masks of Whiteness

Freud has thus far shown that jokes are not simply neutral expressions. Additionally, he outlines a category of jokes as ‘tendentious jokes’: i.e., “only jokes that have a purpose run the risk of meeting with people who do not want to listen to them” (ibid: 132).⁵¹ Hostile jokes are a sub-category of tendentious jokes in their service of aggressiveness and defence in creating the possibility of pleasure of certain inhibited instincts (lust, hostility), and allowing the obstacle denying this pleasure to be circumvented (ibid: 144). Hostile jokes are often aimed at

⁵¹ Freud (1905/1991, p.133) calls ‘abstract’ jokes non-tendentious jokes because they are ‘innocent jokes’.

“institutions, people in their capacity as vehicles of institutions, dogmas of morality or religion”, and when external circumstances prevent such persons from being insulted, “objections to them can only be made under the mask of a joke” (ibid: 153). The façade of the joke thus permits a measure of rebellion against authority (ibid: 149).

The anti-authority aggressiveness of Kannemeyer’s work evidences such hostile jokes. While the intended ‘butt’ of his jokes is White patriarchy and corrupt Black/African politicians, there is a third authority that Kannemeyer seems to be challenging in the book as a whole: politically correct speech, which he feels is hurting his and other White South Africans’ freedom of speech. Political correctness has made certain modes of race talk and representation unacceptable post-apartheid, and his work seems to function as caricatured ‘pressure valves’ which allow access once again to socially unacceptable representations and language. There is active revelry in race and gender stereotypes as a form of criticism, but also as entertainment – this idea is contained in the opening statement of *Pappa in Afrika* which attempts to contextualise it and already diffuse any possible criticism: “...poet and journalist Danie Marais offers a compelling argument for art like Kannemeyer’s that simultaneously provokes and entertains”.⁵² Kannemeyer’s offensive ‘transgression’ is viewed as entertaining and defended as critical entertainment by Marais and Kannemeyer’s gallerists/publishers, and it becomes important to analyse this triangulation of persons who produce and ‘get’ these jokes.

In his analysis of joke-work, Freud examines the intent of the producer. Jokes need a first person who creates the joke, a second person who is the object of the joke, and a third person who ‘gets’ the joke and also feels pleasure, thereby increasing the creator’s pleasure. Freud (1905/1991, p.197, 209) regards the third person as a collaborator in the joke. Thus, the choice of whom to direct a joke at for it to be ‘successful’ is imperative:

It is essential that he should be in sufficient psychological accord with the first person to possess the same internal inhibitions, which the joke-work has overcome in the latter.... Thus every joke calls for a public of its own and laughing at the same jokes is evidence of far-reaching psychological conformity (ibid: 203-204).

Hence, jokes need an audience of their own for the joke-work (pleasure) to be complete, and the audience has to be able to align themselves with the intent of the first person creator.

⁵² Kannemeyer, 2010, inside front cover

The same is true for the functioning of parodies. Hutcheon (1985, p.23), drawing on the work of literary theorist Michael Riffaterre, proposes that while decoders (readers/viewers) are agents free to choose meanings independent of what is inferred by the encoders (producers), inferred meaning is not to be ignored. This is especially true for parody where there is a set of more limited codes that are foregrounded and contextualised against a background text. Hutcheon argues that these constraints are necessary impositions for comprehension between the different layers of coded meanings in parody, and results in the encoder acting as a 'controlling agent'. The intent of the producer and the effectiveness of the coding is, therefore, an important 'act of communication' in parodic works (ibid: 23-24). For a successful decoding process to happen then (and pleasure to be gained), the encoder often has to assume a certain cultural homogeneity with the decoders, an understanding of the formal aesthetic and textual conventions of the decoders (i.e. a semiotic competence), as well as a shared understanding of the larger social context within which the work exists (ibid: 79). This process becomes a kind of 'double-voicing' of parody and is unintentionally revelatory in the presence and positions of both producer and audience.

While artist statements and writing on Kannemeyer's work claim its relevancy for wider South African society, part of the *modus operandi* and success of his parodies is that it is 'voiced' towards a White South African gallery-going audience which shares (and enjoys) the same particular cultural understandings and modes of reading as he does. Kannemeyer has not only attempted to control the meanings of his works by foregrounding the actions of the White characters, but also by his supporters refuting any readings of his work which doesn't align with theirs. For instance, Marais (2010b) in his newspaper rebuttal to Gule says that Gule's criticism of *The Liberals* (Fig.15) paid too much attention to the image of the coons' impending rape of the middle-class White woman and the slicing of the White man's throat instead of the ironical politically-correct statement uttered by the White liberal woman: "Do something Harold! These historically disadvantaged men want to rape me". For Marais the codification of Black bodies is insignificant in this criticism by a White Afrikaner artist of White liberalism, parodying, in an act of homage, an (in)famous Zapiro cartoon which shows three Black South African politicians ("who just happen to be black" according to Marais) holding down a Black Lady Justice whom President Jacob Zuma is about to rape (Fig.16). People-of-colour reading this work, are asked – or rather there is an insistence – to identify with the imagined anxieties and hypocrisy of the

White couple, and to accept the use of Black bodies as mere props in this violent episode, a means to an end, or else 'we' don't get the joke.

Parody requires an ability and training to read its codes, but what if a reader is not competent in the codes of parody? Hutcheon (1985, p.94) says that the reader will simply naturalise the contents of the text, thereby diminishing the work in both form and content. Kannemeyer's work in the context of a country like South Africa, which has very different cultural aesthetic codings and literacy levels, can provide pleasure for racist readers who see the work as visualising longheld stereotypical beliefs. There is also, of course, the possibility that someone refuses the joke. While Marais insists that Gule doesn't 'get' Kannemeyer's joke, he has missed the fact that Gule actively refutes the work of a joke he finds racist. Psychoanalytic cultural theorist Grada Kilomba picks up on Freud's strategy of triangulation in racist jokes, where such jokes are told by a white 'friend' to a black listener, and says that it embodies a level of violence/humiliation/pain which is inflicted, not only on the black object of the joke, but also on black listeners, as it reaffirms the superiority of whiteness. Kilomba argues that the joke creates a devastating isolation between the black and white individual, and between the black listener and a wider white public that would find the joke funny. The pain that the black listener feels is further enhanced as she is made to feel complicit in the joke that is aimed at 'blackness' or a larger black collective from which the black listener is now alienated as an exception. In refusing to 'get' the joke and by further interrogating it, Gule refuses the role of third person collaborator, and is thus a 'killjoy'. Ahmed (2010a and 2010c) posits the idea of the 'feminist killjoy' as someone who not only upsets social settings by pointing out sexism, but who is also not happy in social spaces where one is expected to be so.⁵³ The killjoy is someone who, "In speaking up or speaking out, you upset the situation", in pointing out the problem, they become the problem even though their aim is to question 'naturalisations' and raise consciousness (Ahmed, 2010b). With Gule's refusal, the joke ceases to be a joke and the pleasure that is supposed to be elicited is denied much to the disconcertion of Marais (and Kannemeyer as will be seen in the statements below).

Freud (1905/1991, p.180-183) remarks that jokes employ techniques that 'safe-guard' them from objections and criticisms and, moreover, hint at being possessed of power. Part of the

⁵³ The angry black feminist is a version of the feminist killjoy – she may kill feminist joy, she may kill racial solidarity joy (Ahmed, 2010a, 2010c).

'safe-guarding' mechanisms employed by Kannemeyer and his supporters' has been assuming a position of victimhood and silencing. I quote at length a few examples of their speech:

With *Pappa in Afrika*, my last book, there's been kind of a reaction from *a new African intellectual class*, and they find it problematic. There have been discussion, because there are people who support me and other who say that it borders on racism. The one big argument that's been made is, *a black academic* said recently that me using *black images* is kind of sickening. And as now I'm also criticizing the *new black government*, the work becomes more complicated. Now, I'm not just criticizing the white male, I'm also criticizing the abuse of power. But people came to my defense, saying that in the old days, when I was criticizing the old government, I was a good boy and doing the right thing. But now that I'm criticizing the new government, I'm a racist because I'm not allowed to *say anything against black people*. I think that's absolute nonsense [Sic] (Kannemeyer quoted in Guilbert, 2012, italics added).

According to Gule, it [*Pappa in Afrika*] therefore raises the question 'whether art that is somehow transgressive or subversive necessarily implies progressive politics'. Nonsense! *Pappa* raises a host of difficult questions, but not necessarily that one. ... With *Pappa in Afrika* Kannemeyer puts himself in that 'tangled middle' and runs the risk of being called racist and cynical by commentators such as Gule. But the big questions *Pappa in Afrika* raises are necessary ones without easy answers. It implicitly asks whether white people can ever be forgiven for the horrors of (ongoing) colonialism and whether they will ever be able to see Africa as their home when they have been raised to fear the continent and its people and when so many atrocities seem to warn them that their worst nightmares may come true [Sic] (Marais 2010b).

Marais and Kannemeyer's identity politics concern me. Kannemeyer's own statement above indicates a contradictory understanding of what it means to be 'black', 'Black South African' or 'African': 'Blacks' as a South African racial category signifying indigenous Black South Africans; 'black' as in the South African classificatory term denoting 'previously disadvantaged' groups under apartheid (Blacks, Indians, Coloureds, Chinese); 'African' which is a trans-continental affiliation based on 'citizenship' of the African continent; and the predominantly Black ANC-led coalition government, all of which are indistinguishable and interchangeable for Kannemeyer. The blurb found on the cover of *Pappa in Afrika* refers to Kannemeyer as a 'White African', but Kannemeyer's response to criticism by 'a new African intellectual class' and a 'black academic' demonstrates that he equates 'Black' with 'African' and vice versa, showing that he is uncertain

of the position of Whiteness on the continent. Moreover, he reduces criticism of his work to the (over)readings of Black/African intelligentsia, against which other White colleagues (presumably Marais) needed to defend him. In Marais's (2010b) *Mail and Guardian* rebuttal to Gule, the headline reads: "Denying the Privileged a Voice: If racial privilege disallows *unbiased commentary*, how is a white artist supposed to critique a multiracial nation without being considered racist?" (Italics added). Kannemeyer's work is hardly representative of a multiracial nation,⁵⁴ but more importantly, Marais first emphatically states that Whiteness is being silenced, and then, that Kannemeyer's fictional depictions of White phantasmagoria are "unbiased commentary". hooks (1996, p.73) argues that all too often white producers believe their culturally coded aesthetics are 'natural': "Until everyone can acknowledge that white supremacist aesthetics shape creativity in ways that disallow and discourage the production by any group of images that break with this aesthetic, audiences can falsely assume that images are politically neutral." Moreover, White victimhood places the onus on Black Africans for the existence of their fears and for the state of the country and continent because they are in the majority and have political power (even though those same Whites are raised by other White people to fear the African continent). Furthermore, Black Africans are responsible for White South Africans not feeling that they are forgiven for, ironically, "(ongoing) colonialism", and for creating a climate of "atrocities" throughout the continent which is always threatening to engulf White South Africans. Although all Africans are exposed to "so many atrocities", there appears to be a state of exceptionalism that is granted for White South Africans – what psychologist Aída Hurtado (1999, p.229) calls a 'special needs population' whose needs – according to them, "deserve priority and should be privileged above others". Hurtado (ibid: 228) says that Whiteness, which is often rendered invisible and naturalised, seems to matter only (to white people) "when it is decentered and its privileges threatened", whereupon strategic efforts are then made to 'recentre' it.

Sarah Projansky and Kent Ono term this white re-centring 'strategic whiteness'. In 'Strategic Whiteness as Cinematic Racial Politics' (1999) they examine a range of Hollywood films which appear to be openly critical of racism, but end up restaging the centrality of whiteness through a consistent identification with whiteness. By appealing to a white spectatorial position, whiteness is always addressed through the characters and narratives, and, despite its "attention

⁵⁴ Coloureds, Indians, Chinese and Africans from different parts of Africa do not exist in this simplistic universe, nor are there distinctions within the White population.

to blackness”, it “occludes ‘other’ positions” (Projansky and Ono, 1999, p.151). Projansky and Ono (ibid: 152) claim that strategic whiteness makes “subtle discursive adjustments” which enable a recuperation of white power and self-protection, invalidating any challenges made to it, while superficially appearing to challenge whiteness and reaffirm difference. This can be seen, for instance, in Kannemeyer and Marais’ rebuttals of “nonsense” with regard to valid questioning of his imagery.

Marais’s defence of Kannemeyer’s humour presumes a cross-cultural transparency. He claims our collective inability to ‘get’ Kannemeyer’s jokes is a marker of democratic failure: “The extent to which Kannemeyer’s dark graphic jokes fill viewers with unease, anger or alarm can be seen to indicate how far removed we are from that place where mutually respectful South Africans of all languages and ethnic groups can sit around a table and share a similar joke” (Marais, 2010a: 95). Culturally coded aesthetics and values, which for long have been (forcefully) defined and established by Whiteness, renders the enforced centralisation of that Whiteness invisible in this discussion. South Africa law scholar Pierre de Vos (2013), in an online article entitled ‘When a Joke is not a Joke’, points out how jokes are used by White cultural producers to silence criticisms of stereotypes and prejudices which surface in South African media:

People whose world view is dominant and who benefit from the way in which society is structured and how “knowledge” is produced, often resort to the joke defence in an attempt to re-assert what they believe is their unquestioning right to control the discourse, and thus to control what those who are not like them are allowed to think and feel.

De Vos’ commentary highlights that White South Africans still have significant power as cultural producers and consumers in determining dominant ways of looking. The visual arts field in South Africa is reflective of this, and I believe visualises a kind of ‘White Talk’ that Critical Whiteness Studies researcher Melissa Steyn’s work highlights in various South African media, and which exemplifies a resistant Whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa.

White Anxiety, White Talk

According to Steyn (2004, p.144-145), Critical Whiteness Studies aims to show that “whiteness has definite cultural content, characterized by assumptions, belief systems, value structures and institutional and discursive options that frame white people’s self-understanding...”. An important aspect of this discourse is exposing how racial order “functions around the comfort,

convenience, affirmation, solidarity, psychological well-being, advantage, and advancement of whites” (Steyn, 2004, p.144-145).⁵⁵ The Afrikaner community, in particular, has always felt less secure about its future when it has not been in political control of South Africa, and Steyn finds that post-apartheid, many Afrikaners once again feel alienated, threatened, victimised and powerless.⁵⁶ Afrikaner ideologies based on “patriarchal religious foundationalism” have imploded, and part of the mechanism of White Talk has been the need to maintain the political, economic and social ground of apartheid through a ‘naturalised’ White ethnic talk around certain symbolic institutions like language, religion, history, arts and sport (ibid: 151). Steyn (2004, p.153) argues that these anxieties about identity and loss are found more in Afrikaner South Africans than in English-speaking White South Africans. Whereas the Afrikaner community is struggling with an existential crisis, English South Africans identify with an international ‘Englishness’/whiteness, which still has a stable ideological centre. Thus, Steyn (ibid: 162) argues that while White talk serves a ‘maintenance function’ for the English South Africans, Afrikaner White talk is more constitutive and an active, aggressive reconstitution of a position for Afrikaners against the Africa Other and English Other – the former having local power, the other having global power.

White Talk is marked by a post-apartheid anxiety and purports to a sense of compatriotism by stressing important ‘liberal’ values that White South Africans believe are shared by all South Africans, namely: “democracy, social development, non-racialism and non-sexism, reconciliation, equality and freedom”. This strategy ensures a “positive self-presentation” and “defence against attack”.⁵⁷ Steyn and Don Foster (2008: 46), in their article ‘Repertoires for Talking White: Resistant Whiteness in post-apartheid South Africa’, believe that the difficulties facing a country in political and socio-economic transformation and redress become “resources for whiteness”, which permits it to hold onto its self-interest by situating Africa(ns) as “pathological and hopeless”.

⁵⁵ Steyn’s research is more nuanced than what is offered in this study, and shows the distinctions between perspectives and ideologies of Afrikaner and White English South Africans.

⁵⁶ In the article ‘Afrikaner Fears and the Politics of Despair: Understanding Change in South Africa’ (1992), Kate Manzo and Pat McGowan interviewed a number of middle and upper-class Afrikaner South Africans in 1988, prior to the unbanning of anti-apartheid political parties and the release of Nelson Mandela. Afrikaners, even when they controlled SA politically in the 80s, were very anxious about their future, which was tied to a pessimistic view of the country as a whole. They were fearful of their economic situation, the incompetence of Black governance, and the inevitability of dictatorships (Manzo and McGowan, 1992, p.10, 14). Steyn’s research on resistance Whiteness in SA shows these fears continue.

⁵⁷ Steyn and Foster, 2008, p.28

This kind of Afro-pessimism dominates *Pappa in Afrika*: Africa and Africans are over-determined signs struggling between (neo)colonial abuse of African resources (the bodies of Black Africans included), constant wars and political dictatorships, and the struggle between the good Black versus the bad Black.⁵⁸ In *Pappa in Afrika*, all Black/African leaders portrayed are ‘bad’ except for the singular tribute to assassinated Democratic Republic of the Congo President Patrice Lumumba. Steyn and Foster (ibid: 34) believe that the “trope of *good blacks*” is used to “discredit and even reprimand the ideologically more confrontational position of other ‘others’”. Middle-class Black ‘fatcats’ are frequently criticised in Kannemeyer’s work, and there is a certain discomfort associated with their economic status. It is common to hear criticisms of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) and how this has created a greedy Black bourgeoisie. Statistics, however, reveal that the Black bourgeoisie remains small (under 10% of the South African population), with the 2011 South African census indicating that White men still maintain the most privileged economic space (highest education, the best jobs and the highest salaries), and that the economic divide between the average South African White and Black households is staggering.⁵⁹ The emphasis, then, on a small Black bourgeoisie skews the fact that economic power remains vested in the hands of White South Africans who make up approximately 9.6% of the population. Moreover, Steyn and Foster (ibid: 42) believe that part of this indignation/resentment stems from the belief that any advancement by Black Africans has to be through tokenism (affirmative action policies) or corruption, and is marked by their inability to “handle their new status”, with their inevitable blundering resulting in a threat to transformation and the welfare of South Africa.

White Talk ‘stacks up’ negative tropes of Black governance with little contextualisation of the cause-and-effects of social ills, and legitimises White pessimism as a reasonable/rational reaction to the challenges facing the ‘New South Africa’. White culpability is played down with “appeals to the universality of our common human nature” (ibid: 32), advocating for all people in South Africa to be held accountable, particularly allowing White South Africans to assume the peculiar role of victim in a new kind of reverse racism (Christiansë, 2003). Crime, murder, rape,

⁵⁸ In most instances, ex-president Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu are regarded as ‘good Blacks’, while ex-president Thabo Mbeki, current president Jacob Zuma, the ANC Youth League (identified with ex-president Julius Malema) and beneficiaries of Black Economic Empowerment are deemed ‘bad Blacks’.

⁵⁹ Black-headed households earned on average an annual income of R60 000 while White-headed households earned per annum an average of R365 000 and it is projected that it will take another 60 years for Black South Africans to reach some sense of equal economic status with White households – see Bailey (2012).

the abuse of women and children are extraordinarily high among all communities in South Africa, but White Talk identifies Blackness, Africanness and Black rule as the source of criminality (particularly with regard to the killings of White farmers). White Talk attributes the levels of crime to Black leadership's inability to curb it or mete out appropriate punishment. Victims are 'innocent', they bring attention to the actions of the perpetrators, solicit feelings of "outrage, indignation, and self-pity", which justifies more militaristic beliefs (Steyn, 2004, p.156-157).

This can be evidenced in the contradictory statement by Marais (2010b),

When they were *marginalised* and racially privileged – but criticised the apartheid government and its legacy – they were still reliable watchdogs. But their mockery of the new order is supposedly rabid, cynical and arrogant because they are racially privileged (italics added).

It is unclear when these White men artists were marginalised. One can only assume Marais to mean when other White South Africans criticised their works during the final years of apartheid. There is an imagination of victimhood that Marais claims for these artists that is sheer fantasy. Enwezor (1997, p 26) calls this a 'wounded whiteness' which sees itself as "endangered, on the brink of extinction, in need of special protection and reparation."⁶⁰ The way White victimhood is made visible in these instances allows Whites to "reach out to their racial kin in the white mainlands through the ideological allegiances of whiteness" (Steyn and Foster, 2008, p.46). This can be seen in the currency Kannemeyer's work has internationally among white persons in the US and Europe. In a sleight of hand, the mask of whiteness, which is usually invisible, makes visible whiteness as a minority in the new South Africa, and seeks to use it as a resource, a currency, and to make profit from its mask of 'disenfranchisement' (Christiansë, 2003, p.387-388).

Commodification and Currency

While Kannemeyer's blackface, like Lhamon's early blackface sign around which underclass white youth gathered, seems to demonstrate similar questioning of authorities (both Black and

⁶⁰ Jung talks of the trickster figure as one which is also a motif of subjective suffering, whose "senseless orgies of destruction and his self-imposed sufferings", produces a saviour, humanising spirit. This can be applied to Kannemeyer and Marais and their wounded Whiteness, imagined victimhood and belief in Kannemeyer's work as having salvation overtones.

White), we have seen how he, as a privileged White cultural producer, also uses blackface as a vehicle for personal catharsis and veiled criticisms of African society, while masking an appeal to, and an enjoyment with, White South African society. When the blackface trickster is unmasked, there is no renewing discourse, no regenerating, rejuvenating, re-empowering element or transformation that Fisher identifies in trickster figures or that Bakhtin theorises in his ideas of carnivalesque laughter, no reversal of order, however temporary. There are only masks of whiteness which appropriate masks of blackness.

Enwezor (1998, p.24) asks the pertinent questions of a number of White visual artists who work with images of the Black body, "What benefits and status does proximity to this body confer in the present tense of South Africa's post-Apartheid construction politics?" My argument is that this proximity to the Black body has allowed a number of young White cultural producers in the visual arts actively to benefit (exhibitions, sales, media attention, international invitations) from the exploitation of the gaze on Black bodies and stereotypes of Blackness/Africanness, and yet at the same time they are completely alienated from the realities faced by the Black working-class majority. Unaccustomed to perspectival challenges by people-of-colour, White artists who have been criticised for their racial representations (Brett Murray, Conrad Botes, Pieter Hugo, Guy Tillim, Jodi Bieber, Penny Siopis, Candice Breitz), have been unable to apprehend that there *might* be something inappropriate about their *choice* of representation and accessibility to Black bodies. There has been little consideration that the Black body is a political image and, "in the context of issues of representation in a racist and racialised society, is neither a mute object of transcultural transaction nor an innocent image shorn of the complexity of history that attends to its every display" (Enwezor, 1998, p.25).

Why does a White artist feel the need or the legitimacy to use masks of blackness to register his complaints against authority, White or Black? Why still the insistence on the humiliating caricature that is blackface? The fact that my questions are secondary to the question of 'why not?', and the 'freedom' of White artists to engage whatever forms of critique they choose, is, I believe, also revelatory of the power maintained by Whiteness in visual discourses, the availability of Otherness in representations, and a lack of ethical responsibility and accountability in the production of images more generally in society, despite a climate of

continued racial tensions.⁶¹ The blackface sign is not just a culturally-specific US sign, but is problematically depoliticised and used internationally to denote 'blacks' and 'blackness'. Thus, Kannemeyer is not merely a White Afrikaner parodying his own culture, but exemplifies a type of 'whiteness' internationally, visualising the fear of the Other and simultaneously a consumption of the Other without any regard for the real effects this has, which can be seen in the global resurgence of blackface or blacking-up in popular culture advertising, music, the internet and costume parties as a means of mockery or making difference visible for consumption (Figs. 17-24). hooks' article 'Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance' reminds us of the contemporary enjoyment and consumption of racial difference:

Within current debates about race and difference, mass culture is the contemporary location that both publicly declares and perpetuates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgment and enjoyment of racial difference. The commodification of Otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling (hooks, 1992, p.21).

In the three years of producing this PhD, incidents of blacking-up and blackface minstrelsy have been highlighted across the world practically every month. Some of these instances include the following (see Figs. 17a-24): advertising for make-up and food (the 2009 French *Vogue* edition, the British make-up company *Illamasqua* 2012 blackface, French magazine *Numéro* in 2013, the Thai *Dunkin' Donuts* 'Charcoal Donut' 2013 advert); costume, Halloween parties and university soirees in the US and South Africa (see Grenoble, 2013, and Evans and Flanagan, 2014); in the music industry, the South African zef-rave rap group Die Antwoord's *Hey Fatty Boom Boom* video in 2012 (see Haupt 2012b) and the controversy over Miley Cyrus's MTV performance in 2013; and in the visual arts the 2012 controversy of the Moderna Museet in Sweden blackface cake (see Evans, 2012). There have also been various contemporary discussions about the appropriation and display of black bodies by white visual artists: South African artist Brett Murray's painting *Spear* of President Zuma with penis exposed in 2011 but also the larger body of the work that is *Hail to the Thief* (Burger 2011); South African artist's Steven Cohen's use of

⁶¹ The 2011 furore around Brett Murray's painting of President Jacob Zuma in a suit with his penis exposed revealed that racial tensions in SA continue to be high. Murray's artwork afforded him unprecedented print and television coverage locally and internationally. Some repercussions, however, were that the painting was damaged, several protests were organised by the national trade union (COSATU), the gallery had to be closed and gallery staff were exposed to death threats. President Zuma's spokesperson had initially spoken of suing Brett Murray but this was later abandoned (especially in light of an earlier unsuccessful attempt on cartoonist Zapiro). While this is indeed indicative of free speech winning the day, the implications of incidents like this are being felt and might be a harbinger of different forms of censorship (see Khan, 2014a).

his domestic worker in his exhibition *Magog* in 2012 (Joja, 2012), South African playwright-artist Brett Bailey's use of black bodies in his performance piece *Exhibit B* in London in 2014 (Qasim, 2014); the US artist Joe Scanlan's hiring of black woman to perform his alter ego Donelle Woolford (see Fusco, 2014). These last cases have questioned the 'right' of white artists to use black bodies as they see fit, and situate the 'race' and accompanying privileges of these white male producers in the visual art specifically and in society more generally.

As Ahmed (2000, p.129, 133) has pointed out in her discussion on racial passing, for white subjects 'passing for another race' becomes a detachable signifier, a mask when it is not essentialised on a body – assimilable difference becomes one that whiteness can put on and take off. It hides whiteness' privilege of being invisible, as passing too, and renders blackness 'all surface', merely outward features and physical talent. It pretends at proximity through epidermalization and cultural posturing, it mimics diversity, difference and coolness, even as it simultaneously mocks and distances from social inequalities. The slipperiness of blackface has shown all too often that it is a difficult mask to wear and that its codifications, even when positive, tend to stretch beyond control and to consume all.

In his 2000 film, *Bamboozled*, African-American director Spike Lee critiques blackface currency, and questions artistic responsibility, especially when it is masked by labels of 'parody' and 'art'. In visual arts, a level of criticality is assumed for artworks in a gallery space, especially when it is thought to be transgressive. Gule's idea that transgressiveness does not denote progressive politics is reiterated by Hutcheon's work on parody. While Hutcheon (1985, p.74-76) believes in the possibilities of parody for disruption, re-evaluation and re-creation, she reminds the reader that this potential is not always realised because of a fundamental paradox in parody: in order to reformulate and recode texts, hierarchies and recognized conventions are necessarily referenced, re-authorised and reinforced. Parody therefore, often, functions as authorized transgression – in South Africa, this authorisation is provided by White economic and cultural power, as it dominates the visual arts field in terms of gallery representation, curating, art history discourses and art writing.⁶²

hooks (1996, p.26) shares this belief that transgressive discourse is not sufficient if it does not lead to transformation *in* discourses. Gule and hooks are quick to point out that they are not

⁶² See Enwezor (1998, footnote: 27); Ashton (2006) and Khan, 2011 and 2006 for discussions on how black critiques of White dominance and racism in the art field are silenced.

advocating didactic art practices or prescribing what is 'right' and 'wrong', nor do they believe that black practitioners can engage any better than their white counterparts. Instead, there is a call for vigilance, for a constant interrogation of racial, class and gender coding which involves all creative producers in the process of decolonising visualisations:

Ostensibly, any artist whose politics lead him or her to oppose imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism, white supremacy, and the everyday racism that abounds in all our lives would endeavour to create images that do not perpetuate and sustain domination and exploitation (ibid: 103).

Socially progressive art practice should, therefore, move beyond simple *appearances* of transgressiveness.

Enwezor (1998, p.27) reminds us that representation is not above morality, and accountability, and simply art-for-art's sake, but that there has to be "an ethics of usage, a sensitivity to and respect for those images that have deeply coded meanings". As a woman-of-colour visual artist invested in masquerading performances, who occupies neither a White nor Black position in South Africa, I have tried to understand blackface as an ambivalent parodic masquerading strategy which raises uncomfortable questions about representation and its users/producers who keep it in circulation, but have also explored this mask's ability to serve as a vehicle for self-affirmation. This thesis delves deeper into masquerading as a strategy of reflection and empowerment in post-colonial contexts, but first Chapter Two will further unpack concepts of masquerade to provide a theoretical ground for reading the works of Tracey Rose, Nandipha Mntambo, Senzeni Marasela and Mary Sibande in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER TWO:

Historical and Theoretical Perspectives of Masquerade

To be inauthentic is sometimes the best way to be real (Gilroy, 1995, p.29).

Masquerading's extensive history in different societies and contexts has given rise to numerous perspectives. In this chapter I discuss theories that I have engaged with via masquerading in the visual arts, which often have been directly influenced by notions of feminism, psychoanalysis, race and postcolonialism. The chapter does not present a chronological development of these masquerading ideas, but rather discusses them as I've encountered them as an artist.⁶³ In explorations in my postcolonial masquerading artwork, the concepts of mimicry, masking, repetition and menace have emerged as formative characteristics of a postcolonial masquerade, and I begin with an analysis of the key term 'mimicry'.

The concept of mimesis, from the Greek work 'mimeisthai',⁶⁴ means 'to imitate' particularly referencing the ability of art to imitate/copy the real. Greek philosopher Socrates (Plato, c.380 B.C/2002, p.231) regarded mimesis as a copy of an original (truth), an illusion or deceptive appearance that could never compare to the original. Human susceptibility to mimesis is dangerous, Socrates argues, as it could wrongly influence children and young men by exposing them to false information. He criticises the mimetic art's ability to raise emotion (especially fear) in its audience, which deviates from the importance of a stoic life and strict adherence to the dictates of logic and reason (ibid: 236 – 242, 470). Philosopher, Aristotle, in his *Poetics* (c.335 B.C), is, however, more agreeable to the idea of mimesis. Aristotle regards mimesis as a key feature of man's development from childhood which is harnessed into a craft that provides insight into realistic ideas and contexts. He felt that humans are moved by the likeness of people or situations that are created through mimesis, from which they then learn (c335 B.C/2000, p.7).

⁶³ This means that the theories move trans-historically and trans-contextually without necessarily following any logic besides my own interest in them. Sometimes notable works on these ideas are also not presented as they have not influenced either my writing or practical work.

⁶⁴ The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines s.v. 'mimesis' (noun) as: "imitative representation of the real world in art and literature"; "the deliberate imitation of the behaviour of one group of people by another as a factor of social change"; and in zoology as "mimicry of another animal or plant".

The concept of mimesis has filtered into the natural sciences, behavioural psychology, psychoanalytic ideas of identity production and performance, educational studies, Western imperialist strategies, and modern culture's industrial production and mass culture. Mimesis has come to be associated with the concepts of "emulation, mimicry, dissimulation, doubling, theatricality, realism, identification, correspondence, depiction, verisimilitude, resemblance" and, has, since its Platonic usage, been intrinsically linked with the arts (ideas of authenticity, genius, reproducibility, multiples) as a marker of culturally coded value.⁶⁵ Matthew Potolsky in his book *Mimesis* (2006) argues that the act of mimesis implicates the simulation that is made, the simulator, the simulated, and those for whom the simulation is presented, often (un)intentionally exposing the very conventions that structures its applicability. The influence of mimesis on individual and collective human nature and behaviour continues to intrigue theorists – this can be seen in the many studies which attempt to show the effects of mimetic behaviour today, particularly with regard to popular culture genres (TV, gaming, internet), where the creative 'non-real' can influence the 'real' (ibid: 19). 'Mimicry' was derived from the same root of the Greek word for human 'imitation' in the mid-1600s, but, by the mid-1800s, became largely used to denote biological mimicry, particularly in nature. Culturally, the words 'mimicry' and 'mimesis' are often used interchangeably, but this research prefers to use mimicry as it has been established in theories of identity performativity, and as I first encountered it in Western feminism and then in postcolonial studies.

Feminist Perspectives of Masquerade

My initial explorations of the concept of masquerade were via feminist psychoanalytic ideas of womanliness as a mask. A foundational text in this regard was the 1929 article by lay psychoanalyst Joan Riviere entitled 'Womanliness as a Masquerade'. Riviere's article focuses on her assessment of a woman professional who successfully maintained her work, home, friends and family, but was prone to anxiety prompted by her work performance which affected her health: she actively sought compliments and attention from older male colleagues whom she considered inferior to herself, and experienced an intense rivalry with other women. Riviere draws on Freud's castration and Oedipus theory to posit that this woman would adopt an over-

⁶⁵ Potolsky, 2006, p.1

manifestation of 'womanliness' in order to pacify the castrated father figure (her male colleagues). Riviere (1929/1986, p.38) regards the patient's display of 'womanliness' as a masquerade of guiltlessness or innocence, with the mask of femininity being used as a disguise to ensure the woman's safety by hiding the "possession of masculinity". Importantly, though, Riviere (ibid: 38) does not make a distinction between a 'real' femininity and the masquerade of womanliness: "My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference; whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing." Literary theorist Stephen Heath (1986, p.46) argues that Riviere's theory locates womanliness as a pretence, in which there is no authentic woman, only a constructed mimicry of femininity which is supposed to signify 'woman', and, thus, inherently contains the elements of "mask, disguise, threat, danger" (ibid: 49, 52-53). Thus, femininity, itself, is malleable, an identity created by woman for herself, but also for men and for society. What Riviere identified, and which has been a significant idea in feminism and queer theory, is the element of performativity that informs identity constructions with regard to gender and sexuality. The disguise of 'womanliness' is both of substance (always the danger of what is hidden) and simultaneously a lack (there is no essential feminine identity over which the masquerade is laid).

Psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1953/2006, p.228–231) extends this idea of lack to question the ontology of gender (of a pre-given 'being'), and finds that it is inconceivable apart from the phallogocentrism of language, or the 'Name of the Father'. There is no primacy to gender identity, 'being' is constituted through language and patriarchal regulation determined by the differentiated positions of 'having' the Phallus and 'being' the Phallus. Man has the Phallus and, thus, the power by which to define himself and Other (Lacan, 1958/2006, p.578–579). Women lack the Phallus, and in this lack, come to reflect those who have the Phallus (ibid). Both genders work on appearances in order to signify gendered positions. For Lacan, the penis is also not equivalent to paternal law and can never fully realise this law, and is, therefore, also a kind of lack. For both gendered positions, the 'repeated impossibilities' of gender signification is a kind of comedic failure where everybody ultimately lacks the Phallus (ibid: 582-583). He believes that women 'mask' this lack through a masquerade – this performance produces the sexual ontology of women. Lacan struggled with the idea of women's sexuality throughout his writing, grappling with the notion that the category of 'the woman' could only ever be a fantasy defined by Phallic language.

Whereas Riviere and Lacan's theories render women as a depressing lack, feminist theorist Luce Irigaray in *This Sex which is not One* (1977/1985) engages more agency within the notion of the womanly masquerade. Irigaray's definition of masquerade comes from Freud's understanding of 'normal womanhood' (that is the resolution of the female Oedipus complex), where a woman has to embody a masquerade of femininity and inscribe into "a system of values that is not hers, and in which she can 'appear' and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely men" (Irigaray, 1977/1985, p.134). Thus feminine masquerade is the visible expression and sustenance of man's desire. Nonetheless, Irigaray (ibid: 220, 78) believes that a mimicry of femininity could be an "interim" strategy in masculine discourse capable of subversion by women through a conscious mimesis of feminine coding to make visible the workings of hidden patriarchal structuring, which has constructed, within Western discourse, femininity as 'not', deficient, imitation. Although Irigaray noted the difficulties of speaking as women to women in the phallogocentric language of paternal law, she did not think it was impossible to do. She believed that gestures – even the gestures of mimicry – could be expressed for example in suffering, in laughter, in what women dare to say when they are addressing each other and where they are addressing each other, in their own desire, and in what would produce a female imaginary. These potentialities are elaborated on later in this chapter in a discussion of black feminist epistemologies, but are also explored in Chapter Three in the artworks of South African women-of-colour visual artists in terms of the content, creative methodologies and the audiences they address in their black women-centred works.

