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Intimate archives // Autoethnographic acts:
Personal surfacings, creative agencies, imagined freedoms

Contents

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Editorial

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Intimate archives // Autoethnographic acts: Personal surfacings, creative agencies, imagined freedoms

> Sharing intimate spaces and stories – making them habitable in public – may be a way of breaking down distances between people in the imaginative realm that … cross[es] over into the realm of physical space, potentially opening up new ways of thinking and feeling as well as moving, acting and relating to others (Bystrom 2013:334).

In their introduction to the special edition of *Cultural Studies* in which authors explore the interconnected relations between private lives and public cultures in contemporary South African society, editors Kerry Bystrom and Sarah Nuttall (2013:310) use the term 'intimate exposures' to describe 'a set of diverse acts that involve revealing inner aspects and places of the self and self-making' that were previously suppressed under apartheid. As they contend, '[r]evealing inner lives … blurs common boundaries between public and private through a kind of spatial itinerancy, where things perceived to be properly confined to the home or domestic life surface in public spaces and become knitted into public discussions around these surfacings' (Bystrom & Nuttall 2013:316). Such acts of self-exposure or exposure of the private lives of others in the public realm are intertwined with the public and political realms, and, as such, can work to shape, or at least recognise, the presence of multiple public-private spheres (Bystrom & Nuttall 2013:308, 310).

As Bystrom (2013:336) notes, post-1994, South African academic and public interest in, and cultural production around, domestic, family and private life has grown owing to the shift in emphasis from the collective struggle towards examinations of selfhood to the focus on personal and subjective experience. In South Africa, narratives around personal, intimate or interior expression came to the fore in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of 1996, which placed private experience and testimony firmly within the public realm

(McGregor & Nuttall cited by Bystrom 2013:336). From this point onwards, a set of first-person narratives or 'autobiographical acts' (Nuttall & Michael 2000) emerged within the cultural sphere (Bystrom & Nuttall 2013:310). These narratives present a 'groundswell of personal stories … candid, intimate voices that replace the grand narratives of apartheid with a proliferation of micro-narratives …' (McGregor & Nuttall cited by Bystrom 2013:336).

Many of the articles in this themed edition emanated from papers presented, personal narratives and conversations that took place at the *Intimate archives//autobiographical acts. Personal surfacings as expressed through material culture* (2016)[1] Roundtable, hosted by the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre (VIAD) in 2016. A focus of the Roundtable was on how what are refered to in this edition as "personal surfacings"[2] (as they manifest in creative and/or everyday[3] cultural practices)[4] are routed through,

> performances of the self and the articulation of personal experiences, stories and images as well as private or interior spaces in which subjectivity gets shaped; [an intimate exposure] focuses on and circulates through feeling and affective life; it is profoundly invested in objects, commodities or 'things'; it is about movement and mobility; it tends to embrace vulnerability, risk and recombination rather than following a predetermined aesthetic or political arc (Bystrom & Nuttall 2013:308).

In light of the current turn towards examining ways in which colonial structures that underpin and are upheld within institutional spaces might be decentered within global and South African academies, authors in this themed edition explore how "personal surfacings", in their public intimacies as spaces of articulation and affective encounter, may grant visibility to, and/or potentially unsettle colonial structures and their constructions. As such, personal surfacings may be seen as spaces that create openings for, or opportunities, to make visual the structures of colonial logic. Rather than starting from a set of assumptions or theoretical critiques around the category of decoloniality (and decolonial politics), authors take the everyday practices of address – *which may or may not be decolonial depending on the relational enactments the involve* – as their points of departure. Drawing on coloniality's split between the public and the private realms as a starting point for critique, they offer and develop insight in relation to empirical examples by focusing on personal surfacings in the context of lived, everyday experience.