An attempt to locate agency within identity masquerading is also a concern of feminist Judith Butler, who often employs psychoanalytic and post-structural theories in her examinations of gender performativity. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler 'troubles' the categories of gender and sexuality, but further questions the foundationalist ideas of 'sex' that are naturalised in societies and created in relation to an essentialist heterosexist matrix, which she defines as:

... hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practice of heterosexuality (Butler, footnote 6, 1990/2006, p.208).

Bodies are read as naturally sexed from which gender and desire stem, and 'intelligible genders' are those which adhere to regulatory practices which maintain social relations and coherence

between the relational terms of sex-gender-sexual practice-desire, but also the continuity of the species as such (ibid: 23). Butler questions the seamlessness of this given relation, and interrogates the sex-as-natural/gender-as-construct divide saying that, “Gender, ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established” (ibid: 10). Thus, sex is not a pre-discursive anatomical fact which culture acts on, but already a construct regulated and produced by language and power. Drawing on feminist writer Monique Wittig’s research on gender and sexuality, Butler (ibid: 157) says sex-gender-sexuality-desire contracts are established through a series of repeated stylised performative gestures, acts and enactments, which mark these positions, and produce reality-effects that are eventually misperceived as ‘facts’. Speech acts (based on linguist John Austin’s investigation of how utterances perform an action) inform practice in which “difference, disparity, and, consequently, hierarchy ... *becomes* social reality” (ibid: 161). The repetition of gender acts not only re-enacts, but re-experiences social significations of gender for the doer who believes in these performances and performs in a “mode of belief” (ibid: 190-192). Butler understands the body not as a being, but a marker of boundaries, a surface of signification that is politically regulated and allows identities to be continuously called into question.

Thus, while all gender-sex acts are imitative parodies, society marks gay sexuality as being outside heterosexuality. Butler (ibid: 43) makes evident the illusion of an originary status of heterosexuality and posits that gayness is not not a copy of an original sexuality, but is rather “as copy is to copy”, a “parodic repetition of ‘the original’”. She does not believe that it is possible to escape this law of power, but does believe in a subversive repetition through parody to redeploy repetition to unsettle, to trouble that same law, so that it might turn against itself and spawn “unexpected permutations of itself” (ibid: 127). Butler identifies de-formity and possibilities of failure in repetition in parodic representation as exposing the “phantasmatic effect of abiding identity” – she names manifestations of butch and femme lesbian performances, as well as drag as such blurring strategies (ibid: 192).⁶⁶ Butler regards ‘agency’ as the potential for making evident that identity is “a regulated process of repetition”, as an effect of a “constitutive failure of all gender enactments” (ibid: 198, 200).

More recently, Cultural Studies scholar Angela McRobbie in *The Aftermath of Feminism* (2009),

⁶⁶ bell hooks claims, however, that critical commentary on drag performances often ignore the class and racial dimensions of such mimetic performances. See hooks, 1996, p.214-226

developed the idea of a 'post-feminist masquerade' in the UK, which she views as a backlash in the 90s and 2000s against feminism by young women who enjoy the benefits of it, while still subscribing to patriarchal values (Patricia Hill Collins provides a definition for feminism as "an ideology and a global political movement that confronts sexism, a social relationship in which males as a group have authority over females as a group").⁶⁷ This 'post-feminist masquerade' is characterised by mainstream depictions of economically independent women whose identities are based upon brand name labels, an eagerness to please, non-coerciveness, vulnerability and anxiousness about 'forfeiting' the desire of the male gaze. While feminist gains have become incorporated into political and institutional life, tropes of agency and choice have given rise to a "*faux-feminism*", which has become instrumentalised by Western governments to promote conservative views on gender, sexuality and family life (McRobbie, 2009, p.1). Young women subscribe to Western societies promotion of 'female individualism' and meritocracy (via governmental views and popular culture representations), which McRobbie believes fits in with Britain's right-wing government's views against welfare and dependence, thus reducing disadvantages and dysfunctionality to personal family level rather than social phenomena (ibid: 16, 77).

The post-feminist masquerade also re-inscribes whiteness and middle-classness as the culturally dominant normative, and McRobbie (ibid: 43, 71) views these strategies as a 'recolonising mechanism', which revives racial hierarchies by reigniting the normativity of whiteness. McRobbie (ibid: 94) believes that this post-feminist masquerading has come at the cost of an indiscernible loss of feminism, and an illegible rage by young women, which has resulted in self-harming, destructive behaviour by young white British women.⁶⁸ McRobbie views education spaces – which many young women are accessing – as important contact zones for reviving feminist histories, knowledge and activism. While, I agree with McRobbie on pedagogy as an important critical tool for raising consciousness, I have, too often, struggled to 'locate' myself as a racialized, ethnic postcolonial woman within Western feminist perspectives, even finding that such theories have been used to suppress and silence me – this was particularly the case writing about racial oppression in the visual arts field, and having White women in power (many whom claim the feminist label) refuse to work with me from that point onwards, labelling me a

⁶⁷ Collins, 1999, p.131

⁶⁸ McRobbie finds that popular media are fascinated by young women in pain who demonstrate their melancholic self-loathing through avenues such as anorexia, bulimia, drugs, sex and, sometimes, shameless self-exposure.

‘troublemaker’ and using public platforms to dismiss my artwork, my views and even my personality. This was also my experience with my previous Master degrees studies where my interest in black feminist studies was met with outright hostility by White women academics and examiners, with dissuasion that such perspectives were legitimate and could be used in formal research. Furthermore, as someone born into an ‘underclass’ family, I felt – and still do – that academic discourses often speak *about* people like me in homogenous, either/or ways which do not reflect the contradictions and ambiguities of my life. It was in African literature and black and African feminisms that I located myself and my beliefs in gender/racial/economic equality, and I would like to quickly outline black/African feminist work that I draw on, particularly for the third chapter.

Black-African Feminisms and Creative Theorising

Black feminist works have a long written history (and an even longer oral history).⁶⁹ Black feminism in the US evolved from African-American women participants in the 1960s Civil Rights and feminist movements, and in Africa in various anti-colonial and independence movements. Many of these women-of-colour felt that official equality movements focused mostly on white women or black men in their struggles against white patriarchy.⁷⁰ Black women academics like Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Alice Walker, bell hooks, Patricia Hill Collins, etc., argued that Western feminist theories emanated from its central positioning of white Western middle-class women, homogenising women’s experiences, and leaving many women-of-colour feeling invisible in these discourses.⁷¹ There were also differing cultural perspectives in relation to men, marriage, children, religion and homosexuality.⁷² From the 1960s onwards, a number of women-

⁶⁹ Collins (2000/2009) traces black feminist activism and self-definition in public talks and writings in the early 19th century.

⁷⁰ For histories of black feminist thought see hooks (1982, 1984/2000), de la Rey (1997), Collins (2000/2009), Kiguwa (2004), Abrahams (2001), Lewis (2001a, 2002, 2004, 2010) and Arnfred (2009).

⁷¹ It should be noted that although many of these women are regarded as important contributors to black feminist discourse, they may have ideological contestations with calling themselves ‘black feminists’ or indeed ‘feminists’ (Collins, 1999). Other alternatives are sometimes proposed like Alice Walker’s ‘womanism’ or Molaria Ogunidipe Leslie’s Stiwanism (Social Transformation in Africa Including Woman). Black feminist legal scholar/academic Kimberle Crenshaw is credited with coining the term ‘intersectionality’ in her 1989 article (‘Demarginalising the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics’) to discuss the interlocking oppressions operating in black women’s lives, although this idea is prevalent in many texts before this piece. South African black feminists Pumla Gqola, Yvette Abrahams and Desiree Lewis often draw on black/African/postcolonial feminisms as intersectional terms to foreground a particular allegiance or positionality in different discussions.

⁷² See hooks (1984/2000), de la Rey (1997), Collins 1999 and 2000/2009 and Kolawole (1997).

of-colour theoretical perspectives emerged around the world under the rubric of black feminism, African feminisms, Third World/postcolonial feminisms and intersectionality studies.⁷³ These discourses complicate narratives of gender by insisting that the categories of race-sex-class-sexuality-ethnicity-religion-location do not function independently in women-of-colours' lives, but are interlocking matrices of domination that result in multiple oppressions of them in the spaces they are positioned. These perspectives insisted on acknowledging the heterogeneity that existed between women-of-colour themselves, even while unifying over 'women-of-colour' as a political standpoint for self-determination and self-definition (Collins, 1999, p.127). Says black feminist Heidi Mirza (2010, p.8) of the proximity of black and postcolonial feminisms:

Black feminist thought which is grounded in an understanding of the nature of power, draws on intersectional analysis to explore the way 'the black/othered woman's difference' is systematically organised through the modalities of race, gender and class in everyday social relations...Postcolonial feminist approaches situate the 'spectral' power of colonial times as it appears and disappears in the production and reproduction of racialized and gendered knowledges in the spatially challenged present... Critical black and postcolonial feminisms are united [in] their allegiance of theory, politics and practice.

Mirza's quote points out a fundamental tenet shared by these various positions – that theory, political activism and practice are not separate paradigms in these discourses, but rather integrated features of knowledge production. An important text in this regard, which influences the work that I have produced in this PhD, and more generally, is *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* by Collins, in which she explores American black feminist thought development. She (2000/2009, p.270) defines epistemology as an 'overarching theory of knowledge' which "investigates the standards used to access knowledge or *why* we believe what we believe to be true", but is also revelatory of the power relations which validate who is believed. Following Lorde's idea that 'the masters tools will never dismantle the master's house', Collins proposes that facets of white Western heteronormative patriarchal epistemologies are unable, or inadequate, to theorise about black/African

⁷³ Key proponents include Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gloria Anzaldúa, Uma Narayan, Sara Suleri, Gayatri Spivak, Ania Loomba, etc., who highlight colonial/post-colonial/neo-colonial oppressions and realities for women both outside and within Western centres, but also how representations of women-of-colour, which have been structured by their oppressors, continue to dominate academic discourse in which women-of-colour are mediated by their white Western 'representatives'.

women's experiences. Collins examines a range of stereotypes of black women in American culture, and questions the invisibility of black women's voices and representations.

A large part of Collins' book is dedicated to showing the extensive trajectory of African-American women speaking about their experiences, not only in academia, but in many other sites like blues, jazz and rap music, storytelling, literature, poetry, religion, and every day conversations and behaviour. In excavating and acknowledging these sites of black women's interactions, she shows that the often mis-understood idea of postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak's rhetoric 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1989/2010) is not actually a question directed at the subaltern subjects' abilities to produce and voice their own knowledges, but rather interrogates the roles of mediators in official discourse, and whether the represented can actually be heard amid this mediation. Spivak argues that the intellectual representative performs a kind of linguistic-discursive masking by presenting the 'voice' of the subjugated as 'real', as unmediated and untransformed by the 'nonrepresenting' interlocutor. Collins (ibid: 5) reminds us that the dominance of certain identities as more relevant than others is not by chance, but is rather through a process of suppression by dominant groups of knowledge produced by oppressed groups.

Collins proposes that the methods used by black women to assess ways of knowing and/or creating knowledge need to reflect the political histories and contemporary socio-economic realities that have come to shape the lives and experiences of black women as a political group. She (2000/2009, p.275) comes up with a set of principles which she believes captures black women's "criteria for substantiated knowledge and ... criteria for methodological adequacy". The tenets which she outlines for a black feminist epistemology include: lived experience as a criterion for knowledge; the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; the ethic of personal accountability; and black women as agents of knowledge. Part of the survival ability of black women, Collins (ibid: 276) asserts, is based on the wisdom they have acquired in acknowledging and dealing with intersecting oppressions in their lives. Thus, 'wisdom' gained from insight into lived experience is valued more than just 'book knowledge' (or those who have just thought about them). She argues, furthermore, that many black women scholars draw on their own lived experiences and those of other black women when deciding on their research areas, and the kinds of methodologies they use. (She mentions, for instance, how often black women researchers harness narrative methodology in their engagement with fellow black subjects – a

method that is followed in Chapter Three as I read through the masquerades of fellow women-of-colour artists.) ‘Experience’ is not, however, used as justification in itself, but rather as ‘useful embodied interrogation’⁷⁴ to assess and understand more abstract arguments (ibid: 277).

Placing one’s body and Self at the centre of inquiries of “racialized power and gendered patriarchy” has been an important strategy for women-of-colour theorists (ibid: 4). South African black feminist Pumla Gqola (2005b, p.3) reminds us that the body is a site of power negotiations which we learn as boys and girls about “aesthetics, value and being-in-the-world”, about sexualisation, space and self. “Rather than being a mere tool, then, the body acts as both the site and the language through which positioning is negotiated” (ibid). The placing of women-of-colour bodies at the centre of discussions also highlights the black body not only as a political metaphor, but as a site for collective political activism.

Collins, furthermore, identifies dialogue as a fundamental dimension of black feminist epistemology. Following hooks, Collins (2000/2009, p.279) defines dialogue as a non-dominant humanising speech between two subjects that aids connectedness, and identifies its importance in African communities globally. Collins finds that black women have a range of supportive structures (e.g., their families, church life and other community organisations), so that even when black women are oppressed in other areas of their life, they maintain avenues in which their identities are central and their voices authorised. An important part of this speech is not just the ability to make oneself heard and feel validated in this speech, but that it is equally important to listen and validate others. This leads to an ethic of caring, which acknowledges individuals as unique, places importance on emotions in speech and considers empathy an important part of dialogue, not just in what is said, but in the way such knowledge is presented. Collins (ibid: 282) says, “Emotion indicates that a speaker believes in the validity of an argument” – it connects speaking people to their truth claims, but also calls on an investment in the listener, and when that person is endowed with empathy, there is a shared feeling of caring about the knowledge being shared. The worth of an individual’s stated truths are further assessed in terms of the person’s “character, value and ethics” (ibid: 284). An individual becomes personally accountable for their claims, and their lives must evidence that they are invested in their knowledge claims, and that their actions in everyday life align with their speech. For black women researchers, Collins (ibid: 285) says this means that: “To be credible in

⁷⁴ Mirza, 2010, p.5, 6

the eyes of this group, Black feminist intellectuals must be personal advocates for their material, be accountable for the consequences of their work, have lived or experienced their material in some fashion, and be willing to engage in dialogues about their findings with ordinary, everyday people". I will return to these principles in the concluding section of this thesis in a reflection of how my work actively engages black feminist paradigms, but I would like now to briefly discuss how ideas of black feminist epistemologies have manifested in the theorisations of South African black feminists Gqola, Yvette Abrahams and Desiree Lewis as they engage creative artwork. Gqola (2001a, p.18) relates her relationship to 'black' and 'African' feminisms in the following way:

In like vein, a Black feminist can be a feminist of any persuasion who is Black, one who espouses the tenets of Black feminism, or both. An African feminist is predicated as much on the kinds of feminism as on how one defines African. Many who identify as such use 'African' to refer to people of African descent, whether on the continent or in the diaspora. However, this is contested terrain since there are variations on this theme. Does the qualifier describe the subject who theorises her relationship to Africa, or does it simply refer to the location of the theory in relation to the perceived continental realities?

In this thesis, black-African feminism is discussed as both: I am an Indo-African woman visual artist, living in South Africa but also dealing as an African student with the realities of being engaged, with the help of a Commonwealth Scholarship, in a doctorate degree in visual arts in London. My economic and socio-political realities on both continents affect my daily production of both theory and practice and I cannot separate either. I theorise and make work primarily for an African audience, but also for my UK examiners, for a global visual arts field. While I might delude myself that I am a world citizen, my passport and visa restrictions reminds me that I am an 'African', and my choices are limited by my scholarship which says I have to be finished with my work in thirty-six months and when I do, I *have to go* home to Africa, to make a difference, as I am supposedly the 'best-of-the-best'.⁷⁵ Blackness and Africanness is not simply a feeling of belonging and identifying, but a set of conditions imposed externally on one and these conditions come through in various ways in my artistic practice.

⁷⁵ During a Commonwealth welcome event in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2011, this sentiment was repeated over and over by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission Committee present.

Many of the feminists-of-colour discussed above use artistic creations as sites of critical reflection and engagement. As Hall (1989/1991, p.19) reminds us, “The arts in our society are being transformed hourly by the new discourses of subjects who have been marginalized coming into representation for the first time”. Similarly, Senegalese curator N’goné Fall (2007, p.8) reminds us that although women in Africa have always faced difficult circumstances, they have managed to find a ‘space of freedom for themselves’, and that “today, art is the new weapon for preserving and enlarging that free zone”. In South Africa, the works of black-African feminists Gqola, Lewis and Abrahams, and their submissions to the feminist journal *Agenda*, which regularly features articles on, and submissions from, women producers in the visual arts, literature and poetry, have contributed to the idea of black feminist creative theorising. Gqola (2001a, 2006a) believes creative works, as sites for theorisation and knowledge production, offer a way out of Western philosophical dualism between theory and praxis. Creative spaces offer freedom of the imagination, which is sometimes stifled in academic discourses:

By ‘creative theorisation’, I intend the series and forms of conjecture, speculative possibilities opened up in literary and other creative genres. Theoretical or epistemological projects do not only happen in those sites officially designated as such, but emerge from other creatively textured sites outside of these (Gqola, 2006a, p.50).

Lewis (2007, p.26), following Audre Lorde and Patricia McFadden, lobbies for more use of the imaginary and the erotic, for an ‘excess of imaginative impulses’, which results in a “bold envisioning, a refusal of enlightenment reason, a playing down of realism in the interests of a vision of possibility”. Abrahams (2001, p.71) reminds us that this realignment “uncompromisingly on the construction of the self” is particularly important for black woman in a world where “our experience of self has been over-determined by external definitions of our identity which are racist and sexist”.

Gqola, Lewis and Abrahams’ analyses of the cultural productions of women-of-colour both in South Africa and internationally, include some of the following features: women-of-colour centred narratives produced by women-of-colour artists who seem to be addressing (but not limiting themselves to) an audience-of-colour, which understands the nuances of their work and permits a dialogue with their work, rather than an objectification of their bodies and work; the use of autobiography as the intersection of larger social history with personal familial histories; the ‘everyday’ as a site of theorisation as to the intersectionality of oppressive and affirmative practice; the use of the black body as a site of performative interrogation; differences and

contradictions as fundamental in theorisation to show the heterogeneity of women-of-colours' lives; the value of the emotional as a form of knowledge; and an ethics of caring and personal accountability about how their works fit into the larger histories of their communities and of legacies of representation of women and black bodies. These mould what Bannerji (1995, p.13) has called 'situated critiques', informed not just by the experiences of "an isolated self, but from my sense of being in the world, presuming the same for others, and have tried to think through as best as I can the making of these experiences". It is this sense of making situated critiques in changing times that I share with Tracey Rose, Senzeni Marasela, Mary Sibande and Nandipha Mntambo – this sense that we are in hindsight trying to comprehend apartheid trauma (Abrahams' uses her mother's definition of a traumatic event which is "an act of violence done to you over which you have no control").⁷⁶

Gqola often echoes African womanist Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's words that African feminists need to theorise out of our "epicentres of agency, looking for what is meaningful, progressive and useful to us as Africans",⁷⁷ and that the act of creation, as artists, is an attempt to understand, but that understanding doesn't need to lead to final conclusions but rather to 're-creating', to a continuous destabilisation of hegemonic discourse (Minh-ha, 1991, p.194). These various feminist positions are harnessed in Chapter Three as I read through various black women masquerades, but before I bring this chapter to a close, I will further explore postcolonial perspectives on masquerading as it became equally pivotal in engaging critiques of identity in terms of race and nationality, and unpacking the mechanisms of postcolonial masquerading.

Postcolonial Perspectives of Masquerade

As mentioned in the introduction, Niti Sampat Patel's work outlined key concepts in the terrain of postcolonial masquerading, namely mimicry, mockery, masking, menace, stereotypes and ambivalence. From my own research, I would like to add that of repetition and violence, but before I unpack these ideas, Bhabha's ideas of mimicry-as-mockery, the subversiveness of repetition and ambivalence as an in-between space of possibilities warrant a more detailed discussion, as they became inspirational for my own creative masquerades.

⁷⁶ Abrahams, 2003, p.14

⁷⁷ Lewis, 2002, p.6

As seen above, theorists-of-colour have found locating and excavating narratives of agency of oppressed people essential recuperative work. In this regard, Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994) offers the possibility of reading resistance and subversiveness in colonial mimetic practice. Mimicry, for Bhabha, functions through the strategy of repetition necessitated by colonial authority wanting to create the image of an 'almost-but-not-quite' colonised subject. Drawing on a range of examples in colonial English literature – from political and legal documents to fictional literature – Bhabha shows how British colonials attempted to create colonised subjects that could be made into mimetic persons who would 'adopt' colonial customs and cultural tastes, eventually forming an Europeanised colonial middle-class who could mediate the lower masses. Colonial authority lay not only in political governance over a foreign country and people, but also in cultural hegemony that constructed representations of the Other. The process of identification of the Other is marked by the concept of 'fixity' whereby the Other is reduced to, and represented by, a set of unchangeable, simplistic set of attributes popularly termed as stereotypes. Stereotypes functionalise this fixity, which relies on the process of repetition to 'locate' and foreground certain characteristics known to be 'true' (not easily provable), but paradoxically must also be actively propagated as being 'true' in order to *continue* being 'true', i.e. the Asian's duplicitousness, the African's rampant sexuality (Bhabha, 1994, p.95). Thus, stereotypes extend half-truths as over-determined knowledge, which "must be anxiously repeated" (ibid: 94-95). Stereotypes do not merely ignore contradictions in its politics of identification, but actively disavow them, even absorbing ambiguities.

Drawing on Freud's notions of fetishism to explain the vacillation between the unknown and a projected familiarity, disavowal and desire, Bhabha says the stereotype-as-fetish functions within the play between an imagined wholeness/similarity and the anxiety created by a perceived lack/absence/difference. Stereotyping becomes the process by which the Other is everything the coloniser is not. Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* argues that as European man strove to reach enlightenment and civilisation, there remained in his unconscious the repository of repressed, forbidden, base, immoral, uncivilised desires, which threatened to break through. Through the process of transference, however, European man was able to project all that was 'dark' and sinful onto the black/African other, thereby exorcising himself, but also making it possible to externally punish this 'evil'. While colonial projects attempted to 'civilise' the Other by making him mimic the civilised coloniser, paradoxically the Other was needed to fulfil the role of a kind of shadowy archetype (Fanon, 1952/2008, p.147). The idea of a splitting and

doubling that emerges in colonial discourse creates the mimetic figure, which is, then, “the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*” (Bhabha, 1994, p.122). Mimicry always *appears* to evidence that which is mimicked, a familiarity, a resemblance that is constantly brought into being even as it affirms that it is not the ‘same’. Bhabha (ibid: 126) finds that this fracturing of the colonial subject results in ‘partial recognition’ which always threatens:

The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I’ve described as the partial representation/recognition of the colonial object.

The slippage, i.e. the multiple and contradictory beliefs and ambivalence that is necessitated in colonial mimicry, thus becomes a threat, a site for disruption that must be anxiously controlled and under constant surveillance.

Mimicry, thus, repeats rather than re-presents, and becomes a mockery in its slippage, its excess, its inherent failure (ibid: 125). Repetition does not produce ‘sameness’, repetition in its very structure produces a farce of sameness, a difference that displaces in its moment of enunciation (ibid: 195). The look of the coloniser – which sees difference – tries to disavow it, but is met with the “returning gaze of Otherness and finds that its mastery, its sameness, is undone. The familiar becomes uncannily transformed, the imitation subverts the identity of that which is being represented and the relation of power begins to vacillate” (Mar Castro Varela & Dhawan, 2009, p.323). Repetition becomes menacing, a threat, an avenger.

Bhabha’s work has often been criticised for not dealing with the ‘realities’ of empire conditions on colonial subjects, that his work is esoteric, romantic, theoretically opaque, classist and even hetero-sexist.⁷⁸ Bhabha is, indeed, not concerned with demonstrating overt political anti-colonial activity, but rather the cracks in the colonial project whereby power is destabilised even through a mimesis of identifiable form, language, codings, whereby the slippage of the ‘not quite’ can be harnessed to expose the constructedness of often naturalised representation(s). This idea inspired my concept of postcolonial masquerading as a visually interrogative strategy in post-colonialised contexts, which testifies to heterogeneous, hybrid identities and how cultural productions in these spaces are conditioned by historio-political socio-economic conditions. It also enables me to explore how these postcolonial masquerades question the

⁷⁸ See McClintock (1995), Phillips (1998), Perloff (1999), Mizutani (2008), and Do Mar Castro Varela and Dhawan (2009).

coding, tools and techniques they employ in contemporary visual arts, and to critique that field as well. Postcolonial artists, burdened with a long history of ethnographic representation and Western canonisation, use the mimetic language of contemporary visual arts to evidence power relations with the Western epicentre which legitimises their practices. Like Bhabha's ideas of masquerade, postcolonial masquerading is '... neither one nor the other, someone, something else; a space of ambiguity, of impurity, of ambivalence ... [it] slips, slides, intersects, interlocks, interweaves ... it pretends, it mimics, it seduces, it plays, it laughs, it farts, it gestures, it questions, it interrogates, it interrogates, it interrogates' in its visualising of the Other, of Self.⁷⁹ Mimetic practice creates spaces of in-betweenness, which make the gesture of the mimetic unsettling and become sites for contestation, subversion and hybridity as can be seen in my video *I Make Art* (work-in-progress).

Bhabha (1994, p.164) posits the idea of the hybrid as a "metonymy of presence" which disrupts cultural authority, showing ideas of cultural difference to be power-laden cultural differentiations: "The voice of command is interrupted by questions that arise from these heterogeneous sites and circuits of power...". Bhabha's idea of hybridity marking the constructedness of power relations and representations has become a means by which I question my own identity through my art practice:

Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power (Bhabha, 1994, p.159-160).

Until 1994, my identity had been unproblematically premised on the idea of being 'Indian'. My education, up to that point, was primarily composed of Afrikaner ideology, British colonial doctrines, Indian indigenous knowledge and Bollywood representations of Indianness, as well as American popular culture forms. Not much of this knowledge located me as an African of Indian descent in a racially segregated country. The end of apartheid meant literally throwing out school books which had perpetuated racist propaganda, and instead cultural producers became part of a process of identifying relevant knowledges and subversive practices in various unofficial sites. Art history and African-American popular culture became two unrelated but

⁷⁹ These ideas are adapted from my presentation on my own postcolonial masquerading work (see Khan, 2014b).

simultaneously important locations for me in gaining a critical consciousness. While I learnt about a range of social movements and theoretical positions discussed in this thesis via my fine art studies from the age of fifteen, (African) American spoofs taught me to read the codings of mimicry, and I will, briefly, mention one of these which was also provided personal revolutionary moments of racial self-definition.

In Living Color, produced by African-American actor Keenan Wayans in the early 90s, uses the coding of blackface minstrelsy quite actively to present critiques of, for instance, capitalist collaboration by black entertainers in contemporary versions of blackface (their 'Brothers Brothers' skits); institutionalised racism and the slippage between the mask of the clown and the oppressed ('Homey the Clown' skits), as well as the capitalisation of poor Black ghetto narratives by the cultural industry (Tracey Chapman skit). hooks (1992: 34) dismisses their carnivalesque performance for seeming too much like blackface and critiques (rightly so) their politically incorrect depictions of gayness. While I understand hooks' critiques, I don't agree with her easy dismissal of *In Living Color* that ran for five seasons between 1990 and 1994, and which for a me, as a person-of-colour located outside the US context, evidenced radical, nuanced, funny, black visual critiques of race, which were not available in South Africa at that time. This show, created and produced and performed by the African-American Wayans family, was, at that time, a signifier of black empowerment. These African-American TV shows, evolutions of blackface variety shows, provided me with, through their constant masquerades mocking race-class-gender stereotypes, an avenue post-1994 to laugh about racialized-gendered-class depictions in society, as well as an understanding that humour (through spoof parodies, mimicry-as-mockery and a kind of flagellation of stereotypes) could be an interesting critical tool by which to interrogate socially accepted constructions.

Repeating and spoofing iconic artworks from Western 'fine art' became vehicles, in this PhD process, to turn the gaze back onto sites of power: the ever-presence and authority of Western canonical art is questioned when an unhomed body-of-colour is inserted as the protagonist in the re-performances. Reimagining popular culture films that I emotionally invested in as a child became tropes by which to re-inscribe fractious identity categories and tear apart the cohesive apartheid narrative and life journey. They also offered opportunities of centring a woman-of-colour's body as the central motif in these narratives. Restaging Self became a means to access the subliminal, the unspeakable, the illegible, to give an unadulterated voice to the localism and

postcolonial hybridities which were straining to get out of me, even while continuing to ‘mask’ me. I share these recollections not as mere anecdotes, but rather as connected points from which I theorise both in my writing and artwork. In my postcolonial masquerades these interrogations are framed around the concepts of masking, repetition and violence, not just in terms of the content, but in formal considerations as they manifest in the artworks. In this last section of this chapter, I will reflect on these aspects in terms of a decolonial aesthetics.

Masking

Masking seems to have always been a feature of humankind – from the simple application of ground pigments (clay, red earth, turmeric) on the face and skin, to the elaborate masks and costumes in rituals, ceremonies and carnivals and public/private costume parties. Masks and costumes also appear in social protests and rallies, as with the V for Vendetta mask now associated with the Occupy protests around major capitals, and more recently the use of hoodies in protests in the US against the 2012 slaying of young African-American teenager Trayvon Martin. Masking can denote disguise, anonymity, playfulness, reverence, the temporary suspension of values and beliefs, an ability to transcend oneself, to be an-other. Ideas of masking often seem split between the dualism of the act of masking as something being hidden, endowed with a certain danger; and that of temporarily concealing in order to be revealed, which elicits a certain amount of joy. This kind of masking could be seen both in Chapter One with regards to Kannemeyer’s racial disguise and that of the coon mask in the Cape Town Minstrel Festival.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin discusses masking in European carnivals. For Bakhtin, the mask of ancient folk customs, medieval and Renaissance carnivals symbolised a “joy of change and reincarnation”, metamorphosis, transition. It parodied and rejected authority, official reason, uniformity, similarity, conformity and boundaries, whereas the mask in Romantic Europe became a different entity which “hides something, keeps a secret, deceives” (Bakhtin, 1968/1984, p.39-40). In English masquerades in the mid-1800s, historian Terry Castle (1986, p.38-40) says that the costume and mask gave mysteriousness, allurements and illicitness to the wearer, and often acted as a vehicle for sexual freedom and moral detachment from one’s actions. The mask, which gave a degree of anonymity, real or imagined, afforded a kind of “involvement shield”: “by obstructing visual contact, [it] promotes an unusual sense of freedom

in the person wearing or using it” (ibid: 39). Masks – especially on women – promoted a “sensuality of the visual”, making even a known person “fetishistically exciting” by “absence or withholding of connection” (ibid: 38, 39).⁸⁰ By the end of the eighteenth century, however, this kind of ‘licentious’ spirit gave way to a more reformist one, with a high emphasis on morals and ‘bourgeois ideology’ dedicated to a conservative work ethic and duty rather than the pleasure of Self – carnivals and fairs began to wane in England by the 1790s. Masquerading balls were then viewed as childish indulgences that one had to outgrow by the very people who had supported them (ibid: 101). Castle believes that as cultures arrive at a “rationally ordered, quantifiable universe”, ancient symbols of masks, mimicry and disguise lose their symbolic power. The enduring power of masking practices, however, perhaps evidence that masks disappear in one format only to reappear in others.

The idea of being someone other than oneself through manipulation influences various theorists. For Fanon, black skin is a racial epidermal mask that determines him according to his body. It fixes and racially over-signifies him, something he has to work through and against – a kind of doppelganger that he is always measured against, which makes him question his sense of self. This incessant questioning could lead to the provocation of another mask – “turn white or disappear”, or to Fanon’s (1952/2008, p.181) own sense of purpose – “O my body, make of me always a man who questions!” Kilomba also notes how for black persons masking has been a means of subjugation. In ‘No Mask’ (2009), Kilomba draws on the mask as both a real instrument of colonial torture, as well as a psychological one (of symbolic violence). The physical mask that Kilomba speaks about is an instrument that was used on African slaves during colonisation, in which a bit placed between the tongue and jaw was fixed with two strings around the slave’s head. This device was used to stop slaves from eating from the owner’s plantations, which was interpreted as theft: the mask was therefore a form of control and possession. The device was also used to stop resistant rebel slaves from speaking and riling up others, and, therefore, it also served as an implement of speechlessness and fear. For Kilomba this mask not only prevented an imaginary pillaging of the white coloniser’s goods, but also demonstrated the anxiety of having enslaved persons talking to each other and talking back:

What could the Black subject say, if her or his mouth were not sealed? And what would the *white* subject have to listen to? There is an apprehensive fantasy that if the colonial subject

⁸⁰ Castle (1986, p.41) says that the masquerades gave persons, whose sexualities were policed by cultural scripts (such as women and homosexuals), an avenue for sexual expression they were otherwise denied.

speaks, the colonizer will have to listen. It would be forced into an uncomfortable confrontation with other truths. Truths, which have been kept quiet, as secrets. ... The mask serves, in this sense, to protect the *white* subject from >Other< knowledges. But, the mouth symbolized not only speech and enunciation, but also possibility – the possibility of saying >yes< or >no<. Yet, the mask controls this possibility. ... The mask maintains, therefore, the fiction that only the *white* subject can speak (Kilomba, 2009, p.81).

Enforced speechlessness was thus used to render the enslaved person as mute as an animal, an object prevented from forming alliances and objections. Kilomba (ibid: 81) applies these ideas of speechlessness to contemporary white dominated academic spaces, which she argues perpetuates these systems of black objecthood. Blackness is “researched, described, classified, exhibited, desired and killed”, at the same time that many black academics feel voiceless within academia where white academics have often been regarded as authorities on black experience.

Fanon and Kilomba do not identify any positive strategies with regards to masking, but seem to posit a ‘real’ self which carries the burden of racial interpellation. Racial passing is often a difficult subject which, according to South African poet and scholar Yvette Christiansë (2003), does not get spoken about often. Unlike US black feminist and race scholars who view racial passing of black-subjects-as-whites as a transgressive practice, Christiansë, like Ahmed (2000) in her discussion of racial passing in her book *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, sees subjects-of-colours’ passing as a desire for whiteness that reaffirms whiteness as a thing to be longed for, concealing the fact that whiteness itself is an identity of passing. This is certainly true for people-of-colour under apartheid, and there are many cases of them attempting to move from racial classifications of Black to Coloured, Coloured to Indian, and Coloured/Asian to White, as apartheid granted differential socio-economic privileges to the various race groups (see Khan, 2012). Whereas Ahmed (2000, p.126) sees no “discernible political effects” of racial passing, South Africa produced some cases where such racial passing was used for political purposes. One example is that of documentary photographer Ernest Cole, who was classified from birth as Black, but used the same ridiculous apartheid system of ‘tell-able’ racial differences to get reclassified as Coloured. This political strategy gained him access to areas he was not afforded as a Black man, with

more freedom of movement, which included not having to carry a *dompas*.⁸¹ This passing allowed Cole to produce his scathing documentary photographic essay called *The House of Bondage* (1968). His racial passing, as for others who engaged in this practice, did not come without a toll though, which included secrecy, paranoia, separation and alienation (Hurtado, 1999; Christiansä, 2003; Asfour, 2009; Khan, 2012).⁸²

For Patel (2001, p.120), too, masking is regarded only as a disguise – to hide something, whereas she posits that the notion of masquerade is more revelatory: "We wear masks to conceal, we masquerade to conceal and reveal...[t]hrough masquerade we enter new terrains, make new faces...". Thus, Patel, like Bhabha sees the potential of masquerading in creating a space for oneself – from the familiar comes a difference that creates newness. For philosopher Gilles Deleuze there is only ever masks, repetition and difference. Deleuze (1968/1994, p.17) makes no distinction between a disguise and any underlying essential – only masks are to be found under masks. Variations and repetition are masks themselves, but rather than viewing this as a limitation, Deleuze finds masking an exercise of potentialities, as there are no essences, originalities or singular truths. There is the endless potential in *becoming*, as repetition contests and recreates.