Authors consider how personal surfacings, as manifesting at intersecting points between private and public institutions, can be read both as expressions of personal and collective histories and narratives. These private and public institutions in which the personal surfaces include, but are not limited to, those of the home (furniture, objects, images, photographs, décor); processes of self-fashioning through the body (specifically hair-stylisation and dress); and personal-public archives. Authors engage with wider discussions around the role that personal surfacings, as manifest through their own

1. The Roundtable took place from 4-5 August 2016, at the FADA Gallery, University of Johannesburg. It was accompanied by the installation-based exhibitions entitled *The Arrivants*, and *The Front Room 'Inna Jo'burg'* (FADA Gallery, 30 July-28 August), by Christine Checinska and Michael McMillan respectively. At the opening, the artists collaborated on a performance entitled *Back-a-Yard*. As first-generation Black British artists, McMillan and Checinska both explore the emergence of a black British subjectivity that arose from Caribbean diasporic migration and how this subjectivity manifests in personal surfacings of the British-African-Carribean front room and masculine dress. Checinska's navigation of the invisibility of the immigrant African diasporic subject through the intersections of culture, race and dress is analysed in Irene Bronner's review in this themed issue, in which she provides a first-hand account of her encounter with this autoethnographic exhibition.

2. While Bystrom and Nuttall refer to "intimate exposures", in this edition, the term "personal surfacings" is used to denote aspects of the private-intimate-personal that are not necessarily acts of self-exposure, or acts that expose the private lives of others in the public realm. Rather, "surfacings" alludes to the uprising and consequent visibility of that which has been sublimated, hidden, buried, unseen, forgotten.

3. The term "everyday", includes a range of diverse, non-uniform personal and/or group experience/s, and as such, has the possibility to be read both in relation to the personal and the political.

4. The term "lived-experience" is used here to denote forms of asserting creative agency in daily life by 'subjects of action, subjected to power and law … [who] have a rich and complex consciousness; that … are capable of challenging their oppression' (Mbembe 2001:5-6). As Achille Mbembe (2001:5) notes, the complex phenomena of state and power take place in a material sense, as opposed to ways in which they are reduced in academic disciplines to abstractions such as "discourses" or "representations".

practices and lived experiences or those of other creative and cultural practitioners,[5] play in shaping senses of the self. As such, personal surfacings may be seen as moments where agency can be asserted through processes of making and remaking of identities and subjectivities in relation to particular temporal, geographic, socio-economic and political contexts.

Manifestations of personal surfacings, as they arise in everyday practices, may therefore be considered opportunities that enable processes of making and remaking of identities and subjectivities. Following Anthony Bogues (2012),[6] who considers agencies a means through which practices of what he terms 'freedom' may be enacted, I suggest that personal surfacings may (consciously or subconsciously) be *enacted, and critically read* as assertions of "creative agency". As opposed to the concept of "freedom" as it has been constructed in Western political philosophy and the history of thought, as a value and normative ideal, Bogues (2012:30, 43) proposes freedom as a critical human *practice; a creative activity* that is 'rooted and routed through a set of human experiences'. For Bogues (2012:43), there is no singular definition of freedom but rather a series of 'attempts to name practices in which humans engage within a set of activities'. As forms of creative activity, Bogues (2012: 41, 45, emphasis added) contends, practices of freedom operate through the 'radical imagination': they 'construct new ways of life for us as humans'; 'while political action and practice are always vital, the formations of new ways of life emerge from the ground of *humans acting, working, through politics,* to get somewhere else'.

Bogues draws a distinction between two practices of imagination. In the first, the work of imagination can be conceived of as reproductive; 'it reproduces our … everydayness, in ways that reinforce the various modes of our existence'. In this sense, the work of the imagination can serve to reinforce hegemony (Bogues 2012:45). Regarding the second practice, he suggests that, because the imagination is a 'faculty of capacity',

> the work of the imagination operates as critical thought. It imagines and breaks the boundaries/horizons of the status quo of the everyday. In this way, the imagination … produces new thought and desires … freedom is about these practices of self-creation, not as a telos of self-realization nor that of noninterference, but of a form of activity and human practice (Bogues 2012:45).

Similarly, creative agencies, as enactments of reproductive imagination, may be read in terms of the ways in which cultural practitioners engage, play with, uphold, or reinforce prevailing neo-colonial Northern and Western normative constructs (such as sexuality, age, race, gender, class) which are usually structured around a set of hierarchically ordered binary oppositions and the mechanisms of power that define and enable these

5. "Creative and cultural practitioners" may encompass individuals, collectives and sub-cultural groups that assert forms of creative agency as part of their daily lived experiences and/or group identities, as well as visual artists and designers, amongst others, working across a range of interdisciplinary genres and media.