Repetition

Behavioural repetition is a fundamental human developmental mechanism by which we learn and develop a sense of Self. We are taught to mime sounds, words, actions and behaviour at a distance. For Lacan, this 'at a distance' became important in his ideas of the Self that is developed during the 'mirror stage'. Lacan, on noticing the fascination maintained by young children when exposed to their reflection in the mirror, turned to the work of Roger Caillois (1935/1948), whose studies of mimicry in nature suggested that animals and insects, which adapted to their natural environment through camouflage, did not simply engage in this activity

⁸¹ Black South Africans were required to carry a 'dompas', an identification document that detailed biographical information, their race, as well as their employment status which gave them permission to be within city spaces within certain hours (see pass laws at Apartheid Museum, 2006).

⁸² Cole's family members claimed that he became much more introverted/secretive during this time and this may indicate the psychological strain he was taking both in keeping his masquerading intact, and creating his damning photography of Black life under apartheid (Knape, 2010). Cole died alone in exile in the US.

for protection (against being eaten), but were trying to assimilate into their environment, to become part of the space which surrounded them because they were captivated by it. Thus, there was an innate fascination/compulsion to mimesis even when it did not promote self-survival. From this, Lacan hypothesised that the 'original' mimesis that structures a sense of Self is actually one's reflection. Lacan (1949/2006, p.75-76) also believed that this 'independent' mirrored self was able to see itself in relation to spatial surroundings and a future perfect reflection of Self, where the copy comes in anticipation of the original (Potolsky, 2006).

Psychic repetition could also have negative workings, however. In his paper 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through', Freud (1914/1958, p.151) discusses psychological-behavioural patterns that emerge in individuals when particular situations which happened during childhood are not processed properly. These situations, which were traumatic and repressed, nonetheless manifest through a series of repetitive behaviour. Freud suggests that it is necessary for the psychoanalyst to help the patient to uncover the initial incident that underlies the repetition instinct, and, then using language, enable the incident to pass from the unconscious to the conscious. The method of repetition, here, enables the ability to 'work through' emotional-historical histories, 'creating' a different kind of memory. Repetition is, thus, a coping strategy by which unknown, uncontrollable data is rendered understandable. Thus, the patient can regard the original situation with a position of aloofness, thereby 'mastering' this past incident (Freud, 1920/1955, p.19). Remembering renders the repetition compulsion harmless and useful (Freud, 1914/1958, p.154). This was explored in the first chapter where I proposed that Kannemeyer's work was not simply an expression of parodic humour working with collective White neuroses, but rather was representative of a personal trauma that he played out repetitively through his usage of blackface which he could debase and master. This idea also manifests in my videos *Nervous Conditions* and *No Place*, which explore the idea of apartheid being a ordeal that is in excess of comprehension, and which South Africans post-apartheid are trying to come to terms with collectively and individually, but which further creates new truth-fictions through repetitive historical and memory-making processes.

Thus repetition can have both positive and negative manifestations. Cyclic repetition, which produces difference and renewal, is a key component of Deleuzian thinking. In *Difference and Repetition* (1968/1994), Deleuze closely examines these two concepts and believes that they do not hinge on the idea of sameness, i.e. they do not denote a negation of sameness, but are

rather dynamic. Deleuze's idea of repetition is regenerative, that is to change what is known, to make different and transform. Deleuze (ibid: 272) rejects 'first-claim' ideas or representations, claiming that all ideas and representations are copies of copies or 'simulacra' – this idea is harnessed by a number of artists as well shall see in Chapter Three.

Repetition which acknowledges difference renews, but repetition which seeks and polices sameness and resemblances can be destructive. Bhabha (1986/2008, p.xxvii) identifies Fanon's idea of the colonial space as one of repetitious psychic violence – the Negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man by his superiority and the 'mummification' of his culture that must be mimed by Others. He posits that post-Enlightenment Western man is "tethered to, *not* confronted by, his dark reflection, the shadow of colonized man, that splits his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance, disturbs and divides the very time of his being" (ibid). For Fanon (1952/2008, p.85), this kind of racial interpellation is violent: "I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. What else could it be for me but an amputation, an excision, a haemorrhage that spattered my whole body with black blood?"

Violence

While Bhabha focuses on the possibilities that mis-recognition presents, theorists like Fanon, Kilomba and hooks are concerned about the very real effects that racism has on people-of-colour. The scopic drive of the coloniser objectifies the black body, and through the hegemony of Western culture, asks the black subject to identify himself through these means. Epistemic violence requires colonial subjects to view their bodies, their culture, their history through the Western white male gaze (Fanon speaks of young black children identifying with white heroes in comic books, television and movies, and imbibing fear and stereotypes of the black Other). Kilomba (2008, p.19) believes this leads black people to endure a collective trauma, as black subjects are asked to identify with images of white fantasies that are neither realistic nor positive, resulting in "alienation, disappointment and psychic trauma". Feminists-of-colour note the self-harming practices that women-of-colour subscribe to both internally and externally. Bhabha's (1986/2008, p.xxviii) belief that "... the White man's artifice [is] inscribed on the black man's body" is apparent, for example in skin whitening practices that are popular in Africa, Asia

and the Middle-East, in their mimicries of whiteness as a 'thing longed for'. In 'Of Mimicry and (Wo)Man: Desiring Whiteness in Postcolonialism', María Do Mar Castro Varela and Nikita Dhawan (2009, p.324) use Caribbean writer Wilson Harris's idea that colonial mimicry continues post-colonially as a regime of desire to govern the postcolonial subject, which she now self-regulates, and results in a kind of 'self-mutilation'. When the rage black women feel at structural oppression is illegible, or cannot be discharged, it may result in self-harm. One of these 'alternatives' Kilomba discusses is suicide where 'Otherness' is killed in a final Self reclamation act. On the other side of the spectrum, many others have invested in the idea of the black superwoman, who is so busy she doesn't even have time for death. Such idealized images make it difficult for black women to express the wounds of racism-sexism-classicism they encounter daily.

To this end, Kilomba (2008, p.48) in her book *Plantation Memories: Episodes of Everyday Racism*, analyses everyday racial incidents in the biographical narratives of black women in Germany to understand how episodes of racism are not only individual traumas, but draw on a historical body of collective wounding, where racism becomes not a singular act, but one of continuous experience.⁸³ Black subjects, Kilomba finds, have to deal daily with a racialised-gendered body which is always marked as 'not-belonging', which she is immobilized by, needing authority to enter spaces, while there is always an "unmarking of *whiteness*" (ibid: 33). Kilomba's participants outline a range of everyday racist experiences: from being accosted by strangers in their attempt to 'locate' their (African) ancestry; to racist jokes and issues of living in all-white neighbourhoods; to being representative of one's race. Kilomba (ibid) explains that the psychoanalytic account of trauma has three main ideas:

... first, the idea of *a violent shock*, or an unexpected event to which the immediate response is shock; second, *separation* or fragmentation, as this unexpected violent shock deprives one of the one's link to society; and third, the idea of *timelessness*, where a violent event that occurred sometime in the past is experienced as if in the present and vice-versa, which painful consequences that affect the whole psychological organization, including nightmares, flashbacks and/or physical pain...

This kind of timelessness becomes the major trope in my work *Nervous Conditions*, where a particular episode of powerlessness sends the racialized subject spiralling into a host of other

⁸³ The narratives include that of an Afro-German woman, an African-American woman residing in Germany, as well as her own experiences as a black woman studying and lecturing in Germany.

traumas experienced. Black subjects, in Kilomba's study, regard attempts at ignoring racist episodes as an amputation, or a sense of schizophrenia (separation of self). Kilomba recognises the ego's defence mechanism to such traumas, but advocates different strategies for decolonizing oneself. She sees value in a sense of supportive community, and surmises that with the kind of fragmented history black people have had, love and union become political strategies by which to repair the sense of loss and isolation (ibid: 136).

Kilomba's (ibid: 125) black woman interviewees remark on how reading and establishing a vocabulary on racism helped them in their self-identification, and allows one to remove oneself from relationships which repeat racist violence. Many black feminists recognise the importance of study and knowledge in articulating oppression, and Kilomba (ibid: 126) argues that the printed word appears more powerful and gives a sense of concreteness to spoken words and experiences, as well as an understanding that racism is a structural and institutional white problem under which black people live. She (ibid: 139) poses the question, what does racism do to you: "Should the focus be the reply or rather the reflection... the performance toward the *white* other or the feelings toward oneself?" Kilomba believes that the latter does not imply victimization, but rather an empowerment in the recognition of the effects of racism as one becomes the speaking subject. Speech, here again, is not just a matter of speaking, but of listening as well. Kilomba (ibid: 140) warns that when black subjects attempt to explain and reason when questioned, the process is one of control in which white fantasies are played out again. She therefore advocates reordering a relationship of equality, by the black subject dislocating from the space of Otherness and placing herself outside the "colonial dynamic" (ibid: 141). She says it is a fallacy to think that if one explains enough or properly, then one will be accepted and escape everyday racism. Black subjects have to realize that they cannot make a white consensus understand, but instead that they can change their relationship to the dynamic that makes them responsible for their victimisation (ibid: 142).

Resituating a black voice and gaze at the centre of this PhD inquiry has influenced all of my work, and I continue this discussion in the next chapter as I locate similar strategies, interventions and interests in the works of other South African women-of-colour postcolonial masqueraders. I present a discussion on the content and aesthetic considerations of their/our work that will hopefully show contradictory, ambivalent explorations of identity negotiations in

South Africa and situate masquerading as an important de-colonialising methodology in this very act of putting pen to paper.

CHAPTER THREE:

Plural I's and Autobiography: Postcolonial Masquerading in the Works of Tracey Rose, Nandipha Mntambo, Mary Sibande and Senzeni Marasela

Who is the black woman? What does she want? Is she one or many things? Has she something we could call 'an identity', which remains 'given' beneath all the shifting appearances? Or is her identity *always* a performance, a masquerade? (Hall, 2001, p.56).

The thesis so far has tried to highlight how visual representations in post-colonial contexts constantly, and necessarily, need to be interrogated and decolonised aesthetically. Although South Africa's democracy is already twenty years old, the daily fight over representations is a fight for identity, legitimacy, history, memory. McClintock (1995, p.328) reminds us that although history is an "inventive practice, ... not just any invention will do". While Derrida (1983, p.291) wished for the day that the word apartheid would only "be for the memory of man", hooks (1995a, p.64) reminds us that, as people that have endured disrupted traumatic histories, part of our identity process is to re-member:

The word *remember* (*re-member*) evokes the coming together of severed parts, fragments becoming a whole. ... Using images, we connect ourselves to a recuperative, redemptive memory that enables us to construct radical identities, images of ourselves that transcend the limits of the colonizing eye.

In post-apartheid South Africa, this evocation to remember/re-member both individual and collective struggles through representation is played out in many recuperative projects that seek to unearth the past, and validate and authorise previously ignored and suppressed narratives. The elements of naming, autobiographic storytelling and re-centring bodies-of-colour to a positionality from which to theorise are aspects that can be strongly evidenced in the visual arts, and increasingly, in South Africa, by a number of young women-of-colour artists through the strategy of performative fictive masquerading. The second half of the 90s and 2000s have seen many women-of-colour visual artists enter the field working in a range of media, yet their work remains under-theorised. There seems to be a chasm between relating theory to their practice, and what my own readings of these artists' work in this chapter attempts to show is that sustained discussions of their artworks reflect a diversity of women's experiences and knowledges, but also reveal and question some of the political and economic dynamics of

creative production and the art industry itself. I have chosen to discuss the works of four women-of-colour artists, Tracey Rose, Nandipha Mntambo, Mary Sibande and Senzeni Marasela. Each already has extensive bodies of work which encompass video, performance, sculpture, installation, painting, needlework and photography, and all have gained international attention in the contemporary art field. For the purposes of this study, I concentrate on a few selected video or photographic works in which they employ masquerade, and which embody not only some of the tensions discussed in masquerading practices in Chapter One and Two, but demonstrate the ambiguous and ambivalent abilities of masquerading.

There is much to theorise on the artists under discussion, but this chapter presents an introduction to these artists' work framed around the issues of memory, biography and self; a plurality of identities; anger as a means of empowerment; and the idea of interrogating and engaging doppelgangers and outside-inside positions creatively. In the critical space of reading that this chapter offers, I want to explore how these women-of-colour artists negotiate racial stereotyping, desire and voyeurism in their use of fictive subjectivities.

Autobiography and the Narrative of 'I'

Biographical narratives have been harnessed by anti-racist, anti-colonial, black and African feminist paradigms, as personal testimony and story-telling are important methodological tools in making visible blacks/people-of-colour/women (Brink, 1998; Collins, 2000/2009). This use of the 'personal is political' idiom has been used quite effectively by political movements.⁸⁴ For instance, the 'second wave' Western feminist movement between the 60s and 80s sought to break down the sharp distinctions of the public/private divide that relegated women to the home space, which was devalued as a space of labour. Feminists viewed it as a site of oppression not just for middle-class women who were forced to engage the duties of cleaner, mother and wife, but also for women-of-colour who predominantly occupied roles of domestic workers (hooks, 1989; Collins, 2000/2009). Personal narrative became a powerful tool in articulating the realities of intersecting oppressions operating in the lives of women.

⁸⁴ The phrase 'the personal is political' was coined in an essay of the same by Carol Hanisch in 1969 which appeared in the anthology *Notes From the Second Year: Women's Liberation* (1970). While she is credited with this phrase, she stated in a reprint of the essay in 2006 that, in fact, the feminist editors of the anthology had come up with the title (Hanisch, 1969/2006).

hooks, writing in the late 80s, remarks on how the 'personal is political' idea was both powerful and problematic. She (1989: 129) says that 'acts of speaking' in which women have told their stories, shared their histories and engaged in feminist consciousness were a powerful means of resistance, a threatening kind of speech that vented anger, long held silences and bitterness. These speech acts, however, were being dismissed because articulating "one's personal experience of exploitation by men" did not necessarily translate into empowerment for individuals or for women collectively: "Naming pain without transformation and resistance is not helpful" (ibid: 108, 32). Similarly, Minh-ha (1991, p.113), whose films often invoke personal narratives as sites of knowledge, also iterates that "not every personal event is political, but all personal events certainly have the potential to be political". hooks (1989, p.77) feels that confessional personal acts have to be connected with a larger sense of politics and a critical consciousness in order to be socially relevant and transgressive, in order to move it beyond oneself, and connect with other people and larger structural processes and powers. I argue that the visual artworks of Rose, Marasela, Mntambo and Sibande reflect such a process of personal politicisation as they image individual struggles within the larger framework of apartheid, post-apartheid and post-colonial South Africa.

"And so she died Elsie..." – Unmaking History and Historicising the Self

It is crucial at this point that the past be seen as a legitimate point of departure for talking about the challenges of the present and the future (Ndebele, 1994, p.155).

Domestic work has long been part of the economy of South Africa as the largest provider of employment for Black women besides agriculture. More than a million women (mostly Black women from South Africa and other African countries) are employed as domestic workers. Despite there being a South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (SADSAWU), which demands a minimum working wage and conditions of employment, most domestic workers work on a daily rate, with no job security, no healthcare or pension plans.⁸⁵ Deborah Gaitskell, Judy Kimbell, Moira Maconachie and Elaine Unterhalter (1983, p.86) in their article 'Race, Class and Gender in Domestic Work in South Africa' say that the conditions of domestic service evinces the triple oppression of Black women in terms of gender, race, and class. They

⁸⁵ See South African Domestic Service and Allied Workers Union (2014)

remain highly precarious, exploited workers who work within the whims of their employers and their families (Motala, 2010).

Despite their presence in many public/private spaces, domestic workers are ambivalent figures which occupy an 'outsider-within' status in the South African mindscape. Anne McClintock in her book *Imperial Leather* (1995, p.271) says of the domestic worker:

 Laboring by day to uphold the white cult of domesticity, black women are shunted by night to tiny backyard *khayas* (homes) without water, sanitation, heat or light. The furtive intimacies between black women and their white charges; the forbidden liaisons between black women and their white male employers; the fraught relations of acrimony, strained intimacy, mistrust, condescension, occasional friendships and coerced subservience that shape relations between African women and their white mistresses ensure that the colonial home is a contest zone of acute ambivalence.

McClintock's statement points to the way race-gender-class intersects in the figure of the 'maid', and the fraught contra-bond power relationships between South African women themselves (see also Christiansë, 2003). The lives of domestic workers under colonialism and apartheid were characterised by contradictions: they attended to the welfare of White families, but often at the expense of time with their own; they had to be available whenever needed, and yet largely invisible; bodily present, but absent in their own private capacity; they represented savages who, nonetheless, could be entrusted to raise White children. Domestic workers had to be 'sanitised' in various ways. They had to wear specific attire when around their employment household; be discreetly housed outside in a small room and often not allowed to entertain visitors even if these were a husband or children; drink and eat from specific dishes and cutlery assigned to them, and almost always take on a name that the *baas* and madam could pronounce easily enough (McClintock, 1995).

Mary Sibande's mother, grandmother and great-grandmother were domestic workers.

Sibande's grandmother narrated to her that her great-grandmother was called 'Tsheledi Famedi' in SeSotho, but as her 'masters' couldn't remember or pronounce her name, they re-named her 'Elsie' (Sibande, 2013). "And so she died as Elsie", remarks Sibande, reminding us once again of the power of naming, of those with the power to re-name, at will, grown men and women, whose ethnic names are endowed with cultural significance. Reducing them linguistically to 'my boy' and 'my girl' is an act of language that claims ownership over certain bodies, that gives

particular persons the status of property. It discriminates in the act of doing, in the act of enunciation that Derrida (1983: 291-292) speaks about.

When Sibande created the ultimate domestic worker, she named her 'Sophie', an English/Spanish/French derivative of the Greek word for 'wisdom'. Sibande, herself, found that Sophie represented a wealth of accumulated stories that she unearthed from her mother and grandmother about the conditions of their lives, and how they had managed to succeed despite the limitations imposed on their lives (Sibande is the first person in her family to study beyond high school and to go to university). Sophie represents the hopes, dreams and aspirations of Black women beyond their actual lives. Dressed in the colonial fetish of the clean white apron⁸⁶ and African Zionist/Victorian-inspired frock of royal blue, which grows ever larger and represents the layers of stories that she encompasses, but which also physically limits and weighs her down, Sophie dares to dream beyond the role she has been ordained by her skin colour, gender, class and by the Bantu Education Act.⁸⁷

Worked in Sibande's hands, Sophie is in excess of all the categories that contain her ('Black', 'woman', 'poor', 'maid'), and all the duties she has to attend to. Everything about her is more than – whether she is praying, sewing, taking a break, stopping to smell the flowers, conducting an orchestra, or charging on a horse like those other White men generals (Figs.25-30), she becomes a signifier for dreams and imaginations that are not dependent on reality, that could not be stamped out by racism's last word. Even while recognising the unrealistic aspirations of this poor Black woman under apartheid, Sibande doesn't hold Sophie back, doesn't condemn her for her flights of fantasy. Dreaming itself becomes a subversive moment for Sibande. In *They Don't Make Them Like They Used To* (2009) (Fig.30), Sophie is caught unawares in a daydream when she is supposed to be working. Captured in the stillness of the digital photographic moment, she stands eyes closed, deep inside her. Whether she is the invisible shadow behind Superman mending his costume in her hands, or is envisioning herself in the role, Sophie could, simplistically read, represent the affirmative role played by mothers as the backbone of households, as another positivistic contribution to images of black women (hooks says that such

⁸⁶ McClintock (1995, p.163) states: "The fetish for clean clothes was eloquent of a systematic attempt to erase from view any visible trace of domestic work. The governesses' white gloves, the maid's white apron, the nanny's white sleeves were fetish emblems of the contradiction between women's paid work and women's unpaid work".

⁸⁷ The Bantu Education Act of 1953 segregated all educational institutions in the country with a sliding scale of finances spent on the four racial groups, with Black education receiving the lowest funding possible for an education that focused on unskilled manual labour. See the list of apartheid legislations at *South African History Online*.

positivism does little for critical representation).⁸⁸ Read differently, however, Sophie could also be exposing the 'black superwoman' myth that various black women theorists have criticised.⁸⁹ the one called upon to bear the burdens of providing for so many in her family; for seeing unendingly to those of another paying family; of being herself and not, a demand of schizophrenia placed on her to negotiate daily in her life; of being a mother, an othermother⁹⁰ beyond her own family, looking after the welfare of black communities as a whole; to being silenced under the overwhelming strain of all these roles in her affirmative masquerade of standing by the black man, black family and black community.

This 'playing' of multiple, sometimes contradictory, roles is often disavowed by employers who trust and believe in the 'knowability' of their domestic workers, and at the same time feel a subliminal recognition of 'the stranger in one's home' that unnerves and disconcerts.

McClintock (1995, p.272) states that domestic workers in private spaces were capable of many small subversive acts:

In colonial homes, African women perform myriad such small acts of refusal: in work slowdowns, in surreptitiously taking or spoiling food, in hiding objects, in chipping plates, in scolding or punishing children, in revealing domestic secrets, in countless acts of revenge that their white employers identify as laziness, clumsiness, incompetence, gossip, and theft.

Similarly, Sophie's daring to dream can be read as an act of subterfuge. Sophie declares her humanity in opposition to the very title of the work, which suggests that she is a mere product of labour, one that is defective or of inferior quality to the kind of trope the White madam/*baas* holds in mind. Sophie is cheeky in her masquerading in the madam's clothes (Fig.26), assuming the madam's leisurely posture, in her sleeping on the job. What could be dismissed as a kind of cooning or simple colonial mimicry and class desire, could also be read as the ultimate subversion of placing her body within the intimate wear of the madam's, trying to imagine herself as overseer of her own territory. But it could also quite simply evidence a woman wanting to wear the latest fashions of the day. South African photographer Santu Mofokeng's *Black Photo Album/Look at me* (1997) shows a history of cross-cultural fashion in the images of

⁸⁸ See hooks, 1992, p.130; Collins (2000/2009) and Lewis (2001a).

⁸⁹ See Wallace (1979); Collins (2000); Lewis, 2001a and 2005; Abrahams (2007).

⁹⁰ Collins (2000/2009, p.192) defines 'othermothers' as "women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities", and this kind of relationship has been an important structural support for black mothers. These include grandmothers, aunts, sisters, cousins, friends and even 'fictive kin'. Collins believes that unlike policy reports which focus on the absence of black men in families, black family life is characterised more by the presence, centrality and significance of women.

Black South African middle-class families wearing modern Victorian garb, posing for cameras from the 1890s onwards. His work evidences the cultural influence of European bourgeoisie society on middle-class Black societies, who identified with modernity and the cultural fashions of the day, but which are hidden in narratives of that time, which mostly depicted Black Africans in their ethnic/tribal attire, as distinctly unmodern natives.⁹¹ Sophie makes visible these hidden modern impulses and mixed cultural influences that were part of life but suppressed by apartheid ideological representations.

Although Marasela's mother never worked as a domestic worker, Marasela's avatar Theodorah in *Theodorah Comes to Johannesburg* series (2005-2008) (Figs.33-40) is often read as a domestic worker due to her attire. Marasela, dressed in her mother's yellow dress and head *doek*, retraces her mother's steps in Johannesburg and attempts to see the city through her eyes. Marasela's mum moved from the rural Eastern Cape to Johannesburg after marriage and apartheid Johannesburg was a trauma that she could never deal with. She lived in constant fear of arrests which she saw in the city, and once witnessed someone being beaten to death in the 60s. These external circumstances combined with her own medical schizophrenia, made Johannesburg an aggression she eventually couldn't confront, and has never been to since the 80s. In *Theodorah*, Marasela visits historical sites such as the Hector Pietersen memorial (which commemorates the 1976 Soweto riots in which Black children, protesting against the apartheid government's attempt to enforce Afrikaans as the instructive medium, were gunned down by policemen in Soweto); the Apartheid Museum in Soweto; and the once derelict skeletal structure of the Turbine Hall, an obsolete power station in central Johannesburg (which was home to a number of squatters in the 2000s and emptied out when Marasela took her picture, and is now the headquarters for the multinational mining company AshantiGold). She also visits everyday non-descript places such as an abandoned run-down shop in Kliptown, the bustling migrant trading quarters at Diagonal Street and Jeppestown, and is even seen contemplating graffiti on a wall and having a quiet sit down in a park.

We never see Theodorah's/Marasela's face, we only follow her gaze as, like the 1949 filmic character Jim⁹² who comes to Joburg,⁹³ she becomes disillusioned with the space and the

⁹¹ See for instance the photography and drawings of South African White women documentarians Killie Campbell and Barbara Tyrell.

⁹² Directed by Donald Swanson and also known as *African Jim* (1949), the plot revolves around Jim who leaves his rural homestead to make his fortunes in the big city of Johannesburg. The film starred various Black South African musicians and was the first full length feature film with a largely Black South African cast.

modernist capitalist dream, feels alone against the tide of masses and times, and the physical, emotional and mental toll these forces take on Black people who try to survive it. When asked why she takes these trips as her mum/for her mum, Marasela (2013a) says it's to acknowledge that her mother's experience of apartheid happened:

Because I guess apartheid for most people who might not have experienced harshness, might not have seen it, it's part myth, part horror. It's very difficult to conceive of it as something real, that could possibly happen, you know, on the scale it did.

Marasela feels the need to validate her mother's trauma as something beyond her schizophrenia, as an external condition imposed on Black South Africans. Derrida (1983, p.293) reminds us that apartheid is "... an evil that cannot be summed up in the principal and abstract iniquity of a system. It is also daily suffering, oppression, poverty, violence, torture inflicted by an arrogant white minority ... on the mass of the black population". It is these scenes of everydayness, the space of daily threat and menace that Marasela captures in these unspectacular photographs – the landscapes that haven't changed, and, yet, are probably unrecognisable to someone who has not been to Johannesburg's city centre since the 80s, when White business and the financial district relocated to the suburbs 'abandoning' the city centre to informal Black trading and small businesses. Once stigmatised as a zone of crime, an area to be avoided by the middle-class, the Johannesburg CBD today is rapidly becoming gentrified, amid constant contestations over the usage of space, but it still bears the stigmas and visible scars of its past. This is true of Marasela's mum and also the larger South African psyche.

Marasela recognises the impossibility of her task – the city of gold is known for its transience, its longing to forget, and while it carries remembrances of apartheid, it is no longer the city that her mother remembers. Marasela cannot mimic her mother's experiences because she is of another generation marked so differently by South Africa's history. She can only re-create an imagination of her mother's stories, a kind of personal memorial image acknowledging apartheid as not just a physical brutalisation, but as a continued mental violation, indicating the kind of wounding spoken about by Abrahams (1997, 2003, 2007) when she deals with discourses and feels herself implicated in the stories of her people, the KhoiKhoi, and Sarah Baartman. Abrahams says other Black persons are subjected to a psychic violence when they are told racist stories about themselves, when there is a disjuncture in the official racist narratives about oppressed people, in which they cannot recognise themselves. Marasela's work creates a

⁹³ Colloquial for 'Johannesburg', also sometimes referred to as 'Jozie'.

tension between this public wounding and her private one, and one can only imagine the pain felt by Marasela, as a child, visualising these horrific incidents and her mother's desolation. In negotiating this tension, she reclaims her own and her mother's subjective experience as part of South Africa's untold histories.

Subjective storytelling compels the reader/viewer to acknowledge its bias, its invention, its fiction, the 'bio-mythographical' element.⁹⁴ hooks (1989, p.157-159) draws on black feminist Audre Lorde's idea of 'bio-mythography' as a kind of remembering through which we can remember 'a general outline of an incident', but the details are often different for each of us. It is remembering as a piecing together, a textured re-telling meant to capture spirit rather than accurate detail. South African novelist André Brink (1998, p.30) says this process is one where the real is "not merely represented but imagined", where the aim is not "reproduction but imagining". This kind of storying process does not aim at 'a truth'. There are many truth-fictions in Marasela's masquerading works: the truth of Marasela's own body being used as a vehicle for re-remembering, the 'true' stories of her mum pictured through the eyes of little Marasela and now enacted as a grown up (a mother herself), but it also evidences the 'truths' of other women-of-colour who can relate to this narrative.

While Marasela's photographic *Theodorah* series invokes the spirit of physical, psychological and emotional alienation that her mum felt, her series *Sarah, Theodorah and Senzeni in Johannesburg* (2011) forms a continuum with the *Theodorah* series. In *Sarah, Theodorah and Senzeni*, Marasela reclaims historical narratives of 'troubled'/'troubling' Black women such as Sarah Baartman, but also includes her mother and herself in this visualisation, re-staging in embroidery on cloth these public scenes of women bonding. Baartman's tragic life story highlights sexual and racial exhibitionism, dubious racist science, and colonial abuse and denigration of Black subjects. Baartman, Theodorah and Marasela are threats posed by Black women narratives to sanitised European 'civilisation' histories, as their stories reflect the brutality of the colonial and apartheid regimes.

Marasela in this series, in a gesture that brought me to tears on first viewing, publicly clothes Baartman and then leads her, together with her mother through present-day Johannesburg (Figs.41-43). They explore the city together, understanding the changing landscape, finding

⁹⁴ hooks (1989, p.157) draws on Audre Lorde's use of the word to describe her autobiographically-based book *Zami*.

strength and safety in each other's presence. Marasela identifies with these women as part of a continuum of racial-gendered-class oppression. Her red, menstrual-like, fertile embroidery and ink lines trace a history of limitations and over-coming narratives, from Baartman, to her own mother, to herself (and show how she negotiates two-dimensional fixed images into empowering ones). Even though contemporary art work is often associated with the 'I' of the individual creator, Marasela refuses this individuation and alienation to invoke historical legacy and identify with the social struggles of women who came before. McClintock reminds us that such affiliations were the hallmark of the resistance of Black South African women against a number of apartheid laws that saw Black women as a bodies of labour, but also as bodies of constant threat in their outward defiance against pass laws, their disregard for the imposed limited movement of Black women outside Bantustans, their bodies as bearers of more Black people that had to be regulated. The multiple 'I's' in this narrative also offer these Black women's bodies some kind of protection in South African public space where they continue to be incredibly vulnerable.

Marasela's visual narratives are also a process of personal catharsis as she attempts as a Black child to reconcile with her mother from whom she felt physically and emotionally estranged at significant personal and historical moments. In both Sibande's and Marasela's still images, the activities, whether grand or subtle, are shrouded in silence (for example Sophie dreaming or Marasela climbing through the building rubble of an unknown shop in Klipspruit or sitting on a park bench). These are not silences that extinguish voices but are rather contemplative silences that Gqola speaks of when she echoes the sentiments of black feminist scholar Nthabiseng Motsemme, who believes that 'the mute always speaks': "It is rather to remind us that under conditions of scarcity and imposed limits, those who are oppressed often generate new meanings for themselves around silences. Instead of being absent and voiceless, silences in circumstances of violence assume presence and speak volumes" (Motsemme quoted in Gqola, 2006a, p.50). Motsemme's idea reminds us that even though bodies can be made invisible in discourses, their presence always articulates a counter-discourse (this concept has been brilliantly presented by Abrahams as she reads resistance into Baartman's trials).⁹⁵

⁹⁵ See Abrahams (2003)

Both Marasela and Sibande counter the invisibilisation of ordinary Black women – who were neither activists, nor simply victims – by forcing their oral personal narratives and points of view onto the visual landscape in an attempt to validate their experiences and contributions to their individual family and South African society at large. They visually translate and materialise spoken bio-myths, giving them tangibility and qualification. McClintock (1995, p.317) says: “Oral memory is a refusal of the dismemberment of history, a laborious life-giver. ... It is a device against oblivion, a strategy for survival.” Oral testimonies situate ‘non-heroes’ into South Africa’s history-in-the-making, fracturing it into a plethora of unspectacular narratives. They provide an everyday-ness to the grand narrative of apartheid, giving textures and complexity to ‘black women’s subjectivity’. Vietnamese-American filmmaker Trinh T. Minh-ha (1991, p.191-192) believes that such memory-making process which emanates from women’s personal story-telling breaks down boundaries and either/or dualisms into ‘both-and’ narratives by engaging both a plural and singular ‘I’, and a plural and singular ‘you’:

Memories within come out of the material that precedes and defines a person. When she creates, they are the subsoil of her work. Thus, autobiography both as singularity and as collectively is a way of making history and of rewriting culture. Its diverse strategies can favour the emergence of new forms of subjectivity: the subjectivity of a non-I/plural I, which is different from the subjectivity of the sovereign I (subjectivism) or the non-subjectivity of the all-knowing I (objectivism).

The non-I/plural I represents a host of fictive states of being in both Sibande and Marasela’s works, that allow these artists to attend to the welfare of their fictive emotional lives, i.e., deriving pleasure from these various states of I/non-I, but also doing important healing emotional work (I will return to these ideas of pleasure and healing in imaginative creative productions in the concluding section of this thesis). For Sibande, part of the commercial success of, and interest in, *Sophie* in the art world is that she haunts South African consciousness every day: *Sophie is everywhere* (Sibande, 2013). She’s your mother, your friend, your domestic worker in your house or in your work place. In her dreams, failures and fears, she is a some one that ‘everybody’ can relate to, and, yet, she is the person nobody wants to be. Sibande and Marasela’s works refuse to denigrate the ‘imperfect’ women in their lives – whether they worked as domestic workers trying to be ‘good Blacks’ for their White employers⁹⁶ or whether they were mentally ill – these women’s experiences have shaped these artists’ own lives, the

⁹⁶ Sibande, 2013

lives of their families and their communities. Both artists acknowledge flaws without judging the older generation of women, and instead locate agency in their actions, in their recollections and even in their silences, understanding that this doesn't imply voiceless, inactivity or lack of agency. Sibande (2013) affirms that her own trajectory in life would not have been possible without women such as these: "I come from these women, they build what I am right now. Actually it's their construction, it's their doing and I feel like that shadow will always follow me." Their works attempt to situate the 'ordinary' and the 'unspectacular on a larger visual mapping of South Africa, making us note the complex and the contradictory in the everyday 'I'.

Plural I's in Disruption of a Scripted I

Whereas, Marasela and Sibande's works witness the trauma of older generations of women in their family, for whom education was a dream, the women artists discussed in this chapter, including myself, have all been victims of apartheid school structures. One had to 'get through' these systems, but critically reflecting on these experiences can be traumatic and there is a level of anger that runs through their works, but also a kind of exorcism of these feelings.

Marasela (2013) talks in interviews about how difficult it was for her to be one of a handful of young Black women at a White Catholic school, and again the feelings of isolation and alienation she felt. Marasela and I were subjected to years of sewing classes as young girls in school. While I began to use embroidery and needle-work in my paintings as an act of defiance against the roles expected of women in apartheid education and to elide the art-craft divide, Marasela's needle-work signifies the enforced penance she was punished with at her Catholic school, at the same time that she subverts stereotypes that such an activity was the leisurely past-time of Victorian middle-class women. Rose, like Marasela, attended a Catholic school and detested school and its conformity, with which she struggled. She has a hatred of the Judaic-Christian God as the all-knowing patriarchal figure, which she often makes into a laughable, deplorable character in many of her works, an authoritarian without much authority. She is critical of the binaries of good/evil, light/dark, man/woman that is the foundation of Western Christianity and its civilising mission, drummed into little colonised children who become ventriloquist dummies like the diligent schoolgirl in her video *Ciao Bella* (2001) (Figs.45d/e), and the overseeing colonised school marm. Rose's work often features self-punishment: in *Ciao Bella* she performs

self-flagellation as *La Ciccolina* (Fig.45e), in which punishment is both pleasurable and painful, although pain is denied *La Ciccolina* as she is an object of pleasure. As the *Love me/Fuck me* boxer in the same work (Fig.45f), Rose punches her own head alternatively with *Love me/Fuck me* gloves. Here there is no signification of pleasure or pain, just a brutal anaesthetised response to the patriarchal scripting of love-sexual relationships. In both of these scenes, the sound of the whip hitting the body and the gloves the head, seemed slowed down, out-of-sync and amplified – they resonate in an uncomfortable way that calls attention to the inherent physical violence despite the anaesthetised/pleasurable ‘look’ on the face of the characters. In her black-and-white video *TKO* (2000) (Figs 44a/b), Rose externalises this self-punishment yet again, with the action captured using a fish-eye lens situated in a punching bag in her studio while on an art residency. Scenes of a naked female body and the punching bag visually overlap and ‘trail’ as she punches the bag repeatedly, her voice rising in crescendo, becoming almost guttural. The anger/violence threatens to spill over, but is contained by the safety of the camera lens and her physical exertion, perhaps pointing to the emotional and physical toll that such anger and violence (the enactment or suppression thereof) takes on oneself.

All of these works explore some degree of violence, whether it is mental, emotional, physical or epistemic, i.e., the rupture of colonised education, of seeing yourself through, and being scripted for, the coloniser’s eyes. This results in colonial subjects viewing the Self-as-Other, and is poignantly explored by Rose in her three-channel video *Ciao Bella* (Figs.47a-c) in which she plays twelve different female archetypes who are grouped around a table reminiscent of Da Vinci’s *Last Supper*: a conservative school marm in brown dress suite and glasses; the leather-clad, self-flagellating *La Ciccolina*; the schoolgirl *Lolita*; a winged *Sarah Baartman* (perhaps it is her bottled genitals that make an appearance?); the grey-scale androgynous boxer hitting herself with *Love me/Fuck me* gloves; a singing *Mami Wata/mermaid*; a hopping aggressive *Playboy bunny*; a self-obsessed *Marie Antoinette*-like figure who spoons cake onto various plates; a happy sign strumming a guitar; a pleasing young student in uniform that sings; a pom-pom cheering nun; a shape-changing shadowy sign which changes signification between *Josephine Baker/Wiccan Witch/Folksy Peruvian ‘Qua’/Auntie*.⁹⁷ Rose’s masquerades desecrate the maleness of the Eucharist. Rose’s supper table is all women or, perhaps, predetermined signs of women, which are all Rose and non-Rose.

⁹⁷ See Rose (2014b)

With the staged chaos that emanates from Rose's table, it resembles less Da Vinci's quieter Christ-focused staging and more Mikhael Bakhtin's understanding of a Rabelaisian banquet scene, where food, laughter and provocative festive speech create a carnivalesque feast in which usually sanctioned behaviour and truths are authorised, as man's "essential relation to life, death, struggle, triumph, and regeneration" was remembered (Bakhtin, 1968/1984, p.282). Bakhtin (ibid: 288) believed that "the banquet had the power of liberating the word from the shackles of piousness and fear of God. Everything became open to play and merriment". The open eating mouth, which represents the grotesque body, allows man to taste the world, to introduce it into his body, to make it a part of himself, thus representing the triumph of man over the world, a devouring without being devoured, which is perhaps fitting for Rose's banquet in which the female archetypes represent a kind of inescapability from patriarchal signification and 'devouring'. And yet they also have the ability to run these significations amok, to show their fictitiousness, their paradoxical fixedness and malleability, their playfulness. Gqola (2005b, p.4) notes that often knowledge-making practices think of black sexuality exclusively in terms of "pathology and brokenness: illness, gender based violence, limitation, domination, conscription and death". Rose's bodies are given a freedom of play that is rarely seen of black women and which is authorised by the carnivalesque atmosphere of the Rabelaisian banquet table.

Furthermore, banquet 'table talk' allows for free, uncouth speech, a 'back talk' as exemplified by Rose's Lolita, who after a dialogue in which she seems to innocently question and imbibe self-beauty perceptions, jumps off her table momentarily to cuss out the viewer, "you fucking bitch, motherfucker, piece of shit ass, piece of crap, shit and pussy, pussy, pussy, for you, for you" – the words 'fuck', 'pussy' and 'piece' are given added poignancy by the disembodied winged bottled vagina which later floats in the air (Figs.45f/c). Lolita is unlike the perfect colonial student who sings to someone else's tune. Lolita's outburst is a moment of unexpected violence, of pleasurable release, of excess within the stage of constrained significations. Festive table talk permits 'free and frank truths' for Bakhtin (1968/1984, p.285-286), it allows transgressive humour, a play with vocabulary:

The themes of table talk are always "sublime," filled with "profound wisdom," but these themes are uncrowned and renewed on the material bodily level. The grotesque symposium does not have to respect hierarchical distinctions; it freely blends the profane and the sacred, the lower and the higher, the spiritual and the material.

Festive speech permits truths which at other times could not be said. Asked why she is often quoted as swearing a lot, even in interviews, Rose (2014a) says it is a kind of 'jesting', after all jesters can say all sorts of improper, politically incorrect things within a sanctioned setting, but she adds they also have to be pretty smart individuals in what they say. Rose's Lolita breaks the façade of the video by confronting the viewer as voyeur to the banquet signification up to that point, a voyeur who has enjoyed these women's bodies on display. The swearing makes the audience complicit as part participant, part sustainer in these female stereotypes. In Rose's, and my own works, anger and swearing are emotive forces that can be harnessed for creativity – a kind of radical negativity that breaks with normal social scripting. The 'angry black woman' is a fantasy figure, Ahmed (2010a; p.68) argues, which produces its own effects. By this she means that the angry black women stereotype has been used to disregard the works of black feminists like Angela Davis, bell hooks and Audre Lorde. Ahmed (2000, 2010a, 2010c) has shown that although black/queer/postcolonial women have a lot to be angry about in terms of how societies treat them, there is the contradictory demand that they show external signs of happiness, making black anger a fantasy. Angry subjects are dismissed, the source and reason for their anger ignored and emptied out, which angers subjects further, and makes them look unreasonable (Ahmed, 2010c, p.49).

Anger is a valid response to racism Lorde reminds us. In *Sister Outsider* (1984/2007), she discusses how anger has been a mechanism for survival for many black women, but when internalised and unexpressed, boils destructively inside one. She finds, however, that when anger is strategically directed, it can be liberating and strengthening, a potent force of energy directed towards progress and change, loaded with information, energy and clarification (Lorde, 1984/2007, p.127). While the person(s)/group(s) to whom anger is directed might not 'appreciate' it, Lorde reminds us of the precariousness with which black people continue to live when she says: "If I speak to you in anger, at least I have spoken to you: I have not put a gun to your head and shot you down in the street" (ibid). She (ibid: 131) argues that anger between peers "births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth." Anger can be a potent force in academic scholarship and the creative arts, as I've discovered in my work *Nervous Conditions*. The anger on display is fuelled by my own – and other women's – real life experiences, but it is still an anger that has been scripted several times over. It is confrontational and pretends to be 'real', even as it is just another simulacrum, another fiction, another appearance of 'truth' and 'realness'. It is a

strategic use of the angry black woman/feminist killjoy stereotype to start a dialogue about racial-gender-class power relations that few want to discuss. Ahmed (2010c, p.49) says that when such an angry black woman/killjoy figure enters the room, the tension can be palpable – that this discomfort is generated by the presence of particular bodies, who in pointing out problems, *become* the problem, that “the exposure of violence becomes the origin of violence”. Far from allowing oneself to be made the source of anger, Ahmed (ibid: 51) advocates that black women need to remain angry, “even though speaking anger involves risks and costs”. She (ibid) finds that anger is creative, that it can “give us room to do other things” – in *Nervous Conditions* it allows me to say things about academia and the art field spoken around dinner tables, hushed in whispers at conference lunches and drinks in art galleries, but rarely stated out aloud for everyone to hear and to be offended by.

Likewise, Rose’s banquet table doesn’t leave you with a ‘good feeling’. Whereas Bakhtin’s Rabelaisian banquet seems all celebratory, Rose’s festival has an alienated, disjunctive feeling about it as if the shadow of what hooks calls ‘white capitalist sexist patriarchy’ hangs over it. These women seem unable to escape the roles that have been scripted for them and that although they have the potential to disrupt the scripting, the conditioning of gender performativity seems inescapable except through violence. Towards the end of piece, the Playboy bunny, brandishing a machine gun (Fig.45h), guns down her fellow significations, splattering them onto the camera lens, but just when you think it ends, that Rose has released them, the significations raise their heads and bid a cheerful, irritating ‘ciao’ to the audience. Signification it seems is alive and well, and doppelgangers and their voyeurs continue their happy existence in the visual realm.

Shadowy I’s: Creative Doppelgangers and Outsiders-Insiders

In his article ‘Notes on Wrestling with the Image’ (2011), on the visual task facing artists in the Caribbean, visual artist-curator Chris Cozier talks about the persistent shadow or mirror image that hangs over people and places defined as Other and how artists are challenged by Self-image versus long constructed images of one’s history, body and geographical space:

The Caribbean artist is always in competition with a long history of expedient labelling of their world and their very selves – externally and also internally. ... But in the pictorial domain, we are still anthropological, cultural, national, ethnic or electoral commodities and signifiers. ...

The question is whether the purpose for taking the image shifts to real portraiture and not simply image-capture, in the worst sense of the term, leaving us as subjected signs of ourselves, in a kind of cultural *doppelgänger*-ing that disturbingly reminds us of our traditional role within a visual territory not exclusively of our own making, or coyly performed (Cozier, 2011, p.8, 9-10).

The frustration of having colonial anthropological images and stereotypes of Africanness, blackness, womanhood and Otherness invoked whenever an artist produces visual images that features a body-of-colour, is often a kind of shadow that hangs over the works of artists from African (and other 'Third World') spaces. Minh-ha (1991, p.70) says that this doppelgänger is a projection of the colonial mind of itself as the all-knowing subject-Insider and other-Outsider, and that the other has to remain but a shadow of the self. African art historian Olu Oguibe (1995/2004, p.12) calls this projection 'a simulacral dialogue', an 'echo' or the "displaced sound of percussive fracture" in which only the voice of the Western producer and Western audience count, while the African artist is reduced to ventriloquism. In the process of Western hegemonic discourse, Others have become inscribed with an awareness of the stereotypes projected on them, the roles and expectations of Otherness. Sociologist W.E.B Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903/2006) talks about this double consciousness of black people in their awareness of their own images as well as images that have been constructed of them, over which they have no control, with which they cannot reconcile, but to which they are, nonetheless, expected to relate to.

In an age of pictorial imaging, visual simulacra and doppelgängers live in an eternal world. The violence enacted by scopophilia – Freud's term for the pleasure of looking by turning a person into an object – was taken up by feminists engaged in film theory to examine the kind of system of looking that cinema has engaged in since its beginnings. Laura Mulvey and Mary Ann Doane talk about the patriarchal gaze and filmic coding that reveals the way the male unconscious invests women as objects of loss and lack, and that that lack must be masqueraded through excessive tropes of femininity in order to create the scopophilic and fetishistic pleasure in looking.⁹⁸ Using Lacan's mirror-image theory, Mulvey (1975/2000, p.486) posits that the male gaze identifies with the male lead ("the image recognized is conceived as the reflected body of the self") and that the simulacra "can make things happen and control events better than the

⁹⁸ Doane, 1982/2000, p.502-502

subject/spectator, just as the image in the mirror was more in control of motor coordination". Manipulating visibility and mimicking visual perception, the camera attempts to feed the feeling of an identification with the male on-screen surrogate, who is able to control the gaze and screen (ibid: 492-493). Women, however, are all surface, all image, all visibility to be controlled and consumed by that gaze (Doane, 1982/2000, p.497). Neither Mulvey nor Doane's work racialises this scopical desiring as a white supremacist capitalistic patriarchal one, although Fanon's (1952/2008, p.107) work does when he explains the epistemic violence enacted on him when he is accosted by visual stereotypes of blackness: "I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. ... The people in the theatre are watching me, examining me, waiting for me." It is Fanon's ability to critically read these images that allows him to be affronted by them, but all too often, he notes, black children are more than likely to identify with the white heroes of that visual and literary script fighting the forces of 'darkness' and evil. The fetishistic knowledge of 'difference', of 'excess' of the Other is replicated repeatedly in discourse and representation, and becomes the hallmark of racial/ethnic/gender/sexuality doppelgangers.

For cultural producers, awareness of these doppelgangers can be stifling. Some artists, however, harness these doppelgangers creatively as characters and stereotypical knowledge to work against, or from which they launch their critiques. Self-insertion masquerading practice is one strategy for pointing out that doppelgangers do not represent 'real' knowledge but are an endless play of simulacra, i.e., fictional signs. Art historian Amelia Jones in *The Artist's Body* expounds on the history of performance and conceptual art in which the concept of 'simulacra' is engaged by a series of artists, since the 60s, as technology became more widespread. They were also influenced by the theories of philosophers like Martin Heidegger, Jean Baudrillard and Maurice Merleau-Ponty around the increasing mediatization, hyper-reality and alienation of society, and how the not-real has come to be read as 'real'. Jones defines the simulacra as a series of mediated, increasingly distanced images, resources, staged performances *for* consumption – "always already hypercommodified, ... *always already a picture*" (Jones, 2000/2012, p.37). They are, thus, possibly malleable signifiers which visual artists can play around with.

African art historian Salah Hassan situates African self-insertion practices within the realm of the simulacrum-meets-self-portrait. Hassan draws on Oguibe's discourse that portraiture in West African painting, sculpture and photography was never simply about capturing the 'likeness' of

the person, and that verisimilitude is rather a mediated gesture between “reflection and projection”, the aim of which is not “transparency, but efficacy, the fulfilment of an intent beyond the materiality of the image”.⁹⁹ Similarly, Enwezor (2010a, p.25-26) regards African studio portraiture practices as philosophical ventures where the “figure in the image, more than being depicted and displayed, insists on being seen, to be looked at, and desired” in a “game of theatre and masquerade, premised on the artifice of self-construction”. He (ibid: 27) regards the photographic studio space as a space of ‘figuration and theatricality’, a zone “imbued with strategic and structural attributes” in which to “enact and act out the subjective principles underpinning the different truths and fictions of identity formation”.

Photography has played perhaps one of the most important roles in documenting everyday narratives and evidencing traditional and modern African identities in various parts of Africa since the advent of photography. Unearthing this extensive history of imaging of black-African bodies by black-Africans themselves, has become major recuperative projects by sociologist-curator Okwui Enwezor, African art scholars Salah Hassan and Olu Oguibe, as well as for Stuart Hall. Documentary and studio photography have been key practices in decolonising images of the atemporal, native, the ‘dark’ continent of Africa, more often evidencing Africa as a cosmopolitan crossroads, its social subjects fashionable, negotiating modernity and traditional life. The black-African body staged in front of the lens was also a means of asserting black-African beauty and self-pride, the belief that ‘black is beautiful’, which has been highlighted, for instance, in the works of Malian photographers Seydou Keïta and Malick Sedibé, Samuel Fosso and the photography of South Africa’s famous *Drum* magazine. Hassan (2000/2001: 26) believes this wilful insertion of one’s own body in pictorial fantasy allows for a transcendence of ‘likeness’ into endless simulacra, a play with the not-real – “This is when the *simulacrum* of the person portrayed ... functions as a *surrogate presence* rather than a physical likeness”. Self-insertion practices, for Hassan (ibid), reveal re-presentations that expose the aesthetics and social codes formulated by others or “based knowingly on their expectations”,¹⁰⁰ which allows a ‘counter-penetration’: a strategy that allows African artists to assert their own subjectivities and presence “in response to objectification ... and in the face of presumed absence”, and to evidence the racial and cultural scripting inscribed on non-white bodies. Differences become a point from which to engage, to theorise and acknowledge ambiguities and ambivalence. Using

⁹⁹ Oguibe quoted in Hassan, 2000/2001, p.26

¹⁰⁰ Richard Brilliant quoted in Hassan, 2000/2001, p.26

one's own body produces layers of history and meaning, and implicates the producer in the history of representation in different ways. Minh-ha (1991, p.70) finds that spaces of doubleness create 'inter-' areas, zones of displacement when the 'Not You/Like You' boundaries are violated: "for the in-between zones are the shifting grounds on which the (doubly) exiled walk", what she calls 'insider-outsider' positions.

Minh-ha (ibid: 74-76) talks about the ambivalence that is created when a person who is both insider-outsider to her own culture explores her own circumstances and prods her own experiences and society as both subject and object of her research area:

She refuses to reduce herself to an Other, and her reflections to a mere outsider's objective reasoning or insider's subjective feeling. She knows, probably like Zora Neal Hurston the insider-anthropologist knew, that she is not an outsider like the foreign outsider. She knows she is different while at the same time being Him. Not quite the Same, not quite the Other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in an out.

Undercutting the inside/outside opposition, her intervention is necessarily that of both a deceptive insider and a deceptive outsider (ibid: 74).

The insider-outsider records and questions the taken-for-granted things that insiders usually do, but at the same time does not distance herself from the process, from the context, from the messiness and complications, thereby resisting totalising strategies and foreclosing meaning. These conflictual positions can be interesting engagements for creative theorists, who negotiate not only theory, but practice as well, inserting their bodies into their work and reflecting on meaning-making practise.

Rose, Mntambo, Sibande and Marasela all work as insider-outsiders not just within their ethnicities and races and as women-of-colour in South Africa, but as visual artists within a globalised system of contemporary art. Aware of the burden of ethnographic African photography which fixes and exoticises them, they are not deterred in their individual quests for 'named representations', and instead harness the digital photographic and filmic space as a stage for enacting their characters, for bending reality as they choose, creating their own illusions and truths. There is a resignation that labelling and boxing of social and political categories will follow the works of artists-of-colour, whether within or outside Western metropolises, and that readings and signification of black/African women's bodies were outside their control as artists. And, yet, these artists still chose to place their bodies before the camera,

to direct as much as possible the photographic and video works, and to let loose their photographic visions into the conceptual and material consumption of visual imagery.

For instance, Sibande took the weight of expectations of educated Black women onto her body when she created Sophie into sculptural form, and then when she enacts Sophie by completely blackening her body to a kind of ornamental black.¹⁰¹ In rather poetic eloquence, Sibande (2013) says when she decided to make Sophie, she decided to cast a shadow over her, “But how do you dress a shadow? How do you make a shadow perform?” Her answer to this was an incorporation of the doppelganger into a shadow that speaks of the women who came before her, who have supported her, whose narratives she now shares as informing her own, overlaid on her to create a poly-vocal Sophie of multiple ‘I’s’. In her most recent work though, she recognises Sophie as yet another burden she has to cast off, if she, Mary Sibande, is to move forward as a young Black woman artist. She recognises that Sophie has become a personal and artistic doppelganger which she has chosen to transform quite publicly in *A Terrible Beauty is Born* (2013) (Fig.31) and *A Reversed Retrogressed Scene 1* (2013) (Fig.32). Having received the prestigious Standard Bank Award for 2013, Sibande called upon an earlier simulacrum of herself to engage this battle: “The work maintains an aggressive or militant stance. They are not at war but going through internal transformations. Change is often a violent process, where parts of the same body are destroyed and new ones take over. This installation is looking at destruction, the need to destroy in order to rebuild” (Sibande, 2014). Dressed in purple, this simulacrum is shown standing proud and tall, tossing off her white head scarf and apron, surrounded by alien life forms that manifest from her insides/gown, allowing her violent/ugly transformation to be seen publicly. She is an unknown not afraid physically to fight the older Sophie for her place in the world (*a la* Matrix-style, i.e., not-real-simulacrum fighting not-real-simulacrum for something that does have real meaning for artist Sibande).

In Nandipha Mntambo’s works *The Rape of Europa* (2009a) (Fig.47) and *Narcissus* (2009b) (Fig.48), which takes as its starting point Picasso’s and Caravaggio’s works of the same titles respectively, her sculptural obsession with animal-human relations and their inter-dependence, reflects a kind of doppelganger-ing in her representation of Self as both victim and seducer in these images. In *The Rape of Europa*, Mntambo is both Zeus the bullish aggressor and Europa

¹⁰¹ Sibande (2013) says that this blackening of her body resulted in criticisms of Sophie being a ‘coon’, which she doesn’t agree with.

the seduced, while in *Narcissus* she is the hybrid creature who stares longingly at her reflection. Asked why she chose to play both aggressor and victim, Mntambo (2013) says that she views mimicry as part of social behaviour, something inseparable from a construction of a sense of Self, and that this Self contains these ambivalences, i.e., the dangers lurking within oneself that we always see in other people and vice versa. Desire and the gaze structure these works – the fetishistic looking and longing before the disastrous consequences of each action, what Mntambo calls the ‘consumption of the Other’. Mntambo’s work seems to also hint at the dangers of one starting to believe in simulacra as ‘real’ – when fiction comes to stand in for actual relationships, for critical discussions, when we become perpetual voyeurs mediated by digital images, believing we are constantly connected only to realise mediated selves do not hint at complex, real, complicated persons and situations. Mntambo’s work situates the gaze as both destructive and affirmative. hooks (1992, p.116) believes that the gaze is “a site of resistance for colonized black people globally”, and that it is not only possible to resist certain ways of looking, but that producers of/workers with the filmic gaze, need to be aware of it and subvert it to critical ends.

To-be-looked-at-ness and Spaces of Desire

In all of these artists’ works, the seduction of lens-based voyeurism (what Mulvey calls ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’),¹⁰² and its corresponding fictions, are harnessed by these women-of-colour artists. Sibande forces you inside the private wishes of a Black woman oppressed by the laws of apartheid, implicating you in the spectacle and tensions of her private fantasies and the enjoyment of her defiance, mimetic gestures and flirtations with the excess she is denied in her everyday life. We can critique Sophie for her seemingly Westernised capitalistic longings, but her position as a strongly desiring subject breaks the mere projections of one’s own desires and repressions on her body, rendering her a human subject we can relate to.

Theodorah’s face is unknown, as her back is always turned to us. Like her daughter, Marasela, who went on these imaginary sojourns in a violent Johannesburg, the viewer is forced on these silent journeys. The voyeurism is not a pleasurable or easy one – we are made to identify with Theodorah, to walk in her shoes, comforted only by the objectifying distance created by the lens. We never get to see her emotions and never get to feel we know her. We are, instead,

¹⁰² Mulvey, 1975/2000, p.487

forced to feel with her, for her, to gauge our own emotions in the same situation. Mntambo's work allows you to gaze, but at what? A mythical beastly woman Self/non-Self in love with itself? A fantastical selfie? (This could be read as a kind of Lacanian mirror-image love of the perfect controlled body being reflected back to an as-yet uncontrollable body, but there is also a certain charm to this idea of a bestial Black woman being in love with her own image, producing an oppositional gaze to the dominant one which should be repulsed.) There is little to seduce you in this display of Black womanhood in the way that one is accustomed to in viewing African ethnographic images – they are not externally beautiful women or sexual freaks. The narcissism on display invites even as it resists, because it is 'taken'/preoccupied by itself and offers little seduction for the voyeur.

In Rose's *Ciao Bella* (Fig.45i), the muck (or is shit?) of signification is splattered all over the screen, on the very safe lens that separates signifiers and voyeurs, bluntly forcing us to acknowledge that there is a lens there. The camera, as Mulvey (1975/2000, p.489) reminds us, is meant to mimic human perception and create the illusion of physical depth and reality. When muck is splattered across the camera lens, we, as the viewers, are helpless, waiting on Mammy to clean the gaze, to allow us access again. We have been exposed as dirty perverts on the scene. The lens is the portal that permits access to these fictions, to be taken on these voyages, but remains impermeable, separating them from us, and keeping 'us' safe from the contamination that occurs in the zone of play. In these various instances, the artists choose to make evident the lens-based construction, playing on its ability to seduce, to pretend at knowledge, even as it paradoxically exposes you, denying you knowledge of the subjects in a kind of Brechtian distancing and alienation manoeuvre.

German playwright-theatre director Bertolt Brecht's theory *verfremdungseffekt* (alienation effect) aimed at exposing performative theatre conventions in order to make evident the seduction of illusionism, and situate content within historical structures and ideology (Brooker, 1994/2006, p.215-217). Brecht, thus, politicised the aesthetics of his theatre, not to be used as means of enjoyment-as-an-end, but rather to alienate (or estrange/de-familiarise) audiences from the coding of illusionary performative practice that was capable of perpetuating official dogma and ideology (ibid: 216). Peter Brooker (ibid: 220) claims that Brecht was more interested in producing an "externally, socially situated performance rather than to penetrate a character's inner life". Similarly, Rose's female sign-carriers in *Ciao Bella* are all surface, as is

Mntambo's and Marasela's characters, and even Sibande's Sophie, in that they reveal the "social gest implicit in an action or event",¹⁰³ but deny the audience 'true' knowledge of the characters they purport to portray, rather asking the audience to reconsider what they are seeing and ways of seeing that have been constructed according to power and aesthetic canons. Rose (2014a) often uses crude props and allows the voices of her production team to be heard because she wants to show the "back of Disneyland", the farce and the illusion of the media/technologies that she uses.¹⁰⁴ Following Jacques Derrida's idea of supplementarity,¹⁰⁵ Jones (1997-8/2012, p.209) argues that such images of bodily performance, through its mediated presence, create a kind of indexicality which flaunts the body as a 'loss or lack' in its substituted 'presence', making visible bodily, technological and aesthetic codes and the marking of social boundaries as they are enacted on the body.

Masquerade's ability to make social scripting visible has been witnessed on a number of occasions in South Africa, but I want to highlight just one. The opening of a Women's Day exhibition in August 2009 resulted in a controversy that drew attention to conservative race-gender-sexuality tensions between a politician's personal beliefs and South Africa's liberal constitution. Then Minister of Arts and Culture, Lulu Xingwana, refused to open the *Innovative Women* (2009) exhibition at Constitution Hill (a former apartheid-state prison in Johannesburg and now the seat of South Africa's Constitutional Court), because she was offended by the nudity on display of Black lesbian activist Zanele Muholi and Mntambo's works. Muholi's visual arts photographs of (often poor) Black lesbians from South Africa's townships and cities, have received international attention for her candid lifestyle shots of lesbians as they stage themselves in front of her camera, but also for her documentation of the violence they endure (Fig.49). Her works displayed at this exhibition were a kind of Romantic-styled visual dance between lesbian lovers (Fig.50), while Mntambo displayed *The Rape of Europa* and *Narcissus*. Xingwana apparently found the works 'pornographic', 'immoral' and 'offensive' and left the exhibition, later, unsuccessfully attempting to retract the monies sponsored by the Department

¹⁰³ Brooker, 1994/2006, p.221

¹⁰⁴ Rose (2014a) narrates the story of a friend who, as a child, went on a ride in Disneyland that didn't work, and got taken out of the setting via a back door by Disneyland staff. Her friend told her that the back of Disneyland was super dirty and chaotic, unlike its cleaned exterior, and this idea of 'the back of Disneyland' stuck with Rose.

¹⁰⁵ "The supplement, Jacques Derrida has provocatively argued, is a 'terrifying menace' in its indication of absence and lack but also 'the first and surest protection...against that very menace. This is why it cannot be given up'" (Derrida quoted in Jones, 1997-8/2012, p.209).

of Arts and Culture. This issue only reached public attention the following year and Xingwana issued the following statement in response to her being labelled as 'homophobic':

In August last year, I was invited to speak at the *Innovative Women Art Exhibition* at Constitution Hill. Upon arrival at the Exhibition, I immediately saw images which I deemed offensive. The images in large frames were of naked bodies presumably involved in sexual acts. I was particularly revolted by an image called 'Self-rape', depicting a sexual act with a nature scene as the backdrop. The notion of self-rape trivialises the scourge of rape in this country. To my mind, these were not works of arts but crude misrepresentations of women (both black and white) masquerading as artworks rather than engaged in questioning or interrogating—which I believe is what art is about. Those particular works of art stereotyped black women. ... What I think is necessary in our country today is a long overdue debate on what is art and where do we draw the line between art and pornography (Pillay, 2010).

Xingwana (ibid) diverts attention away from her own conservative stance by highlighting the title of Mntambo's work *The Rape of Europa* – and not called 'Self-rape' as she states – but which she read into the work, and which she then relates to South Africa's horrific women and child rape, and "crude misrepresentation of women (both black and white)". She even goes so far as to insinuate that this is pornography "masquerading as artworks rather than engaged in questioning or interrogating" (despite the fact that the violence, debasement, and unrealistic depictions of women's bodies in service of patriarchal needs which characterises pornography is absent from these works). What Xingwana, who not long after this in a parliamentary cabinet reshuffle was moved to the portfolio of Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, is masking, is deep-seated homophobic revulsion not necessarily to the 'idea' of lesbianism and gayness, but rather to the *public display* of lesbian eroticism and love.

Muholi's work, while touched with an aesthetic of the erotic, does not depict sexual acts but rather Black women loving each other, which it seems is enough to challenge heteronormativity and its imaginings of what goes on behind closed doors. What both Muholi and Mntambo's works, furthermore, seem to elicit is a kind of black women's subjective pleasure in their own imperfect bodies. There is a level of self-definition in pleasure that irks Xingwana's sensibilities of how Black women should be publically displayed. She reduces nakedness – regardless of how it is used artistically – to pornography because, one can argue, too often the naked black body has been fetishized and consumed in a manner that marks the display of black/African/postcolonial nakedness, sex or pleasure as merely primal, violent sexualisation.

This makes it a difficult terrain for black/African/women cultural producers from these societies to have conversations about bodily pleasure that doesn't evoke centuries of racist-gendered visual doppelgangers (Lewis, 2005). It raises the question of how black/African/postcolonial women are to deal with public visualisations of their bodies and the aesthetic pleasures they derive from it, without it being consumed and overtaken by racist-sexist fetishism.

Moreover, the idea of eroticism, as conceived by Lorde, needs to be redeemed from that of sex, of simple bodily pleasure and sensation. She equates the erotic with a depth of feeling that leaves one feeling empowered, informed, acutely aware of the range of their emotional lives: "When I speak of the erotic, then, I speak of it as an assertion of the lifeforce of women; of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives" (Lorde, 1984/2007, p.55). She believes that erotic energy allows one to achieve a sense of satisfaction in what one does, when one is at the 'epicentre of one's agency'. Lorde points also to the fact that women-of-colour cannot always be creating responses *in reaction to*, and *in defence of*, but they have to place their needs and welfare first, and in a manner, the artworks discussed in this chapter seem to demonstrate a kind of attendance to the emotive fictive lives of the artists from whom they emanate.

No Place

In part, what is at issue is a sense of location or even the desire to possess a place. Apartheid placed everything with a cartographer's desire for fixity. Everyone was caught up in its fantasy, came to believe that there was a place (apart) for them. Yet, in the question of identity, there can never be the fixity of a place (Christiansë, 2003, p.376).

My engagement in this chapter, with the works of young women creative producers who have emerged at the end of apartheid as visual artists, has tried to show how they are asserting their own experiences, histories and knowledges in the void of black women's subjectivities in official spaces. Their narratives and picturings have gained international recognition and place on record black/African women-centred questionings of their lives in South Africa at the current moment – Rose (2014a), for instance, is keenly aware of the fact that she is not just contributing to art history, but is making history through her participation in the South African visual arts

field and its wider sphere of cultural productions. All the artists have found self-masquerading a powerful strategy to insert themselves and their personal testimonies into visual imaging and questionings on identity. In each of their works identity categories such as 'woman', 'blackness', 'other', 'sex' have been prodded to reveal their 'political-ness', historical constructedness and changing positionality. Their self-insertive narratives have meant that they are 'speaking to the tale, telling and retelling it' (Minh-ha, 1991, p.12).

For Minh-ha (ibid: 113), the 'personal politicised' and the 'political personalised' for women subjects create an "in-between ground where the questioning work materializes itself and resists its status as mere object of consumption". She (ibid) regards multiplicity, poly-vocality, plurality and mutation as the necessary outcomes of ambivalence, ambiguities, contradictions, displacements and in-between spaces in identity construction because "the self is always in the making". Minh-ha, Hall and Butler warn of the stagnation that occurs when one believes that identity is a point arrived at rather than a departure, when identity becomes fixed, static, when the "naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm" (Butler, 1993/2011, p.xvii). To unsettle the definitive process of naming, Minh-ha (1991, p.2, 112) proposes the interesting concepts of an 'in-between-the-naming-space' and 'un-naming'. The process of 'naming' and 'un-naming' seem intrinsically linked in preventing canonisation, an official sedimentation of truth, promoting instead a constant interrogation of identities which seems to invoke a patchwork Self, a kind of Frankenstein-Self which reveals multiple creations and beginnings. Perhaps sadly, for those who like their identities fixed and their grand narratives stable, Hall (1989/1991, p.20) says there is no going back: "The notion of an identity that knows where it came from, where home is, but also lives in the symbolic – in the Lacanian sense – knows you can't really go home again. ... You've got to find out who you are in the flux of the past and the present." In all of these artists' works, there seems to be this active process of not only being apartheid subjects, but trying to find out who they are in the 'now' and 'here'.

Similarly, hooks (1989, p.51) reminds us that periods of social upheaval often call for the task of re-definition. Speaking of the American scene after slavery ended and civil rights for African-Americans were won, hooks says that opposition is not enough, and that in "that vacant space after one has resisted there is still the necessity to become – to make oneself anew". In the same manner, since apartheid resistance is over, women-of-colour visual artists have become important narrators and interrogators of black women's subjectivities. That at times this may

create other essentialist, undifferentiated positions (like the uncritical celebration of 'blackness' and race as fundamental identity categories, or the glorification of motherhood); that many of these women vehemently refuse the title of 'feminist' because they associate it with Westernness and say it is another 'box' to constrain their works;¹⁰⁶ and that their works may feed black/African women exoticisms is not, I believe an indictment on the process they are involved in, but rather highlights necessary contradictions in discourses that must continue to be interrogated.

The masquerading works of these young women-of-colour artists excites me as a fellow woman-of-colour visual artist in that while it is situated in the realm of a still White-dominated visual arts field, they seem directed by a black gaze at black audiences, seeking validation for black narratives from people who relate to their work, while also being able to speak to a range of experiences cross-culturally. The current lack of theoretical discussions on their work not only denotes the dearth of critical writings by black art theoreticians and art historians, but also reflects the fact that narratives which have at their epicentre women-of-colour, which decentres the white male gaze, may leave many left "adrift without a white presence" (hooks, 1992, p.130). This results, all too often, in simplistic readings of these artists' works. In this chapter I've tried to show just the opposite, that as a fellow practitioner invested in the terrain of masquerading, there is much deconstructing and reflecting to be done on these performative critical practices, not just in terms of the narratives they engage, but in terms of the formal and aesthetic choices being made by these women producers in a post-colonial context.

¹⁰⁶ While these artists may refute the 'feminist' label, they are aware of their works being read in these ways as I am doing in this thesis. All these artists see their works as woman-centred and actively propagate gender rights, but do not invoke the term 'feminism' because they regard it as a foreign construct which does not translate into the African context (Marasela, 2013; Sibande, 2013; Mntambo, 2013).

CONCLUSION

During my lifetime I have dedicated myself to this struggle of the African people. I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die (Nelson Mandela, 1964).¹⁰⁷

Being part of all these people, and in the knowledge that none dare contest that assertion, I shall claim that

I am an African!

Today it feels good to be an African (Thabo Mbeki, 1996).¹⁰⁸

In this thesis, masquerading has been harnessed as a visual analytic tool capable of complex interrogations through a centring and performance of Self and Other, which calls into view local identity politics as well as centre-margin contemporary visual arts relations. Staging self is highly popular in today's globalised, technologized world, whether it is through 'selfie' photographs, costume parties and Cosplayer clubs or reality TV shows. The rise of masquerading practices in visual arts in many parts of the world, therefore, can be viewed as part of a wider phenomenon of self-performativity aided by technology.

This thesis set out to explore this phenomenon of self-masquerading in South African visual arts through the performances of Self-Other in the works of artists Anton Kannemeyer, Nandipha Mntambo, Tracey Rose, Senzeni Marasela and Mary Sibande, which evidence an engagement of personal-meets-public ideas of history and memory, and ambiguities and slippages between accepted truths and fictions. Each of these artists' masquerades use South Africa's post-apartheid, post-colonial context as a theatre for their stagings, simultaneously accepting race, gender and ethnicity as foundational identity precepts in South African society but also 'playing' with such discourses. As has been set out in Chapter Two, Kannemeyer's work reflects a

¹⁰⁷ See *The Telegraph* (2013)

¹⁰⁸ See Chipkin (2003)

postcolonial masquerading using the sign of blackface to critique White male Afrikaner fears, but when this stereotypical racial mask is removed, it seems to be a cover for the very thing Kannemeyer is mocking: his own White male Afrikaner fears in a post-colonial predominantly Black country. His postcolonial masquerades (and his utterances as well as the defence and support of other White colleagues of his work which extend his discourse) evidence his grapplings with Afrikaner identity in post-apartheid South Africa as history is being rewritten and White Afrikaners (and White South Africans generally) find themselves situated as antagonists/oppressors. Kannemeyer's slippery postcolonial blackface masquerade simultaneously hides his fear of Blackness/Africanness while he pokes fun at his and other White South Africans imaginations, but then also finds allegedly 'realistic' political basis for such fears based on past histories of Black African dictatorships and present governmental corruption in South Africa, which then allows him to position himself, and other White South Africans, as victims in this new post-colonial dispensation.