6. I draw here on Bogues's influential work on what constitutes the human, freedom, human emancipation and the radical imagination, or what he terms the 'Freedom Project' (Bogues 2012:29). Bogues (2012: 29, 31) speaks of freedom specifically in relation to the 'traditions of the oppressed'. According to Bogues (2012:37), the 'traditions of the oppressed' or "archives of the ordinary" contain 'both the everyday and the various processes of humanization that the "native" and the "slave" enact to live. They also include the extraordinary actions that seek to rupture in large-scale ways any dominant order'.

constructs. Power is seen to involve those forms of social relations that are privileged (such as capitalism, neoliberalism, colonialism, imperialism, apartheid, patriarchy), and through which prevailing hetero-normative, naturalised or homogenous cultural[7] identity constructs are established, exercised, maintained and upheld. At the same time, creative agencies that draw on the imagination as a "faculty of capacity" may be considered in light of ways in which they can create openings or opportunities for decolonial interventions: moments in which these categorical constructs can be negotiated, subverted, ruptured or resisted, thereby highlighting the workings of, and questioning, the power-relations that they embody.

If read through the lenses of Bogues's conceptions of freedom and imagination, creative agencies are processes that can be understood as a form of 'relational politics'[8] (Hunter 2015), which produce newly configured subjectivities that may fall outside of normative racial, cultural and gendered practices, whilst also having the potential to assert, uphold, unsettle or counter them. The theme of personal surfacings, as openings for creative agencies and imagined freedoms, as articulated through the authors' personal voices, are interwoven throughout the articles in this edition.

Registers of intimacy

The edition opens with Sarah Nuttall's meditative piece in which she considers an array of registers within which the intimate, the interior, and the self-reflexive may be understood and read, both in and beyond contemporary South Africa. In her eloquent portrayal, these registers of intimacy are interwoven through the surfacings of self-hood, exposure, skin, opacity-transparency, reciprocity, relations between humans and plants and other-than-humans. Drawing on critical insights from academic inquiry in the fields of art and literature, and weaving these into a highly personalised narrative writing style, she sets up an imagined dialogue with the reader, evoking an intimacy between herself, the reader, and the material that is being reflected upon. In seeking out a 'new way of writing thought' (Nuttall 2017), Nuttall sets the tone for other kinds of intimacies that unfold through the authors' articulations of personal surfacings that are foregrounded through personal narratives, (re)collected lived experiences, (re) memorying[9] (Morrison 2007), histories and affect. As such, many of the writers present various forms of "non-traditional" academic writing, drawing on autoethnographic[10] approaches, narrative inquiry, or other forms of self-reflexive writing on their own or other cultural practitioners' artistic and everyday practices. Personal surfacings are therefore expressed through the material discussed,[11] as well as in the authors' approaches to narrative – becoming, 'part of the process of self-telling, that is, to expound an aspect of autobiography of oneself through narratives' (Tulloch 2010:276).

7. "Culture" is understood as constituted through the constructs of race, gender and class.

8. Hunter (2015:5) develops the idea of 'relational politics' in her work on the state as part of a philosophical project that develops a way of understanding how neoliberal neocolonial power, or what she calls 'neoliberal whiteness', works through affect and emotion to enact normative social relations through the collapse of the material and symbolic dimensions of the social. For these purposes, she defines relational politics as 'the everyday actions, investments and practices of the multiple and shifting range of people and other material and symbolic objects that make up the state' (Hunter 215:5). According to Hunter (2015:16), 'it is this real, messy and uncontrollable agency [generated through emotion and affect] constitutive of the everyday state' that challenges the normatively categorically ordered institutional practices of the formalised state. Everyday intimacies as enacted through dynamic intersecting relational investments in categorical positionings through power and vulnerability (classed, gendered, racialised, sexualised and generational) drive the dynamic politics of institutional life. They challenge Manichean categories by creating differently ordered material and symbolic practices via culturally constituted affect and emotion. Hunter thus provides a way of thinking about formal institutional life as relationally rather than categorically ordered, as always already imbued with practices and investments which potentially work outside of neoliberal neocolonial dynamics.