Consequently, these layers of masking needed to be deconstructed and it is seen that the 'mask' of the joke and strategies of parody have been used to deflect criticisms of his work and that these jokes and parodic coding are not neutral and self-evident, but rather expose his own positioning and that of his audience that 'gets' the joke. Kannemeyer's postcolonial masquerading returns to the prospect of pleasure and entertainment offered by blackface's mimetic racial Othering, but such pleasure can only be had if one is distant enough from the economic, politic and social realities of the Other so as not to be offended. The fact that blackface was never 'real', i.e., never really about black people, does little to alleviate the irony that white people and the entertainment industry has made a lot of money by employing demeaning black/African post-colonial caricatured masqueradings – Kannemeyer, himself, can afford to be a full-time visual artist from the sales of such work. Nor does it assuage the fact that there are currently more images of blackface masqueradings by (young) White South Africans popping up in the glare of social media which remove any doubt that blackface is used as a trope to mock blackness/Africanness.

As a woman-of-colour faced with his work in local and international gallery spaces, I have struggled to embrace and accept his works. I recognise that there are many White South Africans and whites internationally who do find his work empowering in his alleged mockery of White post-colonial fears, in his laying bare of his autobiographical narratives in his work, in the

ambiguous terrains and readings created by this postcolonial masquerading. While his postcolonial performances can indeed have this potential for his audience, I have argued in this thesis that such readings can only be had if one identifies with his subjective positioning and ignores the proffered stereotypes of blackness/Africanness. Approaching his works from my own subjective positioning, I have felt assaulted and violated by his masqueradings and have never been able to identify with the joke on display, but it is only through the critical analysis presented here that I have been able to contextualise my discomfort and my inability to be seduced into his imaginative play. I recognise that even though I am not Black, each time I see Kannemeyer's work, I place myself in the imagined body of the black/African and do not leave feeling empowered or engaged, even if the joke is supposed to be on Whiteness, but rather that I feel myself, my friends, my fellow countrymen belittled – casualties on the battlefield of transgressive representations. Kannemeyer's so-called 'transgressive' use of blackface/Africanness in his *Pappa in Afrika* have influenced other popular cultural producers (like the zef-rave rap group Die Antwoord) and there is little critical reflection of a trend of 'White transgressive coolness' through the use of Other bodies (such interrogations need to happen on a larger scale in relation to other South African visual artists like Brett Murray, Steven Cohen, Pieter Hugo and Brett Bailey).

For South Africa, the value of these works has been the discourses they are eliciting. Displayed in the public realm of art gallery spaces, these works have, at times, demonstrated the capacity to provoke wider public criticisms, societal tensions and discussions when the politics of their aesthetics have been called into question. The questioning of Western colonial-modernist aesthetics and apartheid racist representations need constant examination and it has been the visual arts that have provided some measure of public debate. These disputes stagnate and remain polarised however, if we do not attend to criticisms raised and evaluate not just one's intent as an individual maker/producer/player, but also the possible *message* and *impact* of the visual representations we send into the wider circulation of imagery. This thesis is a call for artists to understand the histories of the stereotypes they employ, to gauge if they bear repeating, but fundamentally is an artistic challenge to fellow creative producers to employ one's limitless imagination in creating progressive representation that does not necessitate the repetition of degrading racist-gender-class-ethnic stereotypes. This is not a matter of contesting one's right to free speech and representation, but rather what we do with that freedom – does

the right to free speech entitle someone to wound others with that freedom? Free speech encompasses ethics and responsibilities – it costs something to maintain its ‘rights’ and values.

While I have tried to explore in the past chapters some of the problematic dimensions of postcolonial masquerading, it has also attempted to show its potential for affirmation and empowerment, particularly for women-of-colour. The artworks of Sibande, Marasela, Rose and Mntambo have, at times, also employed stereotypes of race, gender and class, but have in subtle ways subverted them or exaggerated their excesses to expose their ‘unreal-ness’, their distance from actual bodies-of-colour and their lived realities (although certainly in future more critical reflection and examination is needed of these strategies). Autobiographical narratives re-performed through fictional ‘textured’ memory accounts and playful re-enactments recount stories that have at their epicentre women-of-colour, but also deny ‘true’ knowledge of the subjects on display, refuting their fixing or ‘truthfulness’, even as they ambiguously register women-of-colour’s ‘truths’. Morrison and Lorde remind us how important it is to have these spaces as women-of-colour living in a “genderized, sexualized, wholly racialized world” (Morrison, 1992/1993, p.4), who have to respond to exclusion, unquestioned privilege, racial distortions, silencing, “ill-use, stereotyping, defensiveness, misnaming, betrayal, and co-option” (Lorde, 1984/2007, p.124). Platforms for women-of-colour to assert themselves and be recognised as part of a larger national consciousness are imperative in post-colonial spaces, not just for what it means to individual women, and the category of ‘women’, but for society at large to embrace the plurality of voices within them.

Such postcolonial masqueradings evidence some of the potentials of performative gesturing. hooks (1995b, p.218) regards performance practice as an essential critical intervention in the politicisation of historical memory and a pedagogical tool, which provides the means for varied, diverse explorations of black experience. Patel (2001, p120-121) identifies postcolonial masquerading as such a tool for postcolonial people to decolonise their own minds and histories, to form communities of resistance and self-definition, via an aesthetics aimed at them and through cultural productions produced for them rather than global, capitalised markets:

Whenever we choose performance as a site to build communities of resistance we must be able to shift paradigms and styles of performance in a manner that centralises the decolonisation of black minds and imaginations, even if we include everyone else in that process (hooks, 1995b, p.218).

Du Bois (1903/2006, p.10) recognises that many a black artist has been tortured trying to appease both the West and their own soul. To produce for oneself and not for an art market can be a strategic artistic decision. My own works *Nervous Conditions* and *No Place*, for instance, were inspired by Toni Morrison saying that the books she wrote were ones she wanted to read but couldn't find. Likewise, my videos are the kinds of work that I would like to see in gallery spaces, that may not be in sync with the times or with any current aesthetic, but presents a person like me that is 'neither-nor', 'both-and', in-between. A line that I read in Collins' *Black Feminist Epistemology* years ago remains with me: "The universal comes from the particular" (Nikki Giovanni quoted in Collins, 2000/2007, p.288). Collins argues that black women intellectuals must challenge themselves to argue from the particular viewpoint of black women's lives, but must be able equally to locate the universal dimensions within it.

hooks (1995b, p.219) believes performance offers a means by which oppressed people can reclaim subjugated knowledge, a space for transgression which is disruptive *and* transformative in proposing new identities, radical black subjectivities, and an 'imagination of future possibilities'. This conclusion opened with two examples which evidence the presentation of such radical black subjectivities and alternate futures: Nelson Mandela's Rivonia Trial statement condemning the apartheid system and imagining a South Africa free from White supremacy at the moment when he will be jailed and the liberation movement will have to go underground, removed from open visibility. The second, spoken thirty-two years later, is performed in a liberated South Africa by the second democratically-elected President, Thabo Mbeki, envisioning an 'African Renaissance'. His call was for all people who live in Africa to identify with being African. Language has transformative potential, but it also has the power to transform negatively, as Hurtado (1999, p.225) reminds us when she talks about the intrinsic racism in our language which we need to guard against. This has been part of Morrison's challenge as well: "The kind of work I always wanted to do requires me to learn how to manoeuvre ways to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains".¹⁰⁹ Visual artists are faced with a similar dilemma when it comes to the language of visual aesthetics. Decolonising language means learning to work with it, in-between, wringing it out, and sometimes even demolishing it. Postcolonial masquerading uses visual arts coding and social scripting, exaggerating and

¹⁰⁹ Morrison quoted in Hurtado, 1999, p.225

caricaturing it to the point of making these codes questionable, pliable and sometimes unacceptable, exemplifying one form of a decolonial aesthetics.

A further appeal, I believe, of visual arts masquerading is its ability to provide a measure of playfulness, challenge and pleasure for *both producers and viewers* in its ambivalences and ability of double-coding. hooks (1995b, p.218-219), taking cue from Cornel West and his idea that public performance can result in self-critical examination and artistic pleasure, reminds us of this disruptive, transformative potential of performativity: “African-American performance has always been a space where folks come together and experience the fusion of *pleasure and critical pedagogies*, a space that aims to subvert and challenge white supremacy as a system of institutionalised domination, along with class elitism, and more lately, sexism” (emphasis added). This thesis has tried to show that postcolonial masquerading demonstrates these features of pleasure, criticality and self-reflection through the artists’ fictive theatricality and role-playing, which also gives them the opportunity to work out their own idiosyncrasies through the visual medium. Masquerading’s performativity, therefore, is not just for the sake of an external viewer and market, but for their own personal journey as well. We have seen in the case of Kannemeyer how this can result in tensions when one situates such pleasure in relation to Other bodies, and reiterates hooks’ point that pleasure itself needs to be critically engaged, reflected upon and theorised for a broader sense of critical pleasure that it can offer a community.

Dressing up and play between fiction and personal truths helps producers – and their audiences – attend, in a manner, to the welfare of their fictive emotional lives.¹¹⁰ I mean this both in the sense of artistic producers, themselves, enjoying the power to create the characters in their performances, to take them on journeys, to aid in a kind of personal catharsis, and even violate them as their non-Selves/fictional versions of their Selves; but also in the audience willingly participating in the voyeurism of their narratives and investing in the characters on display, and the stories being told. This is not unlike the way we invest in fictional characters in literature, theatre, TV and films. Philosopher Richard Moran in his article ‘The Expression of Feeling in Imagination’ (1994) claims that people have a vast range of emotional responses in both their investment in, or dis-identifications with, fictional characters, which has not been sufficiently

¹¹⁰ This idea was inspired by a talk between Melissa Harris-Perry and bell hooks: The New School. (2013) ‘Black Female Voices: Who is Listening – A public dialogue between bell hooks + Melissa Harris-Perry’, *Youtube* [online], 11 November, Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5OmgqXao1ng> (accessed 30/04/14).

accounted for. While some people are definitely drawn into a narrative by shared identification with the characters or plots, Moran interestingly argues that people's investment in fictional characters is not wholly dependent on them being able to directly identify with the characters or experiences in an illusion of reality, but rather that the kinds of excessiveness of 'truths', narrative and technique aid in the audience being able to connect with characters or story:

The outlandish character of some of the comparisons, the rhythm of the relentless piling up of image upon image, like an obsessive thought, the very unreality of it – these things are *directly* productive of feeling on the part of the audience, and not through their role, if any, in make-believe. It is undeniable that the emotions are engaged by something we call imagination here, but it would be forcing things to construe the imagination relevant here as make-believe that some set of propositions is fictionally true For it is such expressive qualities of a work that typically make the difference between representations that are arousing and those that aren't, and these very qualities, like expressive brush strokes or highly chromatic colors, to not only disrupt the closure of the fictional world, but typically contribute nothing of their own to the generation of fictional truths about the world depicted (Moran, 1994, p.85-86).

Thus, part of masquerade's popularity is its ability to create an excessiveness and an unreality that seduces people and allows them to enjoy their 'voyeurism', which masquerading artists harness to their own (creative, political) ends.¹¹¹

This reveals a somewhat paradoxical stance – while Brecht believed that making evident theatrical conventions creates distance and alienation with the audience, we have seen with Rose's *Ciao Bella* that even though she makes evident the camera and the attendant voyeurism, this does not necessarily end the pleasure to be had in these superficial significations, in the excesses of their formal and aesthetic performance. Unlike literary forms where one constructs images in one's head, and is sometimes forced into the minds of the characters, the camera lens offers a safety in distance, a separation which is hard to overcome, which reduces interactions primarily to visuality, and gives us a sense of power and pleasure over the characters that play for us. The lens is thus a powerful mediator and may be impossible to 'overcome', but rather than claiming to 'truths', is more feasible for its imaginative play that temporarily allows us to identify with others like, and unlike, ourselves in the excesses it allows. Fisher (2002, p.69) calls this an 'excess expenditure' and finds its

¹¹¹ Moran (1994, p.97) does note that our sense of imagining and fictional play can be impeded when there is a fundamental difference in moral beliefs between the imagination on display and what is allowed in the real world.

usefulness exactly in its excessiveness, denial of realities and the demands of imagination that it places on its spectators:

If our understanding of the world is largely through mediated representations and ideologies, then the first criterion of a tricky artistic practice is the acknowledgement that we operate in a world not of self-evident 'truths' but of institutional fictions revealed as grotesque monsters, where art is not a reflection of an authentic 'reality' but a simulation that intensifies our experiences and interpretations of its effects. It demands a performative use of language: a direct address in collaboration with the viewer (ibid).

Masquerade's excessiveness invites and implicates imaginative viewers in its fictions.

Moran (1994, p.105) believes that it reveals more about a person in their ability to imagine with others and to understand situations different from theirs, in their willingness to 'try on' other points of view and "determine what it is like to inhabit it", than in circumstances of "ordinary counterfactual reasoning".¹¹² This kind of imaginative play becomes unsettling 'in-between spaces', the zones of ambivalence that Minh-ha and Bhabha theorise, sites which are fertile grounds for the unknown realms where our fetishistic desires lurk, and are sometimes allowed to surface, but which can be harnessed into possible points of connection between people, into wider readings of artworks: "This slippage into the regenerative space-time of becoming other is how I should like to think about the viewer's experience of a resistant artistic practice – not the closure of academicism or the propagandist message, but the uncertain terrain of the open work" (Fisher, 2002, p.68). This potential of complexly reading masquerades in a variety of ways is what has been explored in this thesis.

This thesis does not claim that postcolonial masquerades fundamentally trouble identity categories so as to make people profoundly reconsider racial-gender-sexuality performativity. Apart from Muholi's work, which portrays women already exploring trans-gender identities, most of the masquerades discussed still employ racial and gender identities as foundational categories, which work with 'tell-able' external differences. I think, however, this kind of identity affirming strategies are forerunners of more critical enquiries that will emerge, relevant not just to the South African context, but to racial discussions across the world – international sojourns

¹¹² 'Trying on' racial difference can produce very problematic 'understandings' of race as an embodied lived experience as Ahmed (2000) demonstrates in her reading of John Griffin's *Black like Me* (1970) project where a white American man masquerades as an African-American man in order to 'understand what it is like to be black', reducing racial-gender-class oppression to merely external signals of racial difference.

have taught me that race and intersectionality discourses are just as necessary to imperial cultures as they are to post-colonised spaces. I say this, also, as a challenge to myself as a cultural producer. South Africa's visual arts incessant obsession with inquiries into identity politics may be unfashionable in the West, but it is also the very reason that such work has so much currency and relevancy internationally.

As a visual artist, I am invested in the enabling vocabularies and strategies of postcolonial masquerading, and have used my own art work over the last three years as a site for testing out my theorisations of the potentialities of postcolonial masquerading. I started off this thesis referencing how masquerading practice in my series *What I Look like, What I Feel Like* provided an avenue for me to interrogate my own South African Indian identity and to fend off what I felt, at the time, was a public silencing of me as I spoke out about racial concerns in the South African visual arts field. Part of the potency of that experience was how people responded to the work which has subsequently impacted my theorising of artistic practice. Even though I didn't sell a single work, the responses by audiences in different cities were powerful. People came up to me and offered very diverse interpretations of the work, usually followed by them relating their own stories of struggle. Often I was not required to speak as an 'authority' or 'the artist', but rather to listen as people 'voiced' themselves, and it became clear that it was important for people to feel like they were speaking to an empathetic person who understood 'where they were coming from' and what 'it felt like'.

This was probably the first time as a creative practitioner-scholar that I had produced work that echoed Collins' black feminist epistemology, where lived experience (and the ability to re-tell and contextualise that experience) was viewed as a form of wisdom, which gave me credibility as a researcher, and, also, the ability to assess knowledge via my own experiences. People associated a connectedness in 'our' experiences of social categories of race-gender-class-religion-education that permitted me not to just empathise, but often allowed people to believe that I really cared about their experiences and the stories they were disclosing to me, that there was healing going on via this mutual sharing and that, equally importantly, they were contributing to my artistic practice. Individual disclosure became a means of forming a kind of temporary community network and catharsis, even if this kind of healing was only in the form of the rhetoric of not feeling alone in one's trauma, of refusing to be labelled 'the problem' when one points out social problems.

Like hooks, Mignolo, often cites healing and love as important decolonising principles to combat what Fanon termed *sociogenesis*: the racialised epidermalised colonial subject fixed by the white patriarchal gaze, which fractures the colonial subject and irrevocably wounds. Decolonial aestheSis offers alternatives for people who have been devalued, demonised, demeaned, Othered and made lacking. Decolonial aestheSis is meant to help colonised subjects realise:

... that your mind, your body, your senses, your sight, your hearing have been modelled by the colonial matrix of power, that is, by its institutions, languages, music, art, literature, etc. – or what is the same as Western Civilization – you begin to “heal.” The process of healing is that of becoming a decolonial subject, or “learning to be” (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2014, p.207).

‘Learning to be’ is a long-term political project in post-colonial South Africa, where apartheid dictated for so long who we were, what we could be and the futures we could imagine. Mignolo regards decolonial artistic projects as ‘successful’ not when they gain market attention, but rather when they help colonised subjects de-link from conditions of cultural coloniality, when they help build decolonial sensibilities and “help colonial subjects to re-emerge, re-surge, and re-exist...” (ibid: 205). Above all, decolonial aestheSis must build the communal (ibid: 207). With the video series *Nervous Conditions* I have again experienced a similar bonding with women of various cultural backgrounds as they’ve identified with the feelings of disempowerment and personal attempts at resisting coloniality presented in the video through a range of formal aesthetic techniques like employing the angry black woman stereotype, laughter, repetition and mimicry. As with most of my practice since 2008, my works have started off as a reaction against a particular stereotyping of myself in the local or international visual art field, or in response to feeling disempowered and trying to gain back my voice and ‘work through’ a situation. The three-channel video work *Nervous Conditions* I responded to my feeling of not being not heard and silenced in an academic setting, and then my grudging airing of unmitigated thoughts. But while that was the initial creative impetus, as more women watched the video and gave me feedback, I shelved ideas of scrapping this work and instead reworked the video dialogue several times to include fictional stories as well as the narratives of other women-of-colour I’ve heard as an attempt to visualise Lorde’s idea of bio-mythography. Fanon’s theories influenced the conceptual and visual ideas of racial wounding, racial epidermalisation and the violence of Othering as I slip between subjectivity and objectivity, between apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa and the UK, between different objects that represent ‘oneself’. Trauma collapses time into a timelessness of self-reflection, anger, neurosis, fragility and attempts at becoming.

The video work *Nervous Conditions II*, a fictive psychiatric session between myself and a TV psychiatrist, combines Fanon's words from *Black Skin, White Masks* with Ahmed's theories 'on being the problem', quotes from African literature and Bhabha's idea of avenging repetition into a monologue that despairs but also asserts a strong fighting sense of Self set against the language of pop psychology. Through this process of reworking, the *Nervous Conditions* series have become a more layered sense of mockery and a means for laughter. This laughter recognises the insanity of racism and colonialism, and by relieving the tenseness of the original rant becomes cathartic but also belies the vulnerability of the subject on display who recognises the consequences of performing a Foucauldian parrhesia or 'speaking truth to power'. In his 1983 lectures, Foucault discusses parrhesia as 'frankness in speaking the truth' (Pearson, 2001, p.7). This kind of speech aims to tell the truth at all cost, even if it means incurring the wrath of society and authorities. Thus, the angry black subject 'speaking truth to power' may have negative consequences for the speaker and thus belies the precarious field in which she works, which purports to a criticality, but leaves her feeling fragile.

Rose's work, too, often demonstrates this kind of speech when she openly interrogates the field of art production itself. She is known for finding herself at odds with the politics of both the local White and contemporary visual arts structures internationally. For example, in her live performance *The Cunt Show* (Fig. 46) which was staged as part of the exhibition *Global Feminisms* (2007) at the Brooklyn Museum's Elizabeth A. Sackler Centre for Feminist Art, Rose responds to finding herself as the only woman-of-colour at a panel session via a mimicry of socks puppets.¹¹³ I quote her at length from the video:

Oh! But there's lots of artists here. Yes, Adrian Piper is here. No she is not. Yes, she is. No she is dead. She is dead? Barbara Kruger killed her. Oh, I had no idea. So what are we doing here? They needed some colour. And besides, they said it was a movement for white women. They said they were fighting men. But they give birth to white men. They marry them. They fuck them. They love them. They are their brothers, their fathers, their lovers, their sons. They educate white men, so who's the oppressor?

Hmm. I was wondering. Where are all the other American woman theorists? You know, the coloureds? The Native-American woman, the African-American woman, the Asian-American

¹¹³ The exhibition was curated by Muara Reilly, Linda Nochlin and Lila Acheson Wallace and ran from 23 March – 1 July 2007.

woman, the Spanish-American woman? They're dead. Linda Nochlin killed them. It's a bloodbath. Do you think that there is not enough people of colour presentation from within the United States of America? I don't know, it's not my country, and anyway they're all dead – killed by the liberals, the democrats and the repub-licans. Hmm, it must have been a blood bath. It still is. Hmm, are you a feminist? If anything, I am a humanist. I once asked the artist and she said, "I am an artist." Implying that that's enough. She said that both men and women fought for her freedom to speak (Rose, 2007).

In a centre of Western power, Rose (2014a) criticises the show's curators, the fact that they were not given artist stipends, the whiteness of the show and of Western feminisms. This live performance greatly upset the curators. The cheesy hand sock puppets did little to alleviate Rose's scathing critique of the visual arts and art history fields, and, yet, it confirmed again her awareness of the performative role of the jester in saying uncomfortable truths, and her lack of fear in doing so. In this role of jester, like Fisher (2002, p. 66) reminds us of the trickster figure, she does not resolve conflict, but reveals institutional power and policing, even in a show that is meant to be unified in a global allegiance of 'women'. Rose exposes the cracks in such unifying projects when it emanates in Western centres, at the invitation of such centres. Such kinds of engagement, in which the politics of the art field and its power-players are indicted, continue to be rare, and, yet, they evidence 'other' spaces of creative production, conditional on money, but not only produced for capital gain, but also for resistance and revelation.

The series *I Make Art* was produced with such resistance in mind. It is a loud declaration by a woman-of-colour visual artist from the South that despite the conditions that surround the production, reception and validation of art in the globalised contemporary visual arts field: "I Make Art". 'Making' here is a pronouncement of agency, an absolute refusal to allow neo-colonial capitalistic conditions to dictate my ability to 'voice' Self, and that the making of my art is the platform that I use to make myself heard. The work tries to show how the mimetic gesture fails in re-performing John Baldessari's whiteness and maleness, and in its failure becomes a deconstruction and mockery of the categories of Otherness (feminist, Arab-ness, African-ness, performance, new-media, etc.,) that Western art canon discourse creates in order to keep its white, male, heteronormative specialist centre stable.

Conditions of production need to be made apparent, as they are not peripheral, Adesokan reminds us, especially for artist from the post-colonies. The limitation of funds, as well as

attitudes questioning art as worthwhile ventures, which African artists are faced with daily, often have direct impact on one's mode of production, presentation and discourse, choice of aesthetics, ability to promote and sell work, to making a living as an artist, as well as access to knowledge. For instance, in South Africa (and Africa) many young artists, particularly students-of-colour like myself, become familiar with international contemporary art as a mediated form of knowledge – via art books, and other people who travel internationally and either write or teach about these works, and, more recently, the internet information highway. What this results in is a particular form of knowledge that is distant, limited and already interpreted according to specific Western canonised authorised discourse, before it is disseminated. As problematic as this 'packaged' knowledge may be, it points to the 'after-life' of artworks long after price-tags have been removed and also to the fact that there is not simply a Western art centre and an Other margin, but many centres and margins and various levels on which 'art' operates as cultural capital. This thesis has tried to demonstrate some of these capacities of postcolonial masquerading, not just as consumptive fashionable renditions of Otherness, but also as a powerful reflector of individual and social consciousness, as a critically analytic strategy and pedagogical resource where critical stagings meets pleasure, reflection and resistance.

Although I never expected it, some viewers took the time to write me feedback on *Nervous Conditions* after they viewed it. I quote below two email responses:

I have just sat and watched your film. It's an extraordinary piece of work and I wish to thank you for articulating some, if not all, the feelings I and many others have been suppressing for some time. This film sums up the unspoken anguish which has been simmering inside me for the past 12 months at Goldsmiths. The anguish that I get when I go to the opera house, the national theatre, the Tate, the streets of London, a cafe, a pub, every time I walk past the yummy mummies in my area, frankly every time I leave the flat but sometimes in the flat. Every time I walk into a seminar at Goldsmiths and wonder why I am the only person of colour in the room this is the rage that sits down with me, silent. Thank you for being so courageous, it's never easy being the one that speaks out but some of us know that if we don't speak out we will simply die (C., 2013).

I have cried enough for a day. ... Truly amazing, I will pass on the link to a few friends if I may (J., 2014).

Such feedback testifies to the potential of postcolonial masquerading in articulating not just my own 'truths', but stories disclosed by friends and even strangers, which when shared publicly through creative work, have the possibility of building a community around, and resistance to, the intersectionality of oppressions. As an artist, I can't predict the interest in a work of art that I've made, but I believe in such ventures as starting points from which even failures produce interesting possibilities – practicing artists, no doubt, understand this as an active part of the creative process, where failures often deviate from a planned projection and produce more imaginative results than anticipated. Moreover, in the post-colonial context, failed or short-lived ventures can provide discussion and inspiration long after they have evaporated from existence.

Postcolonial masquerading has also afforded me a site where my interests in postcolonial theory, black feminist creative theorisation, contemporary visual arts, art history and popular culture congeal, and this thesis and the artworks produced try to actively enact this in-between-ness. Viewing artworks as pleasurable creative critical pedagogical tools refuses to instrumentalise them, but regards them as starting points for creative theorisation, the beginnings of conversations and not end products of knowledge. When I think of my own life journey, despite all of my criticisms of educational and arts structures, these are still spaces through which I learnt of colonialism, apartheid, racism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, the constructedness of gender performativity, the structuring constitutive gaze, body politics and agency. These are also the vehicles through which I try to raise the critical consciousness of my own students.

This thesis started off by narrating my loss of voice and visibility in the South African visual arts field following my racial critiques of its post-apartheid power structures. This PhD has been part of a long process of not only coming strongly to voice again, but determining what I want to say as part of a longer engagement in race-gender-postcolonial discourses in South Africa: a nuanced analysis of aesthetics used in the service of Whiteness; the problems and potentials of postcolonial masquerading; creative practice as a self-reflexive, analytic tool; the convergence of criticality and pleasure in visual arts; the idea of the creative-intellectual; and using creative productions of artists-of-colour as starting points for theorisation. Theory has actively fed and

been explored in my video artworks and, likewise, has influenced my theoretical discussions and even my writing style and conference presentations.¹¹⁴

The catalogue *I Make Art* (2014) produced for the PhD viva is another step in this process, using this 'documentation' opportunity to invite others to engage with the works and explore it from their perspectives. Nicola Lauré al-Samarai's (2014: 29) essay 'Claiming Territory – Or: Being a Woman of Colour Artist from the South' reflects on how her first viewing, as a black feminist based in the North, of the work *I Make Art* created a point of connection with a "sister from the South". Art historian Yvette Greslé's essay, entitled "'when I felt like I just wasn't being heard": Sharlene Khan's *Nervous Conditions*', locates the trauma found in *Nervous Conditions* to a larger body of South African video artworks which engage colonial and apartheid trauma, while black feminist and psychology scholar Peace Kiguwa gives a contemporary reading of *Nervous Conditions* and *No Place* in the context of post-apartheid's tensions of race-class-gender. Linguist Fouad Asfour's text locates *No Place* within the language and discourses of South African popular culture through its use of fragmentation, montage and out-of-synch audio. South African black feminist Betty Govinden presented her own creative piece based on her reading of the artist's practice. In the poem *For Sharlene Khan: Contemplation* (2014), Govinden situates 'being a problem' and 'talking back' to a number of other speech acts, but also reflects on the dilemmas posed to individuals and societies by such enactments.

The work on the publication further led to producing new works utilising performative writing to explore various elements of repetition, mimicry, mockery and conceptual violence. The series of '*No*' Performances (2014) is based on Ahmed's concept of 'killjoy' and 'on being the problem', as well as Brecht's plays *He Who Says Yes and He Who Says No*,¹¹⁵ which inspired my performative intervention at a Goldsmiths workshop entitled *She Said No, She Said No* in 2013. This section also references other 'naysayers' including the Wayan's *In Living Color* 'Homey the Clown Chez Whitey' skit; Malcolm X's refusal during an interview in 1963 to acknowledge his 'real' slave name; and a 2014 interview of Hollywood actor Samuel L. Jackson in which he was confused with another African-American actor and, thereafter, refused to answer questions on his upcoming film, instead making a series of repetitive 'I'm not that' statements. Each of these

¹¹⁴ 'I Make Art – Voicing Voice, Speaking Self and Doing Criticality' (2014) has been 'performed' during an artist talk, a conference panel and as performative writing in the catalogue *I Make Art*.

¹¹⁵ Written in 1930, the plays discuss individual and mutual social responsibility.

'no' performances deny attempts to 'stick to a script', to acknowledge the role that one is assigned and expected to play, and to choose, instead, the role of the *killjoy*.

More killjoys are needed for sustained discourses which analytically pick apart the mechanisms that continue to normalise racist-sexist-classicist-heteronormative representations and spectatorship. We need to encourage, through considered critique, new visual languages and explorations, to read and write 'willfully' as Ahmed (2014) says.

Perhaps the most important part of my personal intellectual journey has been 'learning to be' – that finding oneself a killjoy and an angry black woman again (not again!), is a legitimate stance in relation to social injustices – and that masking won't do, as Ahmed (2010c, p.51) argues:

But we can't get over it. Racism is not something you can get over. We won't get over it. To get over it before it is over would be to keep things in place. We must be the trouble they claim us to be: we must persist in being the cause of their trouble. It is time for us to reclaim our place as angry Black feminists even as we inhabit different places. The angry Black feminist, who insists on, speaks about racism, who is not happy with diversity, can do things.

Part of my 'doing' – in my writing and practice – is choosing to 'unmask' social politics in representations. In an age of blinding consumption, of anything goes, of the over-inflated currency of contemporary art works (Fisher, 2002 p.63), it is perhaps easy to forget that visual art images are still a potent vehicle through which a number of social and representational issues are challenged and learnt, sometimes in unforgettable ways. It is also perhaps not so common that visual artists are afforded the opportunity to be involved in shaping public discourse, but, in South Africa, visual arts performative masquerading practices are, indeed, creating opportunities for artists to enact roles of creative-intellectuals in stimulating discussions on identity categories and representation, and continuously allowing us to interrogate – necessarily so – what we think of ourselves and Others as we are being moulded into South Africans with endless imagined possibilities.

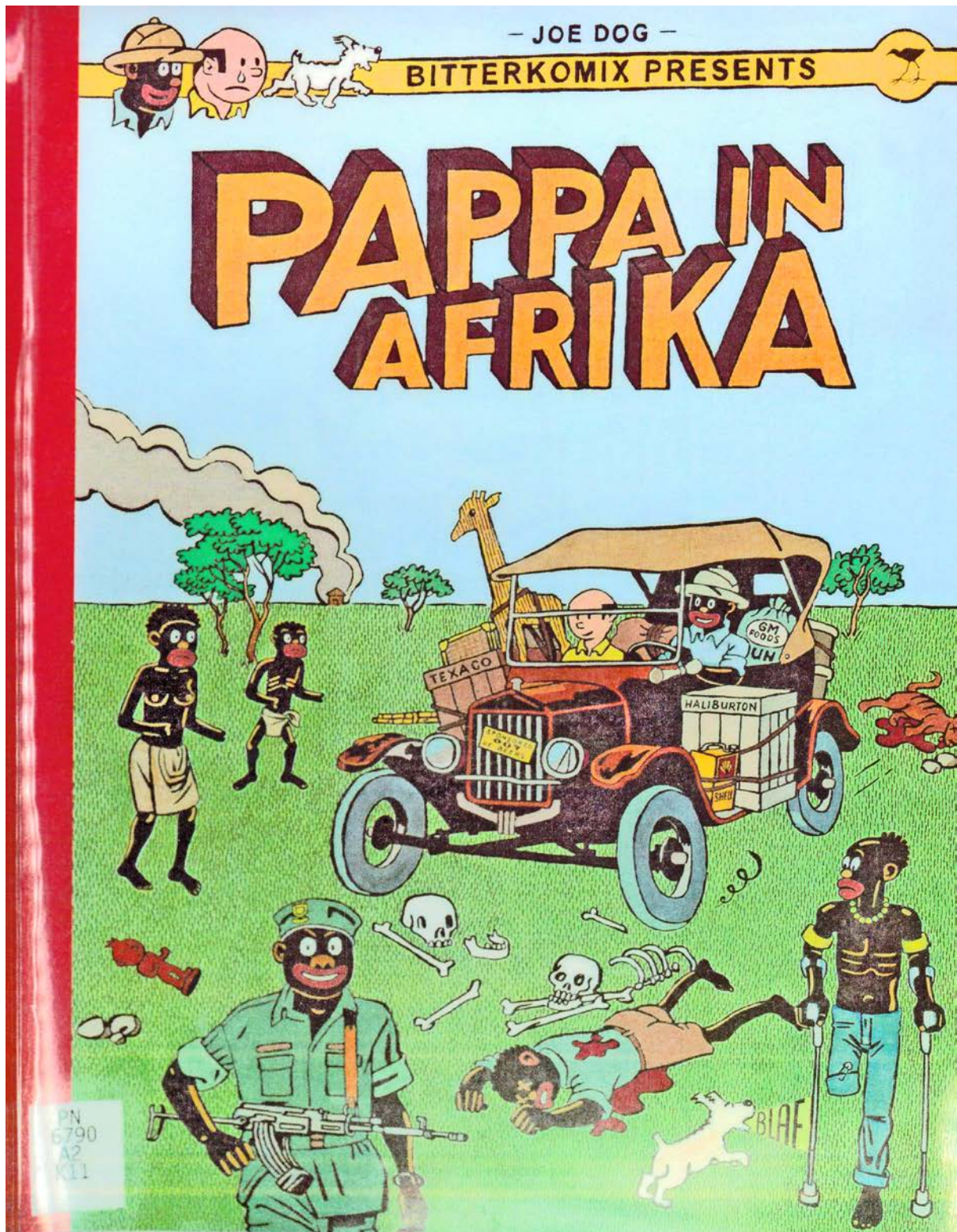


Fig.1. Anton Kannemeyer, *Pappa in Afrika* (2007)

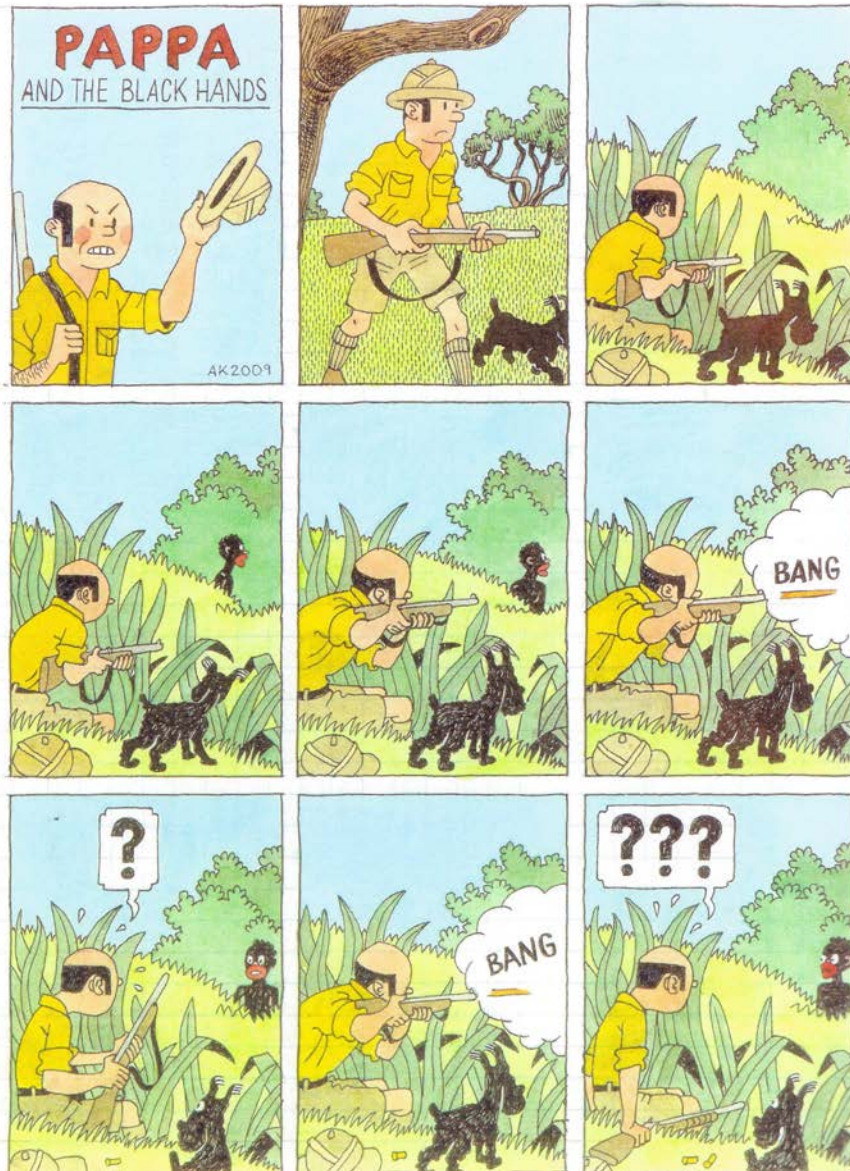
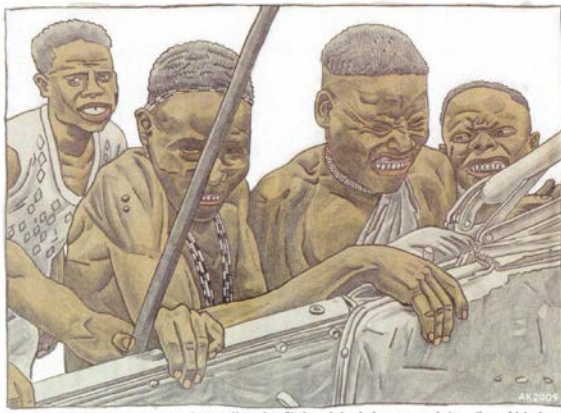


Fig.2a. Anton Kannemeyer *Pappa and the Black Hands* (2009)



Fig.2b. Anton Kannemeyer, *Pappa and the Black Hands* (2009)



The natives of Central Africa above believe that filed teeth lend character to their smiles, which they are displaying when examining a white man's motor-car that seems to afford them great amusement.

Fig.3. Anton Kannemeyer, *Sharp Teeth* (2009)



Fig.4. Anton Kannemeyer, *Zuma and Friends* (2009)

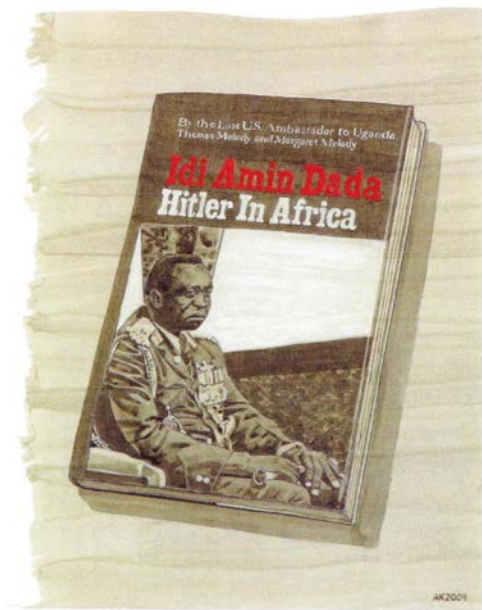


Fig.5. Anton Kannemeyer, *Idi Amin Dada: Hitler in Africa* (2009)



Fig.6. Anton Kannemeyer, *Birth* (2008)

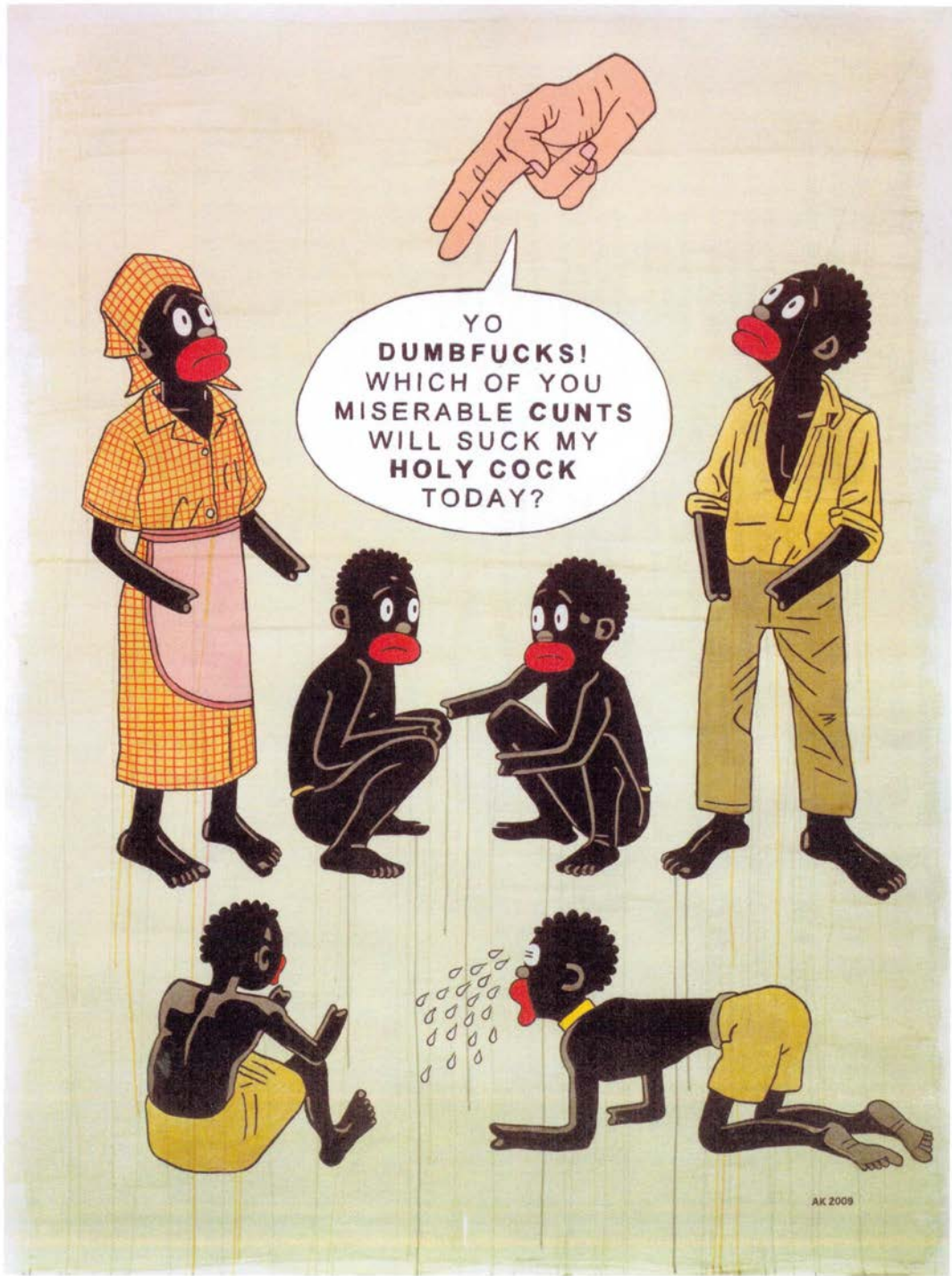


Fig.7. Anton Kannemeyer, *Yo Dumbfucks!* (2009)

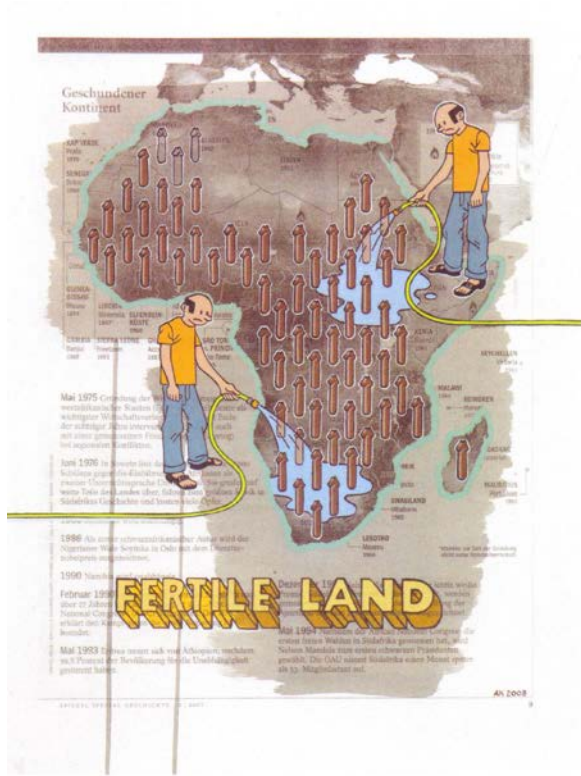


Fig.8. Anton Kannemeyer, *Fertile Land (Cursed Paradise series)* (2008)



Fig.9. Anton Kannemeyer, *Run, Daddy, Run! (Cursed Paradise series)* (2008)



Fig.10. Anton Kannemeyer, *Black Dicks (Cursed Paradise series)* (2008)





Fig.11. Anton Kannemeyer, *White Wealth* (2010)



Fig.12. Anton Kannemeyer, 'Well, how do you like that for a coincidence?' (2008)

WHATEVER YOU DO, STAY OUT OF PRISON IN AFRICA

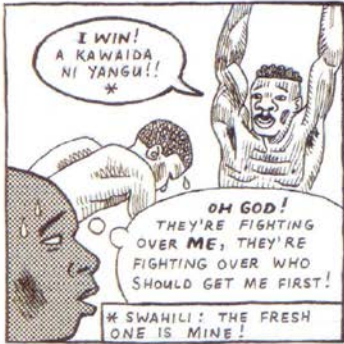
TRUE STORIES BY

JOE  **DOG** 

KAMITI MAXIMUM SECURITY PRISON, KENYA: MWAI GITHONGO GOT THREE YEARS FOR STEALING A BICYCLE:



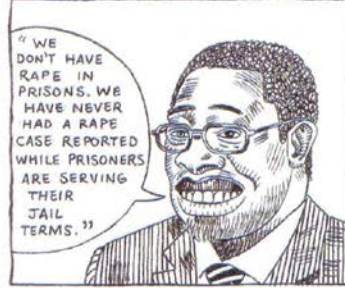
ONCE INSIDE, HE NOTICED A MASSIVE COMMOTION: TWO LARGE MEN WERE FIGHTING.



WITHIN HOURS OF THE GATES CLOSING BEHIND HIM, MWAI GITHONGO WAS GANG RAPPED BY THE WINNER AND HIS POSSE...



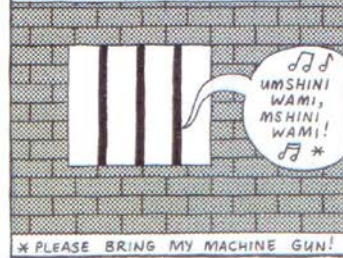
WHEN ASKED BY A JOURNALIST ABOUT RAPE IN PRISON, DEPUTY OFFICER PITE NGUGUNA OF KAMITI PRISON SAID:



IN SOUTH AFRICA, PRISON RAPE IS OFTEN A RACIAL ISSUE: A WHITE FARMER, MR ETIENNE VAN WYK, WAS LOCKED UP IN A CELL FOR ONE NIGHT BECAUSE HE MOVED ANIMALS ON A FARM TRUCK WITHOUT HAVING THE APPROPRIATE LICENCE ON HIM.



HE WAS PUT IN A CELL WITH FOURTEEN BLACK MEN, SOME OF THEM ACCUSED OF ARMED ROBBERY AND MURDER. THROUGHOUT THE NIGHT THEY SANG LOUDLY IN THE CELL...



THE NEXT DAY VAN WYK'S LAWYER, NIC VAN REYDEN, TOLD JOURNALISTS:

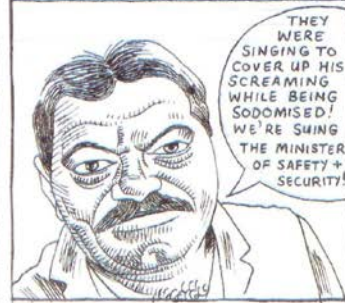


Fig.13. Anton Kannemeyer, *Prison in Africa* (2009)



Fig.14. Anton Kannemeyer, *Congo Parody* (with apologies to Hergé) (2009)

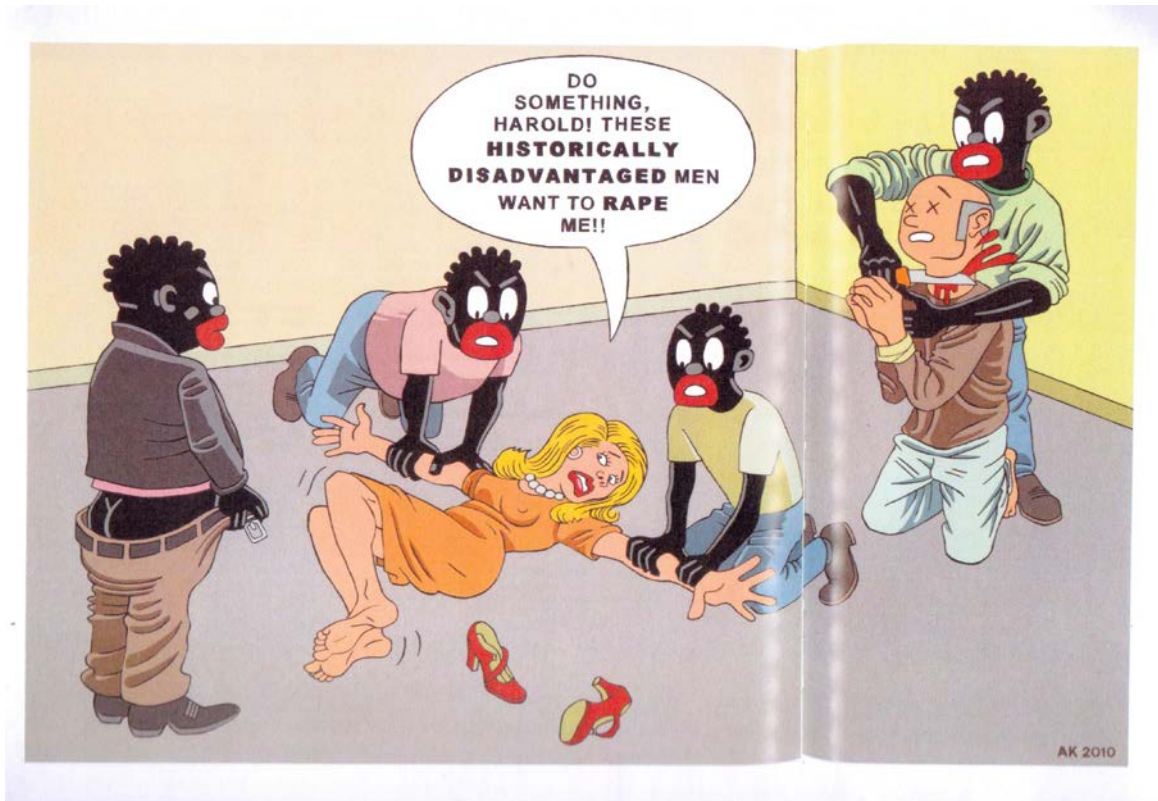


Fig.15. Anton Kannemeyer, *The Liberals* (2010)



Fig.16. Zapiro, *Rape of Justice Cartoon 1* (2008)



Fig.17a. Model Laura Stone for French *Vogue* (2009)



Fig.17b. Model Laura Stone for French *Vogue* (2009)



Fig.18. Illamasqua Christmas advert (2012)



Fig.19. Model Ondria Hardin for *Numéro* (2013)



Fig.20. Dunkin' Donuts Thailand Charcoal Donut advert (2013)



Fig.21a. Die Antwoord, *Hey Fatty Boom Boom* music video (2012)



Fig.21b. Die Antwoord, *Hey Fatty Boom Boom* music video (2012)



Fig.22. 'Race row: Swedish minister Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth smiles as she cuts a piece of the 'genital mutilation' cake' (2012)



Fig.23. 'Dressed in Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman Halloween Costumes' (2013)



Fig.24. 'Under Fire: Two university students are facing disciplinary action after taking photos of themselves as South African maids. Above, the girls are pictured sporting brown face paint and pillows shoved down their skirts' (2014)



Fig.25. Mary Sibande, *I Put a Spell on Me* (2009)



Fig.26. Mary Sibande, *I'm a Lady* (2009)



Fig.27. Mary Sibande, *I have not, I have* (2010)



Fig.28. Mary Sibande, *The Reign* (2010)



Fig.29. Mary Sibande, *Silent Symphony* (2010)



Fig.30. Mary Sibande, *They don't make them like they used to* (2009)



Fig.31. Mary Sibande, *A Terrible Beauty is Born* (2013)



Fig.32. Mary Sibande, *A Reversed Retrogress, Scene 1* (2013)



Fig.33. Senzeni Marasela, *Theodorah Comes to Johannesburg (Hector Pietersen Memorial, Soweto)* (2005-2008)



Fig.34. Senzeni Marasela, *Theodorah Comes to Johannesburg (Apartheid Museum)* (2005-2008)



Fig.35. Senzeni Marasela, *Theodorah Comes to Johannesburg (Jeppestown)* (2005-2008)



Fig.36. Senzeni Marasela, *Theodorah Comes to Johannesburg (Kliptown)* (2005-2008)



Fig.37. Senzeni Marasela, *Theodorah Comes to Johannesburg (Diagonal Street)* (2005-2008)



Fig.38. Senzeni Marasela, *Theodorah Comes to Johannesburg (Turbine Hall)* (2005-2008)



Fig.39. Senzeni Marasela, *Theodora Comes to Johannesburg (St Albans Church)* (2005-2008)



Fig.40. Senzeni Marasela, *Theodorah Comes to Johannesburg (Zoo Lake)* (2005-2008)



Fig.41. Senzeni Marasela, *Covering Sarah IV* (one of a triptych) (2011)



Fig.42. Senzeni Marasela, *Visit to Joburg IV* (2011)



Fig.43. Senzeni Marasela *Visit to Joburg III* (2011)



Fig.44a. Tracey Rose, *TKO* (2000)



Fig.44b Tracey Rose, *TKO* (2000)



Fig.45a. Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella* (2001)



Fig.45b. Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella* (2001)



Fig.45c. Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella* (2001)



Fig.45d. Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella* (2001)



Fig.45e. Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella* (2001)



Fig.45f. Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella* (2001)



Fig.45g. Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella* (2001)



Fig.45h. Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella* (2001)

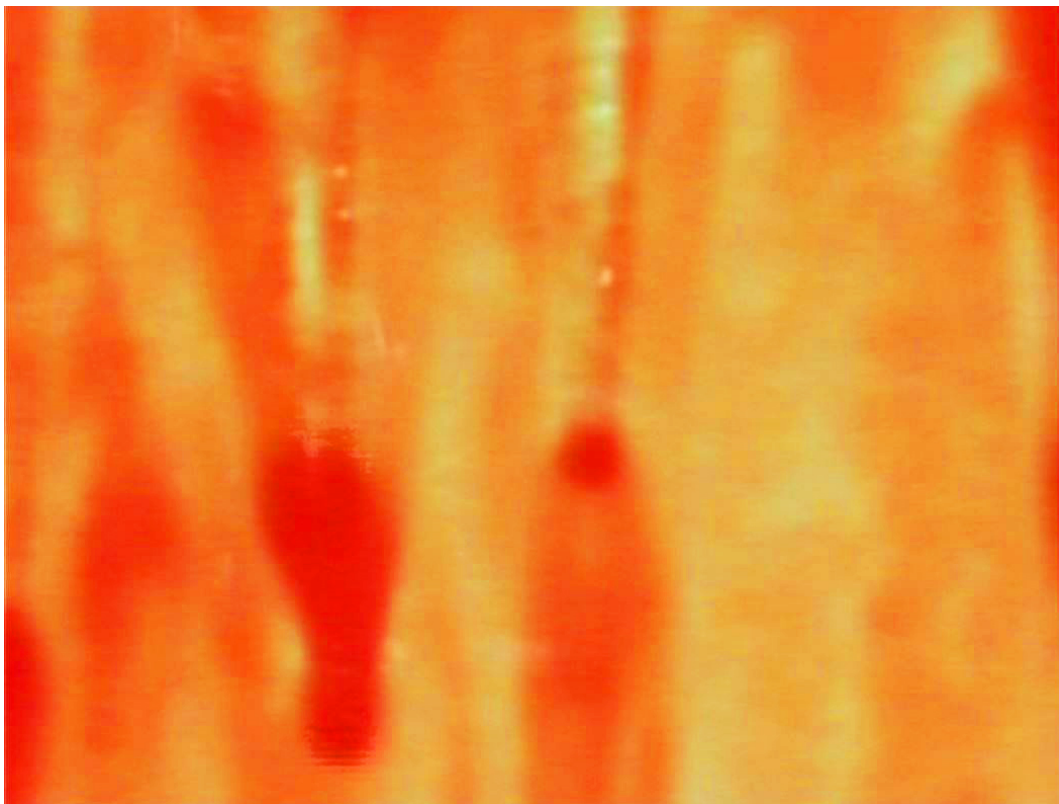


Fig.45i. Tracey Rose, *Ciao Bella* (2001)



Fig.46. Tracey Rose, *The Cunt Show The Cunt Show* (2007)



Fig.47. Nandipha Mntambo, *The Rape of Europa* (2009)



Fig.48. Nandipha Mntambo, *Narcissus* (2009)



Fig.49. Zanele Muholi, *Musa Ngubane and Mbongi Ndlovu* (2007)



Fig.50. Zanele Muholi, *Being* (triptych) (2007)

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Khan, S. (2015c) *Nervous Conditions III*, Black &White projection on wall with sound, Running time: 04.00 mins.

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APPENDIX A

RESPONSES TO *NERVOUS CONDITIONS*

B., Email to S. Khan, 4 September 2014

Firstly, your videos made me cry for many things you have reminded me of and that I realise how I cannot forget.

Stephanie Davis, Critical Diversities Conference Reflections: Day Two [Blog], 21 July 2014, Available at: <http://stephanie-davis.co.uk/?p=85> (accessed on 30/07/14)

Dieuwertje Dyi Huijg (University of Manchester), Terese Jonsson (London Metropolitan University), and Sharlene Khan (Goldsmiths College) Radical Politics, critical academia: talking the talk, but walking the walk? A lunchtime panel

For me, this was one of the standout sessions of the whole conference. Here the three panellists bravely asked questions about the gap between ‘doing’ research on critical diversities and intersectionality and our lived and embodied experiences of structural inequalities in academia. Can we be critical of ‘Critical Diversities’ – how we focus on critical diversities ‘out there’ in our research but do not attend to silences and critical diversities here in the room. There had been some tensions at the conference that were verbally expressed by some delegates, which caused discomfort about who is encouraged and credited for research on race, and who is discouraged. I had left the first day of the conference with a terrible headache, perhaps somatising some tensions within the space. The lunch time panel powerfully named and attended to some of these tensions.

Huijg talked of the invisibility of disability in academia, of a ‘Critical Diversities’ which is inaccessible or not so accessible for people with disabilities – a conference which runs from 9 till late, with short breaks, a lunchtime panel ([A Disability Perspective On The Lunch Slot](#)). When is the time for our bodies to rest? To medicate? To eat? Huijg disrupted this invisibility by coming out as disabled and voicing the right to take up space and time to care for the self, while acknowledging the risks of making such a statement.

Khan opened up the space to ask what is our experience as people of colour in academia; how does it feel to be surrounded by whiteness? Khan’s short film showed her embodied distress over a meeting with a supervisor, of being uncertain of how to disagree with her supervisor – wanting to be polite and pleading to be liked while struggling with the conflicts of feeling angry and misunderstood. One clip focused on her anxiously rubbing her hands together over and over, another clip on her eyes flitting from side to side and looking down at the floor and a third of Khan in a straight jacket in a padded cell emotionally agitated. The film evoked the physical, embodied experiences of a PhD of student of colour finding a voice and also specifically the energy-draining effects of negotiating whiteness for Khan. For Khan and some others at the conference their experiences in specific academic spaces had told them that their own knowledge as People of Colour, as subjects, was not the knowledge that was welcomed. In some examples, knowledge that was deemed valuable was knowledge which reinforced the idea of a

colonial 'object'. Khan discussed speaking back to this and speaking back to institutional whiteness and structural inequality and the serious consequences of doing so.

Jonsson's PhD research explores whiteness and racism in feminism. How does racism work in feminist spaces, conferences and organising? Jonsson's talk ([Until There Is No 'Next Time'](#)) addressed how feminist conferences often lack a discussion of race, and lack representations of women of colour's work. However even if there is some discussion of anti-racist work it is research that is undertaken 'out there' and not on how structural inequalities are embodied in the space we share at conferences. This talk tapped into the tensions felt in the conference and asked us to attend to the dynamics of race in these spaces.

This was a powerful panel, and many delegates commented on how important this space had been. I felt quite choked up by the openness and braveness of the presenters in discussing the embodied experiences of 'critical diversities' and of grappling with and challenging institutional ableism and whiteness. After the panel quite a few of us gathered in the lunch area to continue these important conversations and we currently have an informal mailing list to continue this work.

K., Facebook Messenger Correspondence, 8 May 2014

... people feel intimidated by such a brutal honesty, and shy away from engaging by association. Why I always make a point of stepping in and supporting it wherever I find it. But know and be sure of this, your work is ground-breaking and you are giving permission to a new generation of young South Africans in particular to speak their mind. I shared your link with S exactly because she is in need of that kind of role model and support. People are looking at your work, they're just too scared to talk about it yet, but they will. Your exact words and phrasing are less important, it is the conversation you are setting up, and the honest reveal of your internal battle with the B.S. you encounter ... as you know, I've had a long standing battle with our local art world and the posturing it engages in, and I haven't figured my way through to the other end of doing battle with it in my work. You have shown me a wonderful example of what to do with it, and I celebrate you for it! Unease with our environment doesn't always come with an explanation, and your work frees us from our ideas of art, and what we're supposed to perform within it. I thought I understood what it meant to question art's paradigms, but your work has suddenly made me see the outside surface of the box it tries to shove us into. The word of 'art' that we're stuck with, has its foundations and constructs within a western mindset that stretches back too far for me to reach outside of it. Your work offers that glimmer of what the outside of it might look like, and breaks the mind shackle that has bound us to it. I've always heard the words and understood the idea. But your work is the first time I can actually feel a sense of liberation from it... sometimes I call myself a non-practicing artist in an attempt to claim my status as artist, even though I suffer from an inability to participate in it. It is a deliberate act on my part, and many would like to call it a cop-out, but I prefer to think of it as an opt-out. I just haven't been presented with a legitimate framework in which to operate, so I'd rather invest my energy thinking about that, and trying to find another way... so, I LOVE your work, it is REVOLUTIONARY and the silence you're experiencing has everything to do with the fact that people don't know which box to put it in. This is all said by a person who does not read much, but spends a lot of time feeling and watching it all ... I always prefer to remain the 'illegitimate' voice ... your work is important Sharlene, don't doubt that.

J., Email to S. Khan, 5 May 2014

Hi Sharlene

I have watched the first link. I have cried enough for a day. I will watch the second one tomorrow. Moving, precise, well thought out and touching. I have enough food for thought. Well done. Truly amazing, I will pass on the link to a few friends if I may.

T., Email to S. Khan, 14 May 2014

Hi Sharlene,

Thanks again for sending this to me. I have watched it twice now. I find it really powerful & such an important intervention. I think it will set an uncomfortable tone for the workshop discussion, which I think will be productive. (Although I think we need to think carefully about how to manage it so that it doesn't turn into a white guilt fest.) I almost think we should scrap the workshop and just make people watch the whole film instead!

S., Email to S. Khan, 13 November 2013

Sharlene I could barely watch your film at the start – I know I am super duper white (well maybe not super duper, but white) but your articulation resonated with my experience in Australia in a way that made me shake inside. Everything you accented I knew. The film was fucking amazing. There were so many points when my whole body was shrinking because I couldn't bear to hear it – I couldn't bear to go through it again.

Can I put the link on my Facebook group?

D., Email to S. Khan, 8 November 2013

sharlene, that is absolutely amazing (have just seen the video). i am a bit overwhelmed by it – in a good way; as in it is strong, vulnerable, courageous and honest and powerful and complex and existentially critical. to be honest, i do not think it takes any away from not having mentioned that this concerns goldsmiths (though of course i have not seen that version), maybe the message becomes even more powerful. as this is not particularly about goldsmiths, ... it is, but it isnt. i can see why XXX must have felt taken aback, but it would be really really disappointing if she could not have the courage to see and feel and think through this/that, if she does not appreciate what it must have cost you and what it still cost you to make this critique. it is such an existential fight, for being. your video is not simply about your relation with her, or that specific talk – even when and where it is. because it also is. i am sincerely impressed in how you bring all these different layers in, personally, structurally, artistically – among others. it is about family, country, education, in/humanity, recognition... if she cannot see that they should be honoured that you have this conversation with them, they will fail in so many ways. it would maybe not be surprising, but simultaneously it would be ununderstandable.

i would also love to maybe see this film altogether at one point and talk about this in relation to agency. and, yeah, it would be so great to read fanon together and talk about that. and there is so much more there to read and talk and think about – and critique, obviously, as well.

is this public material? can i 'share' this with / forward this to the world?

well done, sharlene. you should be bloody proud of yourself (and i hope you are!!!). i am really touched

C., Email to S. Khan, 8 November, 2013

Hi Sharlene

I have just sat and watched your film. It's an extraordinary piece of work and I wish to thank you for articulating some, if not all, the feelings I and many others have been suppressing for some time. This film sums up the unspoken anguish which has been simmering inside me for the past 12 months at Goldsmiths. The anguish that I get when I go to the opera house, the national theatre, the Tate, the streets of London, a cafe, a pub, every time I walk past the yummy mummies in my area, frankly every time I leave the flat but sometimes in the flat. Every time I walk into a seminar at Goldsmiths and wonder why I am the only person of colour in the room this is the rage that sits down with me, silent.

Thank you for being so courageous, it's never easy being the one that speaks out but some of us know that if we don't speak out we will simply die.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWS WITH MARY SIBANDE, SENZENI MARASELA, NANDIPHA MNTAMBO AND TRACEY ROSE

*Please note that the four interviewees were sent transcripts of the interviews and allowed to change/edit their responses in order to best represent themselves and their work, and to remove any personal/professional references that they didn't want published. Mary Sibande took the opportunity to edit her response, while Tracey Rose decided she would not like to have her interview published as it currently stands. I believe this kind of narrativisation is appropriate to the textured bio-mythographical story-telling referred to in Chapter Three.

Mary Sibande (MS) interviewed by Sharlene Khan (SK)

25 April 2013

Arts on Main, Johannesburg, South Africa

SK: So, this is just an introductory kind of questionnaire. I might have follow up questions which I might ask you later on in the year or next year, whatever, but just to explain to you a little bit about my research, although that shouldn't influence your answers in any way. [LAUGHS]

MS: Okay. [LAUGHS]

SK: I'm actually just kind of investigating about masquerade and how so many artists in South Africa, and especially among people of colour, have taken to this strategy of using masquerade. And when I say masquerade I mean quite loosely the donning of costumes and enacting certain kinds of personae...

MS: Hiding identity, what's up with that? We like to hide our identity.

SK: [LAUGHS]

MS: I was just looking at Lawrence Lemaona's work the other day, and ja, I don't know why we have to conceal our identity. [LAUGHS]

SK: But that's already a very interesting thing because you know so many people were pushing for this 'post-identity' kind of stuff. Personally I've always found this identity-thing quite an interesting space to work from, it's always under contestation, it's always something that could be fluid if you wanted, and I mean, I never understand what a 'post-identity' is and I think if you come to such spaces, it can also be quite problematic spaces where you are so convinced of what you are, that you're not reassessing it. Ja, so looking at masquerading in a postcolonial context and what does it mean because I think a lot of identity has been contested via these masquerading strategies. So that's kind of broadly where it was and I'm probably not telling you more about it probably because I don't feel like I should influence your responses to it.

MS: Well you'll tell me more after. [LAUGHS]

SK: Yes. [LAUGHS] Okay, so here's where I want to start. First question I would like to start, I would like for you to start describing your trajectory over the last five years. So how did you enter the art field and where are you currently in terms of your artwork?

MS: Uhmmm....

SK: As if that's a little question. [LAUGHS]

MS: [LAUGHS] I started, uhm, I don't know, I began exhibiting my work at 3rd year level in 2005, I started showing my art in 3rd year. I used to take part in off-the-wall kind of spaces with other students, with young up-and-coming artists, and of course Lawrence [Lemaoana] was one of those artists, we were both in the same class. And then he won the Absa Atelier in 2005 and the prize entailed a 3 months residency in Paris, at Cite des Arts.

SK: You guys were already dating then? [LAUGHS]

MS: Ja. We've been dating since forever. [LAUGHS] Since 3rd year.

SK: Sweet.

MS: Uhmm. My 3rd year...I think that's when I realized that I wanted to make art. I never thought I would be a practising artist. I didn't think I would do it as a full-time occupation. My work began to be interesting to others, like writers. So I guess I was lucky that way. I was lucky in a sense that there was an outside interest in my work. Uhm, I would say Lawrence influenced me, uhm, into becoming an artist because he had the drive. He wanted to be an artist, he really was pushing, remember at that time there were only a few young Black artists who had exposure in the art world. I think we assisted each other on how to practise and participate in the art world. During my third year of my studies I got a job at Gordart gallery as a gallery assistant. So, I got a chance to understand how the art world operates. And I met a lot of artists during the three years of working there. During that time I started thinking about my own practise. And then Lawrence and I took a year off varsity and we went back to complete our undergrad. We travelled a lot, we met a lot of artists. In the year we did our B-tech degree (Honours degree), I started envisioning a female figure in my head that later became a maid. I was collecting what I thought was a maid's thoughts and aspirations. I later began to paint these aspirations. Our exam project required that we curate and exhibit our own works at the University's gallery. Thembinkosi Goniwe came to see the exhibition where I was exhibiting with my class mates. This is 2007.

He mentioned that he was curating a show in 2008 and it's titled *Four Tales* at Gallery MOMO, and he then invited me to participate. I was, of course, very excited. I was exhibiting alongside Nomusa Makhubu, Gabriel Goliath and Gina Van Zyl. So there were four of us. Uhm, and then ja, I showed, and then in 2009, I had my first solo at Gallery MOMO, then from there my ideas grew and I started experimenting and developing my ideas and materials.

SK: So in terms of what you just said, do you have a sense of what's been your most successful series and, in terms of your own expectations and also from your gallery, responses from the public to your artwork and invitations from other galleries? So, in a sense, from just picking up from what you just said now, in terms of it's been a snowball effect, what is it, what do you think it is about your work, for instance, that people have identified and kind of wanted to present to a larger public?

MS: Uhm, I think it's the common South African story of Sophie, like we all are related to Sophie. If she's not your mother, she's your domestic worker. If she's not your domestic, she's your aunt, she's everybody. She's all around, I think people relate to her existence and to what she embodies. And especially looking into our history as South Africans, in post-apartheid South Africa, uhm, I think she has played an important role.

Uhm, my best work? I feel like I haven't made, ja, I have not made anything that is great. I think my best work is still to come...its somewhere in my brain, I just haven't realised it. [LAUGHS]
Uhm, but like half the time I'm never satisfied with what I produce, when the work is finished I always feel like I could have done it better. But, I guess that's part of the drive to make the next work better than the last one. [LAUGHS]

SK: Like what kind of work have people responded to the most?

MS: Well, the Sophie series. Uhm, well actually, the first photographic print that I ever produced in that series, Sophie is knitting a 'Superman's jersey'. I titled it *They Don't Make Them Like They Used To*. Uhm, it was the first print in the series, people responded positively. I don't know if I was naïve or whatever, I didn't think it was going to be a great work. Anyway, it was for a commission actually through Gallery MOMO.

SK: For what may I ask?

MS: Uh, I can't remember. It was...uh like a firm. And I can't even remember the story, because they gave us, what's the word?

SK: Briefs?

MS: Ja, brief, ja. Can't remember what the brief entailed but it was around 'blue collar' women in South Africa. Gallery MOMO put together a group show and I presented that work. And there was a positive response. I guess I needed that positive response for me to gain confidence. [LAUGHS] And I've also been accused by other people, other artists saying that the work is not aggressive enough, saying Sophie is a coon. But when you think about the idea of Sophie or what Sophie is, she stems from my grandmother's stories, from my great, great grandmother's stories. I wanted to stay true to the work or what Sophie personified. When you think about all these people that I just mentioned, they were actually humble. Like, how can you work for someone who's abusing you for years and years, but you continue to work and work hard, you work with 'love', you, you take care of other peoples' kids and neglect your own. So that's what my work highlights, I didn't feel the artwork needed to be hostile. The work is actually aggressive by existing, by me making it at this point in time. And, uhm, now I moving away from Sophie. I'll show you a photo, a print just now. Well an image on my USB stick.