9. Toni Morrison (2007) explains the term "rememory" as the act of remembering a memory, of invoking a past reality, or of calling to mind something once known but forgotten. "Re-membering" signifies a reconstuction of memories that form part of self-making and self-knowing processes.

10. While Michael Fischer (1986) refers to autoethnography as 'contemporary ethnic autobiography', many alternative definitions exist, most of which are congruent with one another (see for instance Chang 2008; Denzin 2006). As a research method, autoethnography is appropriate to the thematic of this edition as it offers a reflexive account of personal experience that is

not only autobiographical, but also reflects the subject's understanding of her 'personal history [as] implicated in larger social formations and historical processes' (Russell 1999). According to Allan Munro (2011:161), because autoethnography falls within the paradigm of qualitative research methods, *it draws on the ontological position that the world is experienced and therefore can only be tangentially described and predicted. The epistemological strategy that goes with this ontological paradigm is one of interpretation rather than facts and definitive conclusions. Given this, the position of the researcher within his or her own paradigm needs to be embedded in the research process and taken to be part of that research process.*

11. Neville Hoad's (2007) theorisation of intimacy in an African context is relevant here. Hoad (2007:xxxii-xxxiii; cited by Bystrom 2013:352) notes that the term "intimacies" can serve as a *frame for negotiating those various scales of analysis (transnational, national, local, personal) in the language of imagination and affect … bypass[ing] many of the difficulties in talking about the socially mediated experience of desire and embodiment in a global context that have plagued the older … vocabularies of psychoanalysis, or anthropological reductions of these experiences to kinship patterns.*

12. Burke's installation comprises an extensive archive of objects, artefacts, memorabilia, usually stored in his Birmingham home. While his archive is a personal one, it also records a diverse history of African-Caribbean migration and settlement in Britain from the mid-twentieth century to 2015.

Autotopographies

> This is the story of a house. It has been lived in by many people. Our grandmother Baba, made this house living space [*sic*]. She was certain that the way we lived was shaped by objects, the way we looked at them, the way they were placed around us. She was certain that we were shaped by space. … Her house is a place where I am learning to look at things, where I am learning how to belong in space. In rooms full of objects, crowded with things, I am learning to recognize myself (bell hooks 1995:65).

In their study exploring the values behind archiving practices in the home, David Kirk and Abigail Sellen (2010) draw links between the role of sentimental artefacts which are kept (as opposed to objects that are accumulated) and the invocation of memory, the construction of identities, and the work of making a home "homely". Their exploration makes an important contribution to understandings of how living spaces become populated with objects that hold significance to their owners, and how individuals relate to, and self-identify through, those objects. Looking at ways in which people create a 'domestic topography of sentimental artifacts as an external expression of aspects of self-identity', Kirk and Sellen use Jennifer Gonzalez's (1995:134; cited by Kirk & Sellen 2010:10:6) notion of 'autotopography':

> In the creation of an autotopography – which does not include all personal property but only those objects seen to signify an "individual" identity – the material world is called upon to present a physical map of memory, history and belief. The autobiographical object therefore becomes a prosthetic device: an addition, a trace, and a replacement for the intangible aspects of desire, identification and social relations.

If adopted as an analytical tool for research, use of the term "autotopography" frames the home from the perspective of a unitary relationship between a person and their environment – a space in which identities, subjectivities and personal-collective histories are expressed through artifacts that carry emotional, cultural, religious and political values. This notion of the home as autotopography is borne out in Michael McMillan's and Shoni Netshia's self-reflexive (re)collections of their childhood homes (in London and Johannesburg respectively), as well as in Christine Checinska's reflections on her encounter with the artist Vanley Burke's personal archive that was displayed as an installation in the IKON, Birmingham, entitled *At Home with Vanley Burke* (2015).[12] In these authors' writings, the home is presented as 'a site for exploring individual histories, memories, traumas, feelings, desires and styles of living. It is about self-fashioning, and about forging or testing ties with specific and immediate others' (Bystrom 2013:336).