SK: So that's my next question. Tell me more about this persona that is Sophie. Tell me how did she begin, how did you first conceptualise her. Uh, what qualities does she embody and I'm speaking specifically speaking about her in the third sense cause she's not Mary Sibande.

MS: No. She's not Mary Sibande.

SK: She's taken on a life of her own.

MS: Ja.

SK: And where does Sophie head after this?

MS: I guess for me it was important to take what I have produced before into another or higher level of artistic quest. Looking at where Sophie started. She began to appear in my 4th year... Uhm, I wanted to ... because in the previous year I made shoes, I had this series of shoes. I painted and constructed shoes they were all distorted. I distorted them because I wanted to remove their function and make them objects of desire, things to be looked at and not worn. I experimented a lot during 'my shoes phase', painted them into small cameo size, and at some point I enlarged them, I went big, so there were different variations of shoes everywhere. My studio was a shoe shop. [LAUGHS]

SK: [LAUGHING] Seems like everybody goes through a shoe phase at art school.

MS: [LAUGHS] And at some point I got tired of making shoes. I was thinking of another subject matter, I needed do something else, to expand my thoughts. Our first 4th year crit, class crit, I didn't have anything to show, I got a tongue lashing from my lecturers. I didn't have a clue on what I wanted to do the rest of the year and then I had a series of consultations with my supervisor Marielda Marais. I told her that I'm actually stuck. I don't want to make shoes anymore. I don't know what I want to do. And she suggested that I take a deeper look at my life. My peers had stories and which they transformed into concepts. They extracted from their realities to produce artworks. The most dominant topics were steeped in identity politics and biographical narratives, which were often sad and traumatic. Subjects such as rape, displacement, etc. Their stories too often had negative connotations. During the first University break I went to where I grew up in Barberton. I went to visit my grandmother. So, my grandmother and I were talking about her "working in the kitchens" ('kitchens' is a term commonly used to describe working as a maid or to describe White suburbs). So, that was the beginning of a series of interviews. We began by talking about her aspiration and desires as a black woman living in a small town in those days. And on how limited she was, not only as a black body but as a black female body in apartheid South Africa. My world is a valuable source of inspiration. Merging the imagined world and the real world is my preoccupation as a creator. I appreciate stories, personal and common or shared, as material to be worked with. That's when I realised the richness in our painful history, a past that lives with us in our everyday challenges. And it had to be told, but with a different angle. So that was the beginning of the interview.

SK: How did you decide on the name Sophie?

MS: Uhm, my grandmother told me a story. Her mother, who was also a maid, she had two Sesotho names, she was originally from Lesotho. Her names were Tsheledi Fanedi, but then her masters couldn't remember or pronounce her names, so they renamed her "Elsie". She died as Elsie. So I wanted a name that would actually kind of resonate with that idea of a name being forced on one and the transformation of her identity from that moment, it should be a name that should be remembered. And also in South Africa, if you're a Black child you have to have two names – a home name in your mother tongue, which describes your cultural or tribal group, whatever background you're from, if you're Zulu, you'll have a Zulu name. And uhm, you are obliged to have a Christian name and then that name you'll use it at school. Same goes with me. I'm 'Mary' at school and in professional environments, but at home I'm 'Ntombikayise' so it's a dual identity, which you have to play along. Like if someone were to call me by that name right now, I'll know, I'll be able to place them, like, oh, she knows me from there. If someone calls me 'Mary' then I'd know... you know what I mean? Uhm, so, uhm, at first I didn't make her. I started making her desires, her aspirations, I started painting. Funny enough I started with shoes, I

guess, I wanted to start at a familiar place... [LAUGHS] And then I started painting dresses, these elaborate big garbs, tiers, in a cameo shape some of them were 50cm x 20cm, their sized varied. I then decided well, let me make a figure. But a life-size figure, I wanted the figure to have presence. While making her I had to think about materials that will best pronounce the idea and who should I use as, as, as the model. I thought of using my mother, of casting my mother's body or my grandmother, but it kinda didn't feel right, and I thought well but I'm the storyteller and I want to be the sitter and author at the same time. I wanted to play a dual role in the storytelling of Sophie and, uhm, and uhm, I started casting myself, using my body to make Sophie and then Sophie emerged from the rubber mould. [LAUGHS] Ja.

SK: Also in terms of uh, what is the significance of the colour blue and white that you use?

MS: Yeah. Sophie's in protest, no maid would actually walk around...actually no one would walk around with a dress like that, they're physically heavy. The lightest dress that I've ever made, it was uh, 3kgs of fabric, and they've continued to grow. Uhm, so she's in protest with herself. It's the idea that she's actually limiting herself from moving and she is therefore standing there static, dreaming, you know, with her eyes closed. And then the white, uhm, I thought of a light colour that would show the apron's not dirty and therefore it shows that she's not doing anything, she's standing there, sort of like posing, so you caught her while she was...you know, frozen as if in a photo. So, I borrowed ideas from photography in that way. And I wanted, you know, I wanted the apron to be clean and untouched hence I chose the whitest apron possible. And then the blue... While I was thinking of the kind of dress to dress the figure, I had to think of colour first, colour is central, cause colour has strong significance in the work I make. What kind of colour should I dress her? I noticed that there are various churches around my studio – Zionist churches, Jehovah's Witness, all of them. And then, uhm, I was moved by a group of women who were going to church and were wearing blue and green church – sometimes khaki – uniforms and they looked smart. I enjoyed the way they carried themselves with dignity and respectability, I was attracted by the way they walked and I was attracted to the notion in which it was evident that religion and fashion work together... I was interested in the roots of this notion, in South Africa? The designs and colour of Sophie's dresses reference uniforms of domestic workers, overalls of labourers, designer dresses of local Zion Church worshippers' and historical Victorian garments. Uhm, I, I like the idea of praying because for me, Sophie is praying in a different realm, that is why her eyes are always closed, that's when her constant reality warps and she can escape and exist in wonderland. Like whatever she's dreaming of, it isn't real, it's a dream and, she herself is a construction made from many parts, she's not real, but, it can only be a dream or a wish and can never be a reality. That's how the blue came about with two ideas, the worker who is hopeful of getting out of her uniform who dreams of better things. I buy my fabrics where the church goes or the Zionists buy their fabrics too.

I wanted to make big dresses that occupy space. And uh, ja, like a huge dress that fills the room. While I was making these dresses at first I did the sewing myself I was concerned with style and volume and of course that would create meaning, they started to look more Victorian and I thought well let me embrace this cause this is a new chapter in the work and talking about costumes that are made from multiple layers. Layers and layers of fabric, and uhm this layering relates to Sophie's story, what she is, that she has multiple stories to tell, like she has...she is layered with stories of how she became a maid and where's she coming from and why is she a maid, she did not choose to become a maid you know, it's because she was limited as a Black woman, her individual story is multiplied into the story of many women who are similar to her all sharing her race.

SK: And can you comment of some of the kind of actions or adventures you lead Sophie on?

MS: Well uh, I...the idea was I wanted to show that Sophie's actually every woman. In a work titled *I put a spell on me*, I'm talking about that work where she's wearing a green costume and she's holding a staff. A staff covered in a Louis Vuitton print and she's, she's about to do something – her staff is leaning forward, her arm is outstretched. Uhhmm... And another work, *Her Majesty Queen Sophie*, she's wearing an elaborate necklace made with beads..., uhm, the idea is I wanted to make these excessive beads, like they keep on coming, they keep on making, they keep on growing, and they drop to the floor and the idea's that if, if it was a video you'd see them grow but because it's a still photograph you are only limited to one scene. And, uhm, with that work she's a traveller, she likes to travel. Well I saw a postcard, a Masai postcard and these women were wearing beautiful necklaces and I thought it would be amazing if Sophie can wear these elaborate necklaces. And I made the beading myself and they were quite big and heavy.

SK: The beads?

MS: Ja. And so what I did was I collect photographs of these beads, of these woven necklaces and I designed my own patterns. Uhhmm. She's an explorer, and then another work, *The Waiting Seems to go on Forever*, she's standing at a bus-stop but above her hangs a bright red chandelier, so you don't know if she's outside or inside, the space she is in has become ambiguous. I was toying with the idea that she's neither/nor. She's neither outdoors, nor indoors, she's nowhere and...

SK: So, for instance, the one where she's on a horse?

MS: Oh yes. Sophie embodies multiple personas, she's a maid, a lady, a religious devotee, a queen, a soldier, a shopper, a horse rider. The idea was sparked by equestrian statues in South Africa which are symbols of power. These symbols function as reminders to the general public of who holds power! To mention a few equestrian statues, in Cape Town in front of parliament there is a sculpture of General Louis Botha. In Pretoria, in front of the Union buildings stands general Jan Smuts with his horse, surveying the land before him. They are both significant. I thought of twisting and subverting that image. Insert a Black woman, but not just any woman, a maid, on a rearing horse.

The artwork [*The Reign*] has been bought by the National Gallery. With her eyes closed she is denying her reality but dwells in a fantasy world, and in so doing constructs a reality of her own. And the horse artwork reinforces and supports this proposal. There are codes that can be read in equestrian statues. The codes point out the fate of the rider. For example, if the horse has one hoof raised, the rider was wounded in a battle, all four hooves on the ground indicates that the rider survived unharmed. Two raised hooves similar to *The Reign* (2010) indicate the rider died in a battle, Sophie defies death, as she is a queen her seat is constantly occupied. Sophie's horse is standing up right. And if you're if you were riding it, you'll fall off cause it's straight up, but because it's Sophie, she has this beast between her legs, between her thighs, she'll never fall off, she's in control of this thing. And then now I'm moving away from Sophie. I want to introduce another different humanoid. I want to make videos. 3-4 minute videos, I don't like long videos. [LAUGHS] I can show you if you like. Let me see if I have my....

SK: So why did you decide to move away from sort of just using Sophie as a mould you made to actually becoming Sophie? Using your own body?

MS: Well actually she has influenced a lot of people.

[INTERVIEW IS INTERRUPTED BY A FRIEND SAYING GOODBYE]

MS: So where were we?

SK: So what does it feel to re-enact Sophie in that way as opposed to just making a mould of your body and just presenting that?

MS: Uh, you mean, why... I don't think I understand your....

SK: So your initial works you started, you were making moulds and then... In some of your other work you blacken your body right? So...

MS: Yes. So that's me performing in front of a camera. Ja.

SK: So what happened for that change, that progression?

MS: Oh, you mean, why sculpture and then why me?

SK: Ja.

MS: Okay. I felt like, sculptures have their limits in communicating an idea, like you can only do a certain thing like that, and I wanted to grow and expand my ideas and I needed Sophie to be animated hence the performance, but only in front of a camera and we'll have a series of at least 50 photographs and then we'll have to choose one, each pose telling a different story, edited to tell a perspective. Uh, so that idea of selecting from all these movements, actually take one out, this is going to go to the gallery, this is the one that people will see. Uhm, I don't know, I kinda actually enjoyed that idea.

SK: And in terms of you actually blackening your body because you're like, uh, a Black woman but you chose to even blacken her to an almost pitch coal colour. So why that choice?

MS: Uhm, I thought of me coming from these, these generation of women who were maids from my great great-grandmother up to my mother and then came me, I was born in the 80s when things were kinda starting to change and eventually in the 90s there was a physical change, in terms of geography and movements, etc. I'm from a small town. I'm the first one in my family lineage to go beyond Matric. Uhm, and I felt like there will always be a 'shadow' that will always follow me. I come from these women, they build what I am right now. Actually it's their construction, it's their doing and I felt like that shadow will always be part of me. And I thought well, if I had to make Sophie she has to symbolize that shadow, this is in the beginning of the construction of Sophie. She has to be a shadow. But how do you dress a shadow? How do you make a shadow perform? So I thought of mannequins in shops and well I thought the idea actually linked – if you are looking at Sophie, you are kind of doing your window shopping, people are actually attracted to these dresses, they're not going to get them, they're never going to wear them cause of their size. So the viewer is actually window shopping while they're looking at Sophie, and uhm, I borrowed the ideas of a store mannequin that's how she was...that's how she became a physical shadow. [LAUGHS]

SK: So, masquerade and performance are clearly strong elements in your work. Can you tell me more about the kind of tensions that are created in you performing in front of a camera?

MS: Uhm, it's actually... Performing, I usually have a limited audience, and you may miss the performance and never be able to see it, images allow for one to be witness after the fact. I usually have a limited crowd, my make-up artist, my seamstress, the photographer usually comes with an assistant. Uhm, uhm. Actually someone asked me why won't you dress up as Sophie and perform in front of people and I felt like I'm not that kind of artist and I feel like, well, I want to tell, I want to choose what you have to see because if I'm performing you're going to see everything, but if I'm performing when you're not there, it's about controlling the viewer's image. Uhm, what else did you ask, I forgot. [LAUGHS]

SK: About masquerade and performance and what kinds of tensions it creates?

MS: I think as South Africans we like, there's a word now – not spectacular – uhm....

SK: Spectacle?

MS: Yes. We're into that. Like in town, if someone is playing a guitar, performing at the corner of the street, you'll see a gathering of people around the performer. And also looking at our protests, when we toyi-toyi, they are all about creating an exhibition. So it's that idea that when someone is performing, immediately you gain an audience, uh, but I wanted to reject that. I don't want people looking at me while I am throwing myself on the floor naked or not. So ja. I guess it's that idea of control limiting what the viewers can see or witness. [LAUGHS]

SK: Do you think the term mimicry applies to your work and if yes, why yes, if no, why no?

MS: Uhm, ja it does in a sense that in Sophie's dresses, well actually it's not her own dresses, it's actually the dresses she saw in the Madam's wardrobe but then again she wanted to make them bigger. So it's that idea of copying or doing what the Madam is doing and it's the same thing with us. We're forever trying to catch up to White people, forever trying to prove to ourselves that actually I am human, I'm a good Black. We always have to do that and I've actually seen that in action, especially with Lawrence cause he's a guy, when he walks in a space White people will look and hold on to their purses. We're at this stage were we cannot keep on proving what we are, because we know what we are.

SK: Okay. Uhm, is there a common methodology in all the different media that you use, so whether it's like installation, or sculpture or photographs or your photographic performances or do you see them as entirely different modes of expression?

SM: I think it's a continuation they are all linked with a few visible threads, like if a photograph is not illustrating what I have in my head, nothing will. Next time I make a sculpture it has to do this and do that. So it's always trying to improve. This work has to be better than the last one all the time and I think that's kind of a struggle I have as an artist. I don't know if other artists have this but I want my last work to be better than the last one before that, uhm, so it's that idea, trying to improve my skills all the time. [LAUGHS]

SK: Does performance open up an avenue for you that two-dimensional work doesn't or do you see them in a very inter-related way?

SM: They're very much related. For me, another way in looking at it is, you as a person, you take a photograph of yourself, you'll treasure and preserve that photograph in your album. And I guess the main idea is the idealization of oneself. The two-dimensional work comes from the performative part of the work.

SK: Are there any specific artists, I mean, issues that you as a woman artist feel that you face, especially in using your own body in the work?

SM: Uhm, I think I've limited myself. As I said, I don't like performing in front of a crowd or I don't think the performative part of the work requires an audience at this stage and I don't like performing in front of people. I don't like taking off my clothes and performing in front of people, uhm, I've seen a lot of artists doing that, there's nothing wrong with that. It's just that for me, I prefer not to. I don't want people looking at my body. Not yet anyway. [LAUGHS]

SK: [LAUGHS] So in relation to what you just said, do you think there are pitfalls in displaying the Black female body and by doing this kind of mimicry, this kind of restaging in a way, do you think it runs the risk of feeding exoticisations of the Black body?

MS: Uhhh, well I think there it depends on the viewer, whose looking but uhm, if the idea can only get out there through your naked body, it's fine, do it. I think a lot of artists actually have been in contemporary art, artists specially black artists, have started to address these stereotypical images of the black female body. Sometimes it seems like a tiring battle, a battle that will never be won, in that how does one subvert these popular negative images of the Black body that have been embedded in the psyche of many for centuries.

SK: How do you feel about being labelled African and your work as kind of like African art work or African photography?

MS: Uhhmm. It's....I don't know, I've never actually thought about it. [LAUGHS] But if people were to ask... it's like someone asking me if I'm a feminist, I'd say "no, I'm not". Yes, I am dealing with women's issues, women empowerment but I feel like I don't want to box myself, because as soon as I label myself, I'm actually putting myself in a box, so my steps will be limited. I guess I've actually answered your question. [LAUGHS] Uhm, well I'm from Africa, ja.

SK: So what does identity mean to you and do you feel your work attempts to deconstruct identity in the way that you understand it?

MS: Uhhh, uhm, well identity is, is, cause....well I'm using myself and I'm using my stories to, to, to make my art, to construct my art. Uhhh, what did you say again? [LAUGHS]

SK: [LAUGHS] And does your work attempt to deconstruct your ideas of identity as well, different identities?

MS: Uhm, Identity is a moving thing its fluid, uhm, it is never on solid ground. It changes with the times. An identity is something that can be constructed and deconstructed. For example, Sophie embodies the stories of women, who were denied self-determination but managed to accrue agency in their minds. She takes on a different identity every time... uhm, uhm, ja. [LAUGHS]

SK: Do you think you're also deconstructing your grandmother's identity for instance?

MS: Ja, actually yes, I am. I feel like I am actually telling her story in a different angle, that is I am imaging what she has told me, so therefore I think so, ja.

SK: What does it mean to be, for you to be working in South Africa at the moment, at the present moment?

MS: It's actually great. I had this interview two months ago, these guys from the UK and they asked me, "so if you were to move anywhere in the world, anywhere, where would you move to?" "No", I said, I like to visit, I like going away for two, three months. And I feel like Joburg is the place, there's room here, room for everybody, if you want to live as an artist. I guess that's why other artists from other countries come to South Africa, cause our country is still developing. Unlike other places, especially Europe and America, they are....developed, you can't...it's kinda difficult to penetrate the art world there. And South Africa is that place. And Joburg, I don't know, it just gives me that drive, it reminds me 'not to forget'.

SK: Okay, last three questions. So can you tell me some of your artistic inspirations or which artists you identify with in terms of style and content?

MS: Uhm, actually when, cause, when I was a student, when I thought I want to make Sophie physical, I didn't know where to start cause when you're a student you just don't do research, you wait for lecturers to tell you what to do and then, one time I was at a library, a library at the French Institute then I came across a work by, uhm – this was before Sophie was constructed while I was perplexed on how to construct her – I came across Juan Munoz's work. I much appreciated the *Last Conversation* piece. It wowed me, and thought to myself I'm going to make life-size figures, why didn't I think of this? And then he was, ja, actually the foundation of my art making. And then later I started discovering Kara Walker's work, uhm, uhm, Yinka Shonibare, Cindy Sherman with her...every time you see her she's a different person. Uhm, I looked at Tracey Rose and Berni Searle locally, uhm, and so ja, this plate started getting full and, ja, so like I've got things now, I've got meat, I can actually do this. And that's how she's got a bit of everything from all these artists. And fashion designers! Alexander McQueen and uhm, uhm, Tim Walker, he's a photographer. Ja.

SK: So in the work you produced for the Venice Biennale last year, you introduced, for the first time I think, a masculine element and I think, well you mentioned before, people think your work is not aggressive enough, that work was pretty aggressive. Even with the kind of toy soldier element, so could you comment a bit about the dynamics of that work?

MS: Uhhh, my work has been focusing on the women in my family. I thought well, I'd like to introduce a masculine but an 'absent masculine'. Meaning he is not there but his essence is. And that work was inspired by my parents. They broke up when I was three, and then I, I didn't know my father. I met him when I was about sixteen. He came for my birthday and that was the first time I'd seen, actually physically seen him. Uhm, uhm, he, he... So throughout my childhood, my mother had a few photographs of him and in two or three of them he was wearing an army uniform – he's still in the army 'til today – in the other photograph he's in his civics. So he existed through these few photographs. I created this idea of what he could be, and my mother told me what kind of person he was, and my grandmother the same, and that's why he takes a female form – he's got breasts and feminine thighs. It's because I didn't know him so he's being told through my grandmother and my mother. And also well, the title of the work is *Lovers in Tango*, so of course you know the saying '*it takes two to tango*'. So it actually started there, '*it takes two to tango*' and then I started learning, about tango, started buying books on tango and someone asked me 'so you want to do tango' and I'm like 'no', I don't like doing it but I like watching it. So I started buying books on the tango dance I started reading on the essence of what the tango is. The man is always in the lead, the woman follows, uhm, and that gesture did not happen between my parents. And one of the prominent gestures is the close embrace of the dancers – the men actually pull the woman closer, and they then move together in a

synchronised fashion. Sophie represents my mother, and the lead soldier represents my father, there's space between them, but if you were to join the two figures they would do the tango stance. There's space between the leading figures. The distance between the figures speaks of the separation. And of course, if I introduce...if I'm talking about my father, the idea of army has to be reinforced in the work that is why he comes or appears in multiple, in an army formation, although it's the same figure.

SK: Okay, final question. [LAUGHS] There seems to be like an almost God-like control in these kinds of performances where you get to control every aspect of these works. Uhm, do you, is that important to you either as an artist, or as a woman or as a Black artist to be able to control all those different aspects and representations of your grandmothers' and mothers' stories and representations of these kinds of identities and how it's put out into the art world. That kind of control is a quite a key element?

MS: Totally, I like to control everything. Like in my life, I control everything. And uhm, one of the things I don't like is surprises, uhm, I wouldn't know how to react, so I like to know. [LAUGHS]

SK: Did your dad surprise you at your sixteenth? Or were you expecting him? [LAUGHS]

MS: No, I wasn't expecting him so he definitely surprised me, so ja, maybe that's, maybe that's why I don't like surprise. [LAUGHS]

SK: Well thank you very much. I'm sure I'll have follow up question just because what you said was so interesting. There might be one or two follow up questions.

MS: Ja. Oh let me show you the photograph.

SK: Ja, fantastic.

[MS SHOWS IMAGE OF NEW WORK 'Terrible Beauty' ON COMPUTER]

SK: So is that you again?

MS: Ja, I don't know if you can see, but that is me letting go of Sophie. Her doek is on the floor and is being taken away by one of the creatures.

SK: You said you're moving away towards a more humanoid form, do you mean that it's becoming less human?

MS: Uhm, ja. [LAUGHS] Less human, and more of an other, an other thing. I decided to let go of Sophie and decided to grow from Sophie in that she has become a very important medium in my career, to tell my story, or the stories of the women in my family and I feel like I have to let go of that, I have to close that chapter before it goes stale, because I don't want those stories to go stale, I don't want them to be like a song that's repeated over and over again. So put it aside, come back later, maybe not.

SK: She seems like she going to...like she's going to be devoured. Is that us devouring her? [LAUGHS]

MS: Ja. [LAUGHS] Ja. She's been consumed by other things and it speaks of the idea...people feel like they know what the work is about, they feel like they know Sophie and therefore they always have an opinion like 'okay but you should have done it like this, no, I don't think that

works, what happens if this is that', so that kind of thing. People actually are projecting their own ideas into her and instead of rejecting those, I actually, listen.

SK: Okay, fantastic. ... So looking forward to what you next do.

MS: Ja, well, kinda nervous, but it's a good thing that I am. [LAUGHS]

SK: Yeah sure. Of course, you need to grow as an artist, especially to move away from a success, it's difficult.

MS: Ja, that's the thing, I didn't know that this story, or that Sophie will be a success. It was just me and I was like this is the story I wanna share with you guys. And then it just became like okay, how do I deal with this, and also it's great, but it also puts Sophie in a God-like state.

SK: Ja. And how involved is Lawrence in your kind of like...in your artistic practice cause you seem to speak to him a lot and discourse with him a lot of the kinds of ideas, and with him being an artist as well...?

MS: Ummm, we have a good relationship when it comes to our art making, because before I used to assist him in making – he's not a maker, he's a theorist. [LAUGHS] Uhm, I'm a maker, and I enjoy exploring different materials. Sometimes I get carried away in the making. So, he reminds me to always step back from the work. So now, it's the other way around. I'm a practising artist and sometimes we'll bounce ideas between us. He reads a lot. His ideas are mainly about theories. He is currently reading Deleuze and Guattari. He'll bring in all these ideas and he questions everything. So, what I've learnt is, I will make the work and then I let him crit it.

SK: Good to have someone like that.

MS: Yes. [LAUGHS]

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M. Sibande (2014) RE: Follow-up Questions, Email to S. Khan (sharlnefkhan@yahoo.co.uk), 31 August

Hi Sharleen,

Hope this email finds you well. please find attached q and a.

I would like to apologise for only replying to your email now. There's lot to do, and not enough hours in a day.

With regards to the interview I still need to go through it. I will go through it tomorrow.

kind regards

M

Word Doc Attachment: Sharlene Khan q and a

Hope you are well and that your Standard Bank show was a success?

- Yes, the exhibition was a success.

You said your grandmother was Suthu and that her name was 'TalediFanedi' – can you tell me what is the correct spelling of this name and if it has any cultural meaning? Can you check if other names are spelt correctly in the text?

Great grandmother, she was from Lesotho, so she was Sotho.

Tsheledi-Fanedi

Your work The Purple Shall Govern – can you tell me about the inspiration for the title (I know artist Willem Boshoff has a work similarly named)?

Colour:

- Due to our histories, shared and personal, colour remains important and complex in South Africa – from ideas of race and the rainbow nation and all the complexities of personal choices and favourites in between. I decided to link my colour purple to the incident that happened in Cape Town in the 1980s. During a march the police sprayed everyone with a water cannon laced with purple dye to enable them to identify and arrest the protestors. This act motivated me and got me interest in the roles that colour played in the history of this country. Colour remains a predominant factor in our social interactions and it continues to play a dominant role in our perceptions of one another as South Africans, but what interests me is that colour (race) is constructed, ascribed, subscribed to and through history and activity imbued with myriad meanings which are themselves always shifting.

- Slogan:

I was aware of Boshoff's work with same title. The works share common titles only. The work I made employed the spirit of the march.

Every march has its own slogan. Sloganeering was one of the tools used to mobilise ordinary people towards achieving political and social freedom. Simple events were used as propaganda to unsettle the soil and raise the dust. A common slogan was for example "the people shall govern" taken from the freedom charter was reimagined when during a protest the prepared police laced water cannons with purple dye. The marchers who marked for arrest after the event spread the idea that the people are now purple and they shall govern.

Why are the two Sophies at war?

- The work maintains an aggressive or militant stance. They are not at war but going through internal transformations. Change is often a violent process, where parts of the same body are destroyed and new ones taking over. This installation is looking at destruction, the need to destroy in order to rebuild.

- The purple figure is Sophie's dual, the confrontation of between her 'potential energy' and 'kinetic energy', where she is actively seeking change. She is at different stages of morphing, transcending and transforming, into an unnamed purple figure.

Is the 'not' Sophie a response to the criticism of Sophie?

- No, its not.

Senzeni Marasela (SM) interviewed by Sharlene Khan (SK)

17th April 2013

Wits University, Johannesburg, South Africa

SK: So I was particularly interested in researching you because we seem to share a lot of commonalities and similar interests which I find quite...

SM: Other than driving people nuts?... [SK and SM laugh] ... and going after them?

SK: Somebody needs to.

SM: And I'm not done either.

SK: So when I'm looking at masquerade I'm looking at some of the problematics of masquerade as much as I find it an empowering strategy. I think like masquerade in the way it's being perpetuated by Die Antwoord or Anton Kannemeyer and Brett Murray are very problematic in terms of blackface and stuff. So my research is kind of between that, where masquerading can be very empowering but it also has certain pitfalls so that people who are proponents of it or engaged in it have to be very careful in how they negotiate it. My first question is, I would like to start with you describing the trajectory of your work over the last five years – how did you enter the art field and where are you currently in terms of your artwork because you've been doing a lot of exciting art over the last few years.

SM: Ja, no, what I do, cause all my works start with performance because I think that's what I'm very interested in, where I put on my own mother's clothes because I'm very interested in her history, take her on the streets of Joburg and go and look. Because Joburg is already a threatening space. All these major cities are male-dominated. You know a lot of women get harassed through town and all sorts of things so it's in a way to make my mother, who otherwise wouldn't go out, enter these spaces and I'm also entering them as well because I use my own body in this performance wearing my mother's clothes, and try and engage with the city. And for me Joburg is very important, the city. Because of so many people, cause it's a transitory space. You know there are so many people who come here, go through here, and think of coming here, dream of this place, want to live here I think more than any other place I personally know. You know there's a lot of activity around here, and ja. And so that's what I've been mainly doing the last 5 years, and that get's transferred into a lot of things that I've been doing, I make linos, I make these narratives, these labour-intensive works. Cause for me it's a form of penance cause I grew up partially Catholic, and you know, the idea of always punishing yourself is something that gets repeated so many times in my work, whether I'm sitting and sewing endlessly you know these tiny, tiny drawings and large pieces of paper that still try and knit Joburg together and weave the city, taking it apart. So now I'm studying here, doing a art history MA and hoping to do a PhD, not because I'm failing as an artist [LAUGHS] but because it creates other opportunities, because I don't think it's quite easy to sustain a career as a Black woman in this country. Maybe somewhere else might be but ... so I can just create a balance and I'm still in the same field, you know, of looking and engaging in art work.

SK: Do you have a sense of which of your series has been most successful?

SM: Probably *Theodorah Comes to Joburg*. I think it's been seem more than any other work.

SK: Can you tell me about the persona that is 'Theodorah'?

SM: Now my mother came to Joburg ..., cause what initially happened is that I was looking at *Jim Comes to Joburg* and other movies about migrant labour, cause you know, Jim comes to Joburg with all his hopes and becomes disillusioned with what goes on in Joburg. It's more or less a similar story that my mother had. Came here, was severely traumatised by what she sees. To this day she doesn't come to Joburg, she'll never come to Joburg, because for her it's like recalling all these memories she doesn't want to deal with and all this trauma.

SK: Trauma in terms of?

SM: In terms of what she saw, you know, she saw someone get beaten up until they died in the 60s, quite a lot of people got arrested, some of them in front of her, so the last time she came to Joburg was in the 80s. You know, now she refuses. So this whole chapter of coming to Joburg was trying to retrace the places she remembers and of course they no longer look the same. You know Joburg, because Joburg changes every day, there's always new people coming in, another building being changed, so it isn't the same, but its also my trauma that I'm dealing with now because I don't have experience. And I certainly haven't experienced trauma on the scale that she has in the city.

SK: And did she come to Johannesburg for work?

SM: No, she came here cause she got married and came here to live with my father in the early 60s.

SK: And now where is home for her?

SM: Here in Boksburg.

SK: OK. A safe distance. [LAUGHS]

SM: Ja. Very safe.

SK: So why did you decide to become Theodorah as a photographic enactment?

SM: No, I struggle with resolving video. There's just something that I'm not particularly interested with, you know, that medium. But photographs are very immediate. You know, it's something... cause I'm very interested in a document, in an archive, in archived images, because you know that's what I used when I started out my career. Go back to the archive. Because it is immediate. It's something that people can usually identify with, have it, you know we all keep photographs, we all show off photographs, we all use them to record particular memories. So the photograph for me is important because of that, because it is a medium that is familiar to so many people besides the artworld that I operate in. So I have someone who documents the stills as I perform.

SK: Ok, so you work with someone who

SM: Ja, no I get a photographer who comes in and documents just the stills. And then that's how the performance then moves, in stills, freezing the moment so that people can look at it time

and time again, repeatedly because how you look at an image now and how you look at it again two years, it's not the same, you know cause experience comes in and it changes perspectives.

SK: And why is it important for you to control the photograph as opposed to video?

SM: You know because what I'm dealing with is like secondary memory and stories that I've been told, and I guess it's also trying to find a way in which I can make Theodorah's and my journey parallel because there are a lot of similarities.

SK: What is the significance of the adventures and the actions that you enact as Theodorah?

SM: You know the level of victimhood between my mother's or mine is very different because I still see myself as a victim of apartheid. In fact, I don't think I'll ever stop, you know cause I was born into this consciousness. I grew up with it and I still somehow embody it, so I don't know.... What am I saying? [LAUGHS] You know I think stepping out of it is very difficult or denying it but then it's also choosing a different way of embracing what has happened and finding your own way of formulating your own identity that you're comfortable with and use it to go forward.

SK: So, re-enacting your mum's footsteps in the different spaces?

SM: It's one: trying to acknowledge that that happened. Because I guess apartheid for most people who might not have experienced harshness, might not have seen it, it's part myth, part horror. It's very difficult to conceive of it as something real, that could possibly happen, you know, on the scale it did.

SK: So, why the name Theodorah? Is that your mum's name?

SM: It's her name. That is her name.

SK: And the way you dress Theodora?

SM: It is her dress.

SK: It is your mum's dress?

SM: [NODS] Because she has this habit of discarding clothing because she's schizophrenic. So she wears one thing forever and then discards it. So she used to burn these clothes, until I said to her, "Can I have them?", you know, so since then she's given me jackets that I have no hope of wearing [LAUGHS], and like shoes – the other day she gave me a hat. And today I'm going to collect some more dresses, you know, because I'm going to be doing a performance downtown, where I'm going to get women to put make up on me, make me look beautiful in the middle of the street. So I'm going to be using one of those dresses, you know, cause I'm having them. Why not, you know?

SK: And the way you photograph Theodorah in terms of you seem to following her gaze, her body presence, but very often her face is obscured or hidden from view?

SM: No, I didn't want to... you know when I started working, this was 2003 I remember, cause I decided then when I work with Theodorah I don't want to make her available, because for me there's just something not complete about her, about the life she has lived and the fact that she is now schizophrenic because she's said it so many times that she doesn't feel like a complete person. And she's made certain that she doesn't meet people, you know, she's always in hiding

and she guards her own privacy very jealously, wouldn't come out. So it's really in part trying to guard that by not making her available. But I mean she could also be any woman, she wasn't the only one, I'm sure there were others that had more horrific stories than she did or similar. I don't know if you can say stories of horror can be similar or not, you know experience is very individual. So ja, she can be anyone, she's not a particular person in that sense.

SK: So while researching some of your work over the last few years it became very interesting because you and I share a fascination with critiquing Barbie. So for my PhD, I had applied to Goldsmiths with a project for Barbie. It hasn't quite materialised because she's a bit more difficult to tackle than I imagined...

SM: Cause she's an institution, entirely. One that is so massive and overwhelming.

SK: Ja

SM: And because there's so much research on her available, it's frightening.

SK: There's really not that much solid critique of her by artists. There's like people who... the stuff that I've seen is really like people taking the doll apart kind of thing, you know, which doesn't really interest me as much

SM: But have you seen Hans Bellmer's work?

SK: Ja.

SM: There's Bellmer but there's also this woman I did a performance with in Scotland. She calls herself the real life Barbie. She lives in London.

SK: Ok

SM: She calls herself the real life Barbie. And she's had like more than 200 procedures.

SK: Uh-huh, yeah, I think I've read about her.

SM: Ja, she came and I performed with her when I was doing my Barbie work in Scotland. [LAUGHS] She was fantastic, you know. But she was telling me that there is a lot of women like her.

SK: Ja, there's a whole industry...

SM: Ja, and not even just White women either.

SK: So do you see Nicki Minaj and stuff as part of that?

SM: And Beyoncé as well. But you know the Barbie thing is, it started quite strange that because when I was starting to work with images of my mother, I realised that in a lot of very abnormal times in my life she wasn't there, you know. Because for me it was quite abnormal that I went to a Catholic school and then all the things that went on in there, with them trying to stop us from speaking Zulu, forcing us to learn all these English manners and all these mannerisms and in a way denying us, you know, our own backgrounds, whatever cultural experiences we had. That we almost had nowhere to turn because there were only six of us at that school and there was this massive project to get us to be these little English girls.

SK: So what was this school called?

SM: St Dominics.

SK: St Dominics, ok.