For example, McMillan reflects on the process of realising his installation-based exhibition entitled *The Front Room 'Inna Joburg'* (2016, FADA Gallery, Johannesburg). As an instance of spatial itinerancy, McMillan's staging of a recreated African-Caribbean front room offers a form of personal surfacings that enables members of the public to enter into the privacy of a living space, or as Meg Samuelson (cited by Bystrom & Nuttall 2013:316) puts it in relation to a different context, to imaginatively (and in the case of McMillan's installation, physically), '[walk] through the door and [inhabit] the house'. Here, the domestic interior – a space historically gendered as feminine – is exteriorised and made visible in the public realm of the gallery. In a gesture of hospitality, the artist welcomes the viewer into the personal space of his childhood, in which his emotions, memories and familial histories are embedded. In so doing, he invites the viewer to experience points of relation to, and identification with, their own relationally enacted lived-experiences. The interplay between these points of relation and the associations they may evoke, might spark, or indicate, points of sameness and difference between colonial and post-colonial contexts, potentially revealing multiple contingent senses of being-in-the world.

These (often entangled) points of sameness and difference can function on a trans-African-African diasporic level, as artifacts with colonial origins are adapted and transformed as a means of negotiating shifting forms of identity, frequently through process of cross-cultural exchange. They are made poignantly present through Netshia's discussion of the ubiqitous, "insignificant" crocheted doily, which featured prominently in the African-Caribbean front room, and similarly forms an important part of the décor in some South African black middle-class homes, such as the one in where Netshia grew up. From Netshia's reflections on the décor of her mother's home and that of a family friend's in Soweto, it becomes evident that, in both the British-African-Carribean and South African contexts, the doily, and the way in which it frames the objects displayed on it, become a means of conveying visual narratives of *respectability*: notions of selfhood, pride, self-respect, dignity, social status and good moral standing. In both contexts, use of the doily as a form of personal surfacing can be seen as an enactment of creative agency: a means of reclaiming personal and collective histories with a sense of ownership and pride and/or as a means of articulating respect for family values, cultural heritage and tradition.

In her autoethnographic account of experiencing Vanely Burke's archive, both in his home and at the IKON gallery, Checinska touches on ways in which artifacts can trigger affect by evoking personal and collective memories, sentiments and emotions. For her, the particular kind of African-Caribbean domesticity Burke references evokes processes of rememorying fragments of her childhood home in England, and the need for a sense of "at-home-ness", often charateristic of displaced diasporic communities. For Checinska,

Burke's archive acts as a catalyst to explore the relationship between personal-private-intimate and public-collective cultural histories. As a site of memory, Burke's archive; of personal surfacings in the form of "everyday" objects collected over time functions as a source of individual and collective knowledges. Imbued with value, preciousness, and forming traces and markers for memory, these objects become a means of revisiting and reframing fractured histories, providing an impetus to reflect, explore and articulate personal and collective narratives of adaptation and belonging.

Hair stories

In Shirley Tate's, Hlonipha Mokoena's and Edwin Mahandu's writings, Black hair and its stylisation is situated as a site self-fashioning; a transnational personal surfacing that can be read, albeit not uncontroversially, an expression of creative agency. Both Tate (a Black British woman of African-Carribean descent) and Mokoena (a Black South African-born woman) present autoethnographic accounts of "hair stories" – their life-long and on-going personal experiences of having to negotiate difficult questions around their hair in relation to racialised conventions and perceptions of beauty, appropriateness and acceptability. Their readings of "hair stories" as surfacings point to the symbolic, political, material and affective connections made between hair, "race", and racism within white regimes. These connections are often manifest through attacks on what, in white regimes, is considered to be natural Black hair's "unruly" strands, textures and styles. Tate and Mokoena point to the transnational nature of these attacks in their analysis of, and reference to, case studies of Black school children in South Africa, the United States and the United Kingdom, who have been victims of institutional racism for violations of conduct in relation to their hair and its stylisation. The examples they cite show that Black natural hair is vulnerable to political, aesthetic, psychic, social and affective attack by the ideology, politics and practice of what Tate (2017) refers to as 'the white/whitened state' as it operates through school policies.