SM: But again I wasn't the only one. All the private schools were doing that in the 80s. Trying to breed this new type of Black girl. Just was neither here nor there. So I've always looked, I think even before I started working with my mother's dresses, I've looked at memory. All the things I remember quite clearly, during the death of Chris Hani my mother was in a sanatorium, you know, and I think that's why I remember that moment quite clearly because she had been taken the day before and Chris Hani dies the day after. You know, so I have all these distinct memories around times that my mother wasn't there. And bringing in the doll was kind of finding black dolls that nobody likes, people reject them, and trying to comfort them, mother them, tell them that they're beautiful. Cause that's what I did in New York in all those doll performances. Go to Central Park and meet people, you know, and get them to talk to my dolls. [LAUGHS] Lots of them thought I was nuts. [LAUGHS] There was this one guy who followed me, I still have photos of him in my computer. [LAUGHS] He talked to me for about three hours, you know, and like all sorts of ridiculous things he was asking. But then it's also the idea of comforting this ugly doll. I read Toni Morrison's book *The Bluest Eye* when I was a child and we weren't allowed Toni Morrison in school for many, many years but then one friend of mine smuggled it into the country and then all of us were furiously reading, you know, and what a tragic story that is. Pecola Breedlove is so rejected, so unwanted you know, she ends of dreaming of becoming a doll, having blue eyes, thinking that's exactly what makes people fall in love is the colour of your eyes. You know, so with having that in mind and the kind of rejection that a black doll goes through. You know dolls are not very pretty, there's nothing very appealing about looking at Barbie, but it's just that the black dolls their skin is dark and all these associations with negative things and what Black people are or supposed to be makes it even more ugly.

SK: I actually started the work four years ago on *The Bluest Eye* cause I think it's like one of the most powerful books I've ever read...

SM: It is tragic.

SK: It's just, I don't know, it's that when I was a child I had created this White character in my head, this White version of myself..

SM: We all did that.

SK: And when I read the book it just made me so sad for myself, you know, because of the way she captures it you realise it is a form of insanity that apartheid instilled in us, you know, to think of ourselves in the ultimate White form. So I was also interested in that, you know, because not many people I know really appreciate *The Bluest Eye*.

SM: No, but you know there's a lot of this thing. There's a lot of us. We all have copies, most of my friends do and it's, it's... I mean I read it again now like four-five years ago.

SK: And the performance you did with the dolls, where you are kind of putting on the make-up and sitting with the dolls?

SM: That's what I'm going to do in town. It was ... I mean I did it with Louise McCragg who makes dolls because when you see those photographs there are all these likelihoods of me on the side and I was just trying to look beautiful. Put make-up on, take it off, put it on again, take it off, put it on again, take it off, you know, until I just reach this stage where I'm okay. Because I think subconsciously there are things that bother me about how I look. Because when I travel I always look different. There's no mistake about that. I am different cause I look it. [LAUGH] I don't look like everyone else, you know, when I'm there. And I guess that's where I become more conscious of being different, when I'm walking in the streets you see or in America in the Mid-West where there's like two black people in the whole town. So you become conscious of it cause people like you just don't look like you. You know, it's not like they say anything or do something, but it's just that you're conscious, constantly aware of it. So those performances, and they're still going to go on, and there's going to be tons of them, because I have to do them over and over again, and then find a way of editing it so that it then builds one narrative of me with my dolls on the streets of Joburg and then get these women that own these small salons around Joburg to come and make me look beautiful while I'm sitting there. Because all those salons are born in the streets anyway in Joburg, in street corners, in passages, some rented corner there, and then have someone document that process in stills.

SK: What do you think is the relationship between identity and dolls – the dolls that we play with?

SM: I think for me there's certainly an affirmation of identity because for White girls, Barbie grows up and she has a career. Barbie becomes a doctor, becomes an astronaut, finds a nice guy Kenny, whatever his name is, and has a nice life. So it is something that White girls can aspire to, have a beautiful life. So it really is an affirmation of what is possible or what can be possible for, you know, in a way that for Black girls it isn't available that type of a role model (if Barbie is a role model). Cause she's had many careers hasn't she? She's been a president, she's been a doctor, princess, in some instances she's been a lawyer, she's been Angela Merkell, she's been Princess Diana, she's been this... So she's had many careers, you know, that are very powerful.

SK: And a question about your other series *Beyond Beauty: Sarah Baartman*. Can you tell me about the prevailing need to tell your mother's narratives and then in this work it seems that it's become inter-generational between Sarah, your mother and yourself?

SM: You know it's become quite difficult to ignore Sarah. It's extremely difficult because for me I'm interested in Sarah not as a victim, you know, because people have not been told the entire narrative, that she left on her own, that before she went to England she was already performing in the streets, she was already in shebeens and she agreed to go there, but then again you're looking at someone who was born into slavery, you know, that for her entering the world there was no other way that she could be besides being a slave and she stayed that way until she died. So what I don't know is if it is possible to have agency within that context of slavery? You know it's something that I need to think about quite a lot.

SK: Is this a question you're asking of yourself and your mum as well?

SM: Ja, that in this context is it possible for me to peel away all these other things and then just reach a stage where I'm just me, that I can create my own experiences that are not burdened by what I've inherited. I don't know.

SK: And the significance of needlework? Because you do a lot of it?

SM: It's penance.

SK: Penance. Okay.

SM: Ja. Penance. It's absolutely... I'm doing a work for Husein and it's overdue. Husein Mohammed. I was supposed to give it to him in February and I'm not finished. I'm not sewing. Uhhhh.

SK: [LAUGHING] I'm doing needle-lace and I promised a friend a work. She's even finished paying for this work.

SM: The same thing with Husein. Husein has paid, and I'm like "Husein I'm doing it", [LAUGHS] "I'm doing it".

SK: People don't realise how arduous needle-work is. You know we still associate it with that Victorian manner, sitting comfortably and sewing away as opposed to losing your eyesight. [LAUGHS]

SM: No for me, you know, it's my back. Because for me there's days when I'm full of energy and I can sit for eight hours doing it and I kind of lose myself in it, then I'm gone for two months. I do like two stitches and then I'm like no, there's other things coming. And that's why... but he's patient. [LAUGHS] But he'll get his work because I have to give him.

SK: But it's interesting you say that about the back because I suffer with huge neck problems because of my sewing and my eyesight has gone much worse because the needle-lace is so intensive and whereas with embroidery I can go on automatic, with needle-lace you're always calculating, and it's like "God, there's just not enough time in this life time" [LAUGHS]

SM: [LAUGHS] I have about thirty other pieces that I need to sew and finish and I'm like thinking "no, no, no". Because people... all the ones that I've done, I've made, now this is in the space of two years, I've sewn ten already you know, and I've sold besides the one that Husein's gonna get and the one that's going to France, I've sold all ten of them you know.

SK: Did you do needle-work at St Dominic's?

SM: Ja, as punishment.

SK: As punishment? Okay.

SM: If you didn't do something, you did that. They give you something to sit and sew.

SK: So masquerade and performance seem to be a strong elements in your work. Can you tell me more about this? What kind of tensions it creates? What kind of possibilities it creates?

SM: You know, I think for me it's more the possibilities of finding ways in which I can talk about me in my own way and develop a language talking about me. Without burdens.

SK: And using your own body allows you to do that?

SM: Yes. Cause I live in it, I can understand it much better than anyone else's body you know.

SK: And using your body for your mum?

SM: Using my body for my mother? [LAUGHS] I think with that I'm trying to say that the journeys we've had are kind of same. That we've had so many similarities, you know, in terms of things that we had to go through. I guess our experiences are a lot different because far as my mother she's quite shy-ish and withdrawn and most women that I know are like that. I'm like the complete opposite. I'm like a pitbull. [LAUGHS]

SK: Do you think the term 'mimicry' applies to your work?

SM: In what sense? Repeating experiences?

SK: Ja. Copying experiences...

SM: I don't necessarily copy them because it's quite difficult to repeat experience you know because you can only do a likelihood or something similar or re-enact.

SK: Can you tell me is there a common working methodology to all of the works that you create because you move between print-making, you move between photographs and a little bit of video, performance? So are they all quite separate or are they quite inter-related for you?

SM: I think they're ... Cause when you're still a young artist trying to find your own language it's quite difficult, and trying to move ... I guess for me I'm still in that level and I will get there were I definitely have a language. But for me labour-intensive work and the fact that I need to touch my own work and I need to be there physically is very important that's why I don't want to have processes that remove me from the physical experience.

SK: So your body interaction even in your 2-D work is quite important to you?

SM: Ja.

SK: Would you consider your performance an extension of that – a natural kind of extension?

SM: Ja, you know it probably is an extension. However my performances are never complete, you know they still aren't. I struggle with them, you know, with telling a story. And it's also because we need to be quite careful about creating work that is quite familiar. Cause there was a time when all the young Black women – well I'm not young anymore, Mary and them are young – were accused of sampling from the same idea, you know, because Mary and me, my Theodorah and her Sophie are two completely different. You know hers is available, theatrical, fantasy whereas mine isn't.

SK: I was quite interested in your *Comforter* video. Because like you said it's quite incomplete and then how you took that into the printmaking series and then it became quite surreal in a way for me, I don't know. Something about the *Comforter* series became surreal. So could you tell me a bit about the work and how it kind of evolved...

SM: In the video that I did, that comforter turning that doll brown black and then comforting. It was actually I think that was after I had read *The Bluest Eye*. Yes that was in Sweden already when I read *The Bluest Eye* again. Now I remember that because that's when I went and bought that doll and I turned it into black and I was talking to it throughout the performance.

SK: You turned the doll black?

SM: Ja.

SK: So it was a white doll?

SM: It was a white doll. And I went and I put brown face mask and I started singing to it. [LAUGHS] And comforting it. And for me I was in Sweden and I was incredibly lonely you know, so I guess it was my way of comforting myself and finding something, making something that was familiar. So I made this black doll for myself. [LAUGHS]

SK: And how do you think it evolved into the printmaking?

SM: Because it comes a bit later that. I guess again it was just a way of documenting it. Making sure that it has a life beyond the performance. Cause I still like to go back to doing that because there was a time you could find black dolls in South Africa but now you can't. They seem for some reason to be out of circulation. So I'm going to buy white dolls and turn them black again.

SK: Are there specific issues that you face as a woman artist and using your own body?

SM: No, I don't know. Maybe I haven't thought about that. I haven't thought about what those issues would be.

SK: Do you think there are any pitfalls with displaying the Black female body? Do these re-enactments, these restagings, parodies do they run the risk of exoticisation, of fetishism, especially when it comes to photography?

SM: I don't know unless I was doing most of that work in the nude, but I mean you don't need to be naked for the body to be fetishized, to go through that process. But I guess when you're producing work you need to accept that when you take it out there, that you can't control the interpretation of that work you know. Your intention might be something else but how it is read by someone else out there is completely different.

SK: How do you feel about being labelled 'African' and your work being labelled as 'African photography' or 'African art'?

SM: Well you know I've always thought of this simple way of sorting this identity thing you know, especially in writing and how they write about us. For me it's very important that I am here in South Africa, I work from here. There's a lot of 'me' walking around you know. So here I'm a lot less conscious of being different here, because I'm one of many. So I'm very well-positioned here. And then for me I am quite emphatic that I am an African artist because I do come from here. And I've never understood this thing of just wanting to be an artist cause you're always identified according to a place, you know. And then I don't want to in a situation where I peel off my identity and become nothing and constantly interrogating. You know what I've assembled and what I think I am, is okay for me to go forward, because then I guess as time goes on you change.

SK: What does identity mean for you?

SM: For me it's a process that will never be complete but as long as I'm in control of the process then I find some way of defining myself and be satisfied with that at the time.

SK: Do you think your work contributes to your understandings/deconstructions of identity?

SM: I make an attempt. I make an attempt cause otherwise, sometimes you become disillusioned, yourself, creating the work. I do make an attempt.

SK: What does it mean for you to be working in South Africa at the moment?

SM: It's extremely difficult. You know as I said in terms of sustaining this career successfully you know and keeping ... because it looks like no matter how hard you work you tend to be just flavours. They'll be crazy about Nandipha and no-one is writing anything about her at the moment, and then they'll be crazy about Mary and then she disappears. So we seem to be coming in and out, in and out but you're not finding Black women who sustain careers as long as your Sam Nhlengetwas and your Pat Mautloas and your David Koloanes. Otherwise I'm sure there were plenty of women that went through Rorke's Drift and who even had degrees long before us you know who've just disappeared. So it isn't easy. But for me it's important to stay in the field. I guess that's why I've gone the art history route cause it makes sure that I stay here. And I don't know if I want to become an art critic either. Or if I ever want to curate cause my entire PhD's going to be looking at curatorial practice and how those curators need to censor, you know, and consider the masses especially in the South African context where it is difficult to curate proper cause you don't want to piss off the masses like we've seen in *The Spear* and Mark Hipper in Grahamstown, Terry Kurgan, Ayanda Mabule in Cape Town, so there's all these examples in this country. The lines have already been drawn.

SK: And need to be re-drawn...

SM: Ja, they need to be re-drawn.

SK: So I have my last two questions. Can you tell me something about your artistic inspirations, like some of the artists who've inspired you, who you identify with in terms of content or methodology, technique?

SM: I mean I've looked at a lot of Christian Boltanski's work. He still is one of my favourite. Him and Marlene Dumas whom I speak to to this day cause she responds to my emails. Sometimes I catch her in the studio at two in the morning cause she's a workaholic. A lot of Judy Chicago's work, a lot of Stephen Cohen's work you know, as much as a lot of it I struggle to take it in you know because it's so in your face, so hostile, you know. I kind of enjoy the fact that he pushes so many boundaries with what he does. Because he wrote to me when I was telling Kim that I'm going to do the street performance, he's telling me that I need to get the lashes longer. [LAUGHS] Because if I was going to allow people to come and touch me, you know, and then apply make-up and take away things and put, then I might as well then become a freak because that's what I going to be perceived as once they're done with me. Ja, so it's normally those. And I like some of what Nandipha does. It's a pity she's not producing. And she should have continued producing.

SK: Producing in what sense?

SM: Her artwork.

SK: She's not making artwork? Really?

SM: [SHAKES HER HEAD 'NO'] And a lot of Nicholas Hlobo's work because he's like a machine. You know but I admire them, their ability to just go on, and not wait for inspiration. Because sometimes it takes a long, long time to come you know. And the one's that just work flat out, it will come, it will join you, doesn't matter, cause I guess that's what I suffer from. Long bouts of frustration where it is just difficult to put together an idea and just work, it's something that I just need to learn to deal with.

SK: Last question. How do you think growing up with a schizophrenic mother has affected you or contributed to who you are, and secondly, you yourself are a mother, how does that affect you as a woman artist producer?

SM: I think one thing this has taught me ... cause for many years when we were growing up it was such a big secret my mother's illness, we're not supposed to tell others, it's supposed to be hush, hush. And then I realised how much silence injures people, you know, and that even when they realise they are in a terrible position, this need to keep quiet to protect others, even at your own detriment, which is what I don't do these days at all. We'll see later. [LAUGHS] Deal with it later. I mean because now I realise how big a voice I can have if I just raise it a bit louder, you know, and shout. And someone will listen. And I guess it's important to have as much women believe that.

SK: And your kids?

SM: My daughter she solves her own problems and tells me about it later. [LAUGHS] She doesn't get bullied at school, never happens. Which is what I appreciate, cause she looks after herself, and she's very strong about that.

SK: Have they affected your artistic production in any way?

SM: Ja, I think in many ways. But I would never include them in my work. Totally opposed to photographing your own children. Why do you want to expose them? That's totally disgusting. Never put them in your work. Never. Keep them out.

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Follow-up Questions with Senzeni Marasela over email (sharlenefkhan@yahoo.co.uk):

S. Khan to S. Marasela, 12 August 2014: *Follow-up Questions and Images*

Dear Senzeni

I am coming to the end of the PhD and have to finalise the thesis by the end of August. To this end, I was wondering if you could give me some final help. There are very limited pictures available of your Theodorah Comes to Joburg series and usually low quality. Can you possibly send me some larger images of the whole series if possible (I would really like to produce more articles in future on your work as well and this would be very helpful). Also, could you answer these few follow-up questions with regards to your work:

- What are the various sites that Theodorah visits in 'Theodorah Comes to Johannesburg?' The only ones I've seen is a street in Fordsburg/Central Town, Hector Pietersen Memorial, a shop in Klipspruit and the Turbine Hall... Can you please provide me with the correct corresponding titles and years of individual pictures as well as the year(s) of series as a whole?

- The series with you, your mum and Sara Baartman – is that whole series called Beyond Beauty: Sara Baartman. Can you tell me the year(s) of the work?

- What is the title/year of the performance/video work(s) in which you buy black dolls and nurse them in New York and English? You also have prints of these – what are they called/year?

- Can you tell me a bit about your recent performance in dressing up every day in the same outfit? Rationale? Process? Responses (some White guy calling you ugly?...)

- Do you consider yourself a feminist? Or a Black or African feminist? Does this stance (a feminist or not) influence/affect the kind of work that you produce (in terms of content, process)?

I've attached a copy of the interview I conducted with you. Please have a look through and see if there's anything you would like to amend or remove from it – if this is so, can you make amendments/highlight removals in Track Changes. I will send a finalised copy of the interview to you for your records if you want.

Thank you for your assistance with this PhD project and, as always, your generosity of thought. I have become something of a fan of your work.

Kind regards
Sharlene

S. Marasela to S. Khan, 15 August 2014: *RE: Follow-up Questions and Images*

The year of that work is 2009 – 2012

My Dolls 2009. They were all made same year.

Theodorah

I visited sites from my Mothers stories. From Diagonal Street, Kliptown, Jeppestown, it were sights of trauma and other painful memories.

Or go to my twitter page @ArtistSenzeni more images lined up there. Even of Theodorah comes Johannesburg

S. Khan to S. Marasela, 4 September 2014 August: *Follow-up Questions and Images*

My dear Senzeni

I am finalising my thesis – despite my best efforts, I am really struggling to get consistent information about your Theodorah Comes to Joburg series. I'm attaching the images as they appear in my illustrations, with the info I have put in.

Please, please can I ask you to let me know whatever information is wrong – I really don't want to misrepresent your work.

Pdfs of images attached.

I appreciate your assistance in this regard.

Kind regards

Sharlene

S. Marasela to S. Khan, 4 September 2014: *RE: Follow-up Questions and Images*

I answer on the morning. Promise.

Nandipha Mntambo (NM) interviewed by Sharlene Khan (SK)

8 August 2013

Interview over Skype

SK: Thanks for the time again. I hope your presentation went well yesterday.

NM: It was fine, thanks. Sorry that we kinda missed each other. [LAUGHS] I guess eventually...

SK: Ja. I forget sometimes that I'm communicating with people on different time zones.
[LAUGHS]

NM: Ja, true.

SK: So where are you on residency.

NM: Uhmmm, in Umbria in Italy.

SK: Hmm, nice. Is the weather good?

NM: Pretty good. Sorry?

SK: Is the weather good?

NM: Yeah, yeah. It's really good, nice and hot. It's really pretty here so we're kind of like in a countryside in the middle of nowhere, which is nice, so enjoying it.

SK: [LAUGHS] That's good. How long are you there for?

NM: I go back home on the 2nd, so it's just a couple...ja.

SK: So, ja, uh, I'm just going to give you a few sentences on my research and...cause I'm more interested in how you respond about your work as such, so I'm just going to give you a brief sense of what my work is about.

NM: Okay.

SK: Uhmm, so I'm actually looking at masquerade and how a number of artists in South Africa have utilised masquerade in their artworks and, uhm, some of the reasons for that. And one of my contentions is that it's being used to interrogate identity categories that were fixed for so long in South Africa. So basically everything rotates around this idea of masquerade.

NM: Okay.

SK: And I'm looking at your work, Senzeni Marasela, Mary Sibande, Tracey Rose. So it's quite a small focus group as such.

NM: Okay.

SK: So, I don't know if you have the questions in front of you but I'll go through it with you and some of them will change depending on what you answer as such, so just feel free to talk and I'll try to keep it down to an hour.

NM: Okay, cool.

SK: Alright. So I would like to start with you describing the trajectory of your work over the last five years, so a little bit of how you entered the art field and where you are currently in terms of your art work?

NM: Uh, well.... [LAUGHS] Uh, I guess I entered the kind of commercial art arena as a student. I had a lot of interest in the exhibition. So at the time it was a bit daunting because I mean I was still in school and I had no idea about what the big art world was so I thought studying a Masters would probably be a good idea. Uhm, so I did that and had one or two shows during that time as well. Since then my [BREAK IN SKYPE TRANSMISSION] ...with Stevenson whose obviously my primary gallery, and right now I've started working with a Stockholm-based gallery called Andrehn-Schiptjenko and I just had a solo show with them which closes...which actually closed last week. And showing at Art Basel with them as well. So at the moment I suppose I think my career is going quite well. The collectors I have are people who buy work quite often. I think it's a growing list.

SK: Do you have a sense of which of your series has been most successful, and I mean in terms of your own expectations, your gallerist's, responses you've gotten from the public, uhm, your collectors, invitations you've gotten from other galleries.

NM: Uhm, actually it's a bit of a complicated question to answer because I think when I first started in sculpture the medium of cow hide became maybe my signature in a way, and you know my photographic series of the minotaur, the *Europa* and the *Zeus* series was quite successful but at the same time I have a waiting list for sculptures so I don't know...[LAUGHS] Ja, I don't know. [LAUGHS]

SK: So can you tell me about your use of cow hide in your work and how that has led on to your, your photographic and video work, and uhm, do you still think of yourself primarily as a sculptor?

NM: Uh, wow. Uhhhhh... [BREAK IN SKYPE TRANSMISSION]

SK: Hello, hello, hello?

NM: ...two dimensional sculpture... hello?

SK: Sorry Nandipha can you please start again. You just cut off a bit there.

NM: Uhm, I was saying that I would probably describe myself as a sculptor still. Even in my moving, photography or video, the three dimensional space has always been a pre-occupation. At this point in time I guess I'm still trying to understand how to give that illusion of three dimensionality on two dimensional plane or space. So I'm a sculptor and in terms of the cow hide usage, my interest in the material has strayed more into mythologies and how the animal/human divide still works. And so, uhm, at this point I think the body – animal versus the human – is more on my mind than the actual animal of the material.

SK: So by that you mean kind of the more animalistic responses we have as human beings, like more base responses? Or do you mean animals, animals?

NM: Yes. No, I think more the base human responses we have.

SK: Okay. Uhm, you seem to be interested in other stories, narratives from other cultures which deal with the metaphor of the bull like Greek and Hindu mythologies. Can you tell me more about that?

NM: No, I think that like I said the animal/human has been a big pre-occupation and for me within all kinds of cultures there, at different stages, has been mythologies and stories that connect animals and human beings, whether it be human beings [BREAK IN SKYPE TRANSMISSION] into animals or animals morphing into human beings or having like a half-half situation, that connection is there. And in terms of the animal cow, something that civilisation... [BREAK IN SKYPE TRANSMISSION]

SK: Sorry Nandipha you said that every civilisation, sorry...?

NM: Every civilisation has had some kind of relationship or connection to the cow, or the bull.

SK: Okay.

NM: So, uhm, you know, whether it be, I guess, Stone Age people and how they [unclear at 09: 40] bison and how they domesticate it. It's like the cow right now. We all have had some kind of connection to it. So, I guess the reason why I have a fascination with the animal is because of the fact that it's this thing that connects everyone in the world. So, ja.

SK: So, in your more recent work, masquerade and performance seems to be a strong element in your work. Can you tell me more about this and the kinds of tensions it creates in your work?

NM: Uhm, I think that again it probably starts with the whole thing of animal-into-human or human-into-animal, so those mythologies, where that very real element of us being one with the animal is more apparent than we make. Actually human beings have this need or pre-occupation to separate ourselves from the fact that we are animals. I think when I deal with performance and this idea of taking on different personae or different faces, it's centred around the idea of the morphing and changing, and connection between the animal and the human.

SK: Just related to that...

NM: Hello...?

SK: Just related to that... [LAUGHS]... Sorry it's a very dodgy connection. Related to what you're saying, what about stereotypes of black people, you know, colonial stereotypes which associated black people with animalisation?

NM: Uhm, well, I mean, I think that could be a possible reading of my work or something that people read into the work because I happen to be Black but it's never really been something that's on the fore-front of my mind. I don't clearly work in the realm of colour in that way, if that makes sense. So it's not my pre-occupation, it's not an interest of mine. Or a concern.

SK: Okay. Would you consider your work to deal with mimicry? Or what does that term mean to you?

NM: I think a lot of our lives is about mimicry cause we are taught social behaviour through mimicking other people whether it be our parents or our teachers or our friends. So from a very young age we are taught to mimic. And in terms of the way I suppose I grew up, I've had so many influences from all over the world and they have a huge impact on how I think, impact on how I view myself and on how I want other people to view me as well. And I think that performance of either the Other, or the performance of how you understand yourself is part of all of our lives. So...[LAUGHS], uhm, I don't think mimicry is something that you can separate yourself from, regardless of whether you understand it immediately or whether it's in your intentions to do. So I guess for me when I either take on the personae or language of Zeus or Europa or a bullfighter, it is that kind of consumption of the Other but an Other that's part of me at the same time, if that makes any sense.

SK: Uh-uhm. So related to that is the next question. In *The Rape of Europa* you become both victim and aggressor. Can you explain the roles you encompass and why you chose to identify with both and, relatedly, what does the self-rape signify and can you comment on the narcissism in the work?

NM: Okay. I think that we all have had situations where we are unsure of whether we are protecting oneself or to be fighting, and at the same time, I think that we all have situations where we have a recognition of a possible danger within either another person or a circumstance that we find ourselves in. So, the work, more than anything, was about that moment of recognition, that recognition of either bad elements of yourself, bad elements of other people. And, so that's why the two characters are actually engaging, looking at each other. Uhm, and it wasn't really about a self-rape, it was just like I'm saying, that recognition of danger, or a possible... uhm, ja, the recognition of putting yourself in danger basically and the recognition of the dangerous elements of yourself as well as a person, and the narcissism....it was about looking at oneself and understanding those kind of underground dark spaces of either your mind or your emotions that you don't just kind of put out there, you keep to yourself but are there. Kind of like the 'elephant-in-the-room' in a way.

SK: Okay, so I'm about to sneeze. [SNEEZES] [LAUGHS]

NM: [LAUGHS]

SK: Sorry about that. Can you perhaps explain if there's a common working methodology to all the different media that you work in? Are they different modes of expression for you? Or are they all kind of tied up with notions of performativity in some way?

NM: I think that all the work I have made has been pre-occupied with the whole idea of attraction and repulsion and how we understand, uhm, self-love or self-punishment, you know. I think when I first started working with the cow hide, I hadn't gotten a complete hold of the medium, and so it would be this really painstaking process. [LAUGHS] At the same time I was so attracted to what was going on whether it be kind of scraping away fat, or dealing with maggots, or dealing with smell...

SK: Oh God...

NM: There was something strangely attractive about it, and so that's why I [LAUGHS] continued working in this way. And I guess it started making me think about, uhm, I suppose the idea of self-punishment and then how one understands it. The idea of love and what it really means because surely if we love ourselves there are certain things we wouldn't put ourselves through, but we continue down these strange paths all the time anyway, you know. So, I guess it's what the work for me is about, that whole idea of attraction and repulsion and whether you can always tell the difference. Uhm, it's the line that so thin that sometimes what you think repulses you is actually what attracts you to something. So, I think, more than just kind of ways of working it's about that central core attraction-repulsion thing. Ja.

SK: So can you tell me technically how your *Europa* series was done? Uhm, and related to that how much performance goes into works like that versus the *Trocado* series for instance?

NM: Versus the what series, sorry?

SK: Your *Trocado* series? Your bullfighting series?

NM: Okay. Well with the *Europa* piece, uhm, that was done in my studio so we ...the make-up artist who came in and created the minotaur but using make-up and hair and prosthetics. And then shot that in my studio surrounded by a whole lot of plants. We kinda created the environment. The drooping vines was real...so that was how I had a strangely private thing that was done in the studio. And the bull fighting series in a funny way, although it seems quite public because of the space that we used to create the work, was also quite a private thing, because it was just me and my choreographer and the cameraman and the photographer who were there. And so using the space to create the spectacle, or I guess ourselves or me. Uhm, so both works have a very public-private life about them, I guess.

SK: How, how do you feel about performing? Uhm, does performance open up a space for you that, uh, two dimensional work doesn't or that sculpture doesn't?

NM: Uhm, performing [LAUGHS] I guess, pushes me out of my comfort zone. It forces me to deal with myself in a different way. Because, you know, in as much as I thought it would be fairly easy to make the video because we had been practicing for so long and, you know, I thought I would be comfortable with it but when it came down to actually you know... [LAUGHS] I panicked ... and so like the space of having to deal with the fact that I'm not really comfortable with certain things and I am scared of what I could possibly look like, whether it be possibly looking like a [LOST SOUND], or making mistakes or, you know, uhm.. So, performance helps me sort out myself critically whereas my sculptural work, two dimensional work is something that's more private, something that I, uhm ... something that nobody else really has to experience other than the end product, you know. I mean [LOST SOUND]...people, be it the photographer or the cameraman to create the performance of works is a different space cause you, you have to essentially be believable. You have to be you, so that you can do the job, [LAUGHS] I suppose.

SK: Uhm, are there any specific issues that you face as a woman artist, especially with regards to using your own body or nakedness in the work?

NM: Uhm...wow. When you say specific issues, I mean are you asking about, I don't know, people who said or done things? I don't know what you mean?

SK: Uh, okay, maybe I relate it to the next question as well. Do you think that there are any pitfalls with displaying the nude black body? Uhm, does say parody or critical re-depiction run

the risk of feeding exoticisations and fetishisms of the black body? Especially in photography I mean.

NM: Probably does...sorry? Excuse me?

SK: I said especially in photography.

NM: Uhm, I think it probably does. I suppose part of that answer would be that is why I very rarely use other people within my work because the politics of representation are still quite complicated, and even if one feels they're taking ownership or responsibility for how other people are viewing them in terms of maybe using your own body like I do, uhm, you're not really always in control of how people read things or how your work is interpreted. So, I'm sure there have been strange sort of uh, fascinations or fetishisations of my body. I don't know if it's all necessarily because I am Black or the fact that I'm a woman. I don't really know the specifics but I'm sure there has been...

SK: Okay, you need to forgive the generalisation of this question, but... [LAUGHS] do you...

NM: Sorry...?

SK: [LAUGHS] I'm going to ask you a very generalised question now, but feel free to answer as you want. Uh, what does your work intersect with wider social issues or political issues?

NM: Uh, it's not my first intention but I think because of the fact that we live in very politicised space, firstly South Africa is a very politicised situation, and also the world generally ... space where you can't escape politics, so even though it's not my sort of first thought or intention, the work is politicised and political because, ja, I use my own body which has its own politics, I use material which has its own politics as well and history, so ja, I don't think you really can escape politics. I don't think that there is an escape to it.

SK: And how do you feel about being labelled 'African' and your work being subsumed under the category of 'African photography'?

NM: Well, it is my situation. I mean I think the reality of the fact that I can't escape it is there. Uhm, it used to bother me a lot more when I was younger, but now not so much.

SK: And why the shift? [LAUGHS]

NM: [LAUGHS] Uhm, I don't know, I guess growing up and realising that there are bigger problems in the world. [LAUGHS]

SK: [LAUGHING] Okay that's a good response. What does identity mean to you and uh, do you feel that your work attempts to deconstruct identity in any manner?

NM: Uhhh, I think that more than kinda deconstructing it, my work challenges how we understand identity. Cause even before a lot of people knew that performance, even in South Africa actually, before people knew that I was a woman artist, by just looking at my work they had all these kind of perceptions and ideas of either what I would look like, what age I would be and all these kinds of thing, and, uhm, obviously the situation where people don't immediately understand that I may be female, there were these strange ideas that people had because sculpture is not something that a lot of women did at that time, I don't know, I guess maybe the visual language seemed very masculine. And at the same time, you know, because of how I was

educated, living in South Africa, our history, is very kind of world-based, very European-based, how we learnt art history at Michaelis was very European-centred, uhm things like [UNCLEAR AT 29: 07] and the programmes we would watch are, you know, from all parts of the world. I don't think that my identity, or at least how I understand it for myself, can be put down to a very African or South African space or idea. So, uhm, I think the work that I make is about that, and the fact that you can't really ... I don't think that identity is a simple thing to classify, so ... The work is about challenging this notion we have on identity or very clearly what identity means.

SK: Uhm, but what does it mean for you to be working in South Africa at this present moment?

NM: Uhm, wow. You know, I think that South Africa is in a very interesting, a special moment. People my age [LOST SOUND] and younger though experience the back end of apartheid are becoming, or at least are now, coming of age, we're voting, we are working in different spaces, so shaping the country differently and I guess, there's this like struggle between how older generation and how this newer, young generation people are wanting the country to work. So, I think we're in an interesting moment. I wouldn't want to be working or living anywhere else at this point in time.

SK: That's good to hear. [LAUGHS]

NM: [LAUGHS]

SK: Last two questions. Uh, maybe three. Can you tell me who some of your artistic inspirations are, and do you identify more with their content or style of the people you are thinking about? And what is the future direction of your work?

NM: Well I think the one person who really inspires my work a lot is Jane Alexander. I think if I hadn't worked with her and then she wasn't my supervisor for my Masters, my work would be very different. I think her understanding of the human body, her understanding of that complexity of the animal-human, understanding of, I guess, creating emotion. Her installations, uh, really influenced me a lot, and helped me a lot with thinking about my own work. I really liked Louise Bourgeois and how she, I guess, deals with space and human relationships and how her kinds of ideas of herself and her immediate environment filtered into her work. I really like Salvador Dali's work and his ideas of, I guess, bending reality and how he kind of creates these alternate worlds within his work. Ja, I think those three are my most favourite. And, in terms of the future of my work, uh [LAUGHS] I don't know, I mean I'm painting, I'm going to be doing a bit more print-making and I kind of ... I think I'm also going to be giving myself a bit of a break from sculpture for a while. And try...

SK: Is it...?

NM: Sorry...?

SK: Is it physically demanding?

NM: Uh, no it's just, you know, I think, I feel that something else needs to happen for me in terms of my understanding of especially cow hide I think. It's a very interesting medium, and I never want to stop working with it, but there's something that needs to shift in terms of how I use it and so I'm hoping that the break will give me an idea of what that shift could possibly be.

SK: And at the Standard Bank Gallery, at your, at your exhibition you had the paper works with the hair coming out of them. Can you tell me a bit more about those?

NM: Uhm, I think with those...I guess that my interest has always been the body. I started thinking how to depict or show the body differently and in a kind of like strange twist or shift of fate or, I don't know, uhm, I have this very big mirror in my house, in my apartment, and every time I kind of walked past this mirror I would be different parts of my body, in fact whether a shoulder, a finger, an armpit, you know, an earhole. And I started thinking about these humps and bumps of the body, these protrusions and concave spaces that make up the human body, and so the first drawing I suppose I was trying to understand those humps and bumps and shapes and also try to create a hairy three dimensional space. [LAUGHS] I don't know where it's taking me as yet...

SK: [LAUGHS] Oh well, ja. I think I've come to the end of my questionnaire. [LAUGHS]

NM: [LAUGHS] Oh, okay. Hope I answered the questions in a clear way.

SK: Ja, it's just the internet connection that was very bad. Is there anything else you finally want to say?

NM: No. [LAUGHS] Not really.

SK: [LAUGHS] Okay, super, thanks so much for your time.

NM: Okay cool. Ja, I mean if you need anything else, please let me know.

SK: Sure.

NM: Thank you and sorry about the miscommunication yesterday but...

SK: No, it's fine really. Even though it's just a one hour difference between the UK and the rest of Europe, or in South Africa, I'm constantly forgetting it.

NM: Ja.

SK: And it doesn't seem like a lot of time but it suddenly is like, oh, it's too late to call my parents. [LAUGHS] So it's quite silly but I just didn't take it into account. Apologies for that. But ja, thank you very much again for your time. I might have to send you the transcript when I transcribe the interview so you just look at and fill in any kind of words that I didn't catch right because of the internet connection, if that's okay.

NM: Okay cool.

SK: But it will take me a few months to transcribe it. [LAUGHS]

NM: Okay cool.

SK: Okay super, all the best for the rest of your residency.

Tracey Rose (TR) Interviewed by Sharlene Khan (SK)

Initial Skype interview was conducted on the 4th July 2014

*Rose was not happy with her answers when she viewed the interview transcript and has requested the interview not to be published.

D. Gunn (2014) *Interview Finalisation*, Email to S. Khan (sharlenefkhan@yahoo.co.uk), 23 September

Dear Sharlene,

I hope you are well. I am Tracey's gallerist and representative.

As Tracey has explained herself, she does not grant permission to use any version of the transcript of your Skype conversation in your thesis. I would therefore like to kindly ask that you exempt this text from any published form, now or in the future.

However, if you can send her a final list of questions, she will respond to them by email, in a way that can be transcribed into a clear, substantial text, which will be far more efficacious as an addition to your thesis.

I would also be grateful if you could confirm to us that you have received both our emails.

Many thanks and best wishes,

Dan Gunn

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