Mokoena (2017) uses the incident at Pretoria Girls High School in 2016 as a departure point for her complex and nuanced reflection on 'the volatility of Black hair', both in South Africa and elsewhere. She posits the (arguably) controversial claim that the politics of Black hair are reproduced not only by regimes of whiteness, but entrenched in cosmetic consumption, American media and pop-culture and within black communities themselves. In so doing, Mokoena foregrounds how practices of self-fashioning through hair-stylisation can uphold, unsettle or counter normative racial, cultural and gendered practices. At the core of her argument lies the assertion that

the black "hair story" is a new mode – enabled by YouTube, vlogging and other social media – through which young Black women express their rejection of the conformity that is often implied in social and written regulations of their hair.

In his portrayal of hair and hair-stylisation as it features in Tendai Huchu's novel, *The hairdresser of Harare* (2010), Mhandu presents an alternative to the conventional tradition which Tate and Mokoena draw upon, in which hair-stylisation is seen as site of struggle and contestation, and is inextricably interconnected with racial constructs. Rather, he argues, hair-stylisation, as a form of self-fashioning and an assertion of creative agency, demonstrates an individual's capacity to identify with, relate to and experience "the good life"; to participate in the 'Art-of-Living' (Veenhoven 2003 cited by Mhandu 2017) and other versions of human flourishing in a multi-ethnic environment. As such, he posits, hair-stylisation is an expressive genre that has the capacity to carry messages that enrich the self in various spaces of dialogue, and which can convey meaning to, and of, the self.

Self-making, self-telling

In his reading of the artist Zanele Muholi's series of self-portraits entitled *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2016-), Ashraf Jamal (2017) puts forward the provocative contention that this body of work – in which Muholi photographically theatricalises and enacts facets of her Black identity – presents a 'vital alternative to a programmatic and reductive identity politics'. In contrast to ways in which Muholi's image-repertoire has largely been defined through a racially and sexually determined readings, which run the risk of reductiveness, Jamal contends that in this series, Muholi takes an unflichingly personalised approach to exploring and articulating her Blackness. While the politics of race and sexuality remain central to her project, in this series, the need to redefine and re-imagine the Black body is foregrounded. In Jamal's view, here Muholi is working against a reactionary return to black essentialism, the rendition of "tropes of Blackness" (such as the "Black body in pain"), and the concomitant racial divisiveness which the return to black self-determination has fostered, by adopting a deeply self-reflective, yet simultaneously playful approach.

As Muholi notes, 'in *Somnyama Ngonyama*, I have embarked on a discomforting self-defining journey, rethinking the culture of the selfie, self-representation and self-expression'. Yet, while her images are clearly self-portraits that comment on the 'dailiness of self-fashioning' (Jamal 2017), they also reference the collective, in that each photograph is a commentary on 'a specific event in South Africa's political history, ranging from the advent of the mining industry, to the fame (or infamy) of the "Black

Madonna", to the massacre of miners at Marikana; from family to society and back again'. In Jamal's (2017) reading, through these seemingly 'self-consciously pleasurable re-enactments', Muholi has arrived at a '"radical moment", where blackness [is presented] as innovation and pleasure, freed from a grotesque history of hurt' (Jamal 2017).

Kent Williams also offers an alternative reading in her analysis of artworks by Judith Mason and Wanja Kimani, both of whom feature the dress-as-motif. Instead of reading the dress as a signifier of femininity, and positioning it in terms of the conventional macro-political (gendered, cultural, racial and socio-economic) identities it might evoke, Williams explores the concept of dress as mediator or interface through which multiple surfacings of the self are activated. For both artists, the dress becomes a site through which to express and negotiate narratives of personal pain; a vehicle through which to engage ideas of loss, trauma, memory and belonging. Tracing the dress through the notions of address and redress in relation to Mason's and Kimani's work, Williams evokes the dress as a site of tension, where various narratives of the self intertwine.

Past-present, public-private

Personal and collective processes of refiguring the 'self' may be linked to Hal Foster's (2006 [2004]) concept of the "archival impulse" – the idea that by confronting the archive, new systems of knowledge can be created. Albeit in differing ways, Maureen de Jager's, Siona O'Connell's and Andrew Hennlich's writings offer glimpses into how personal or autoethnographic narratives might work to counter, present alternatives to, or address omissions in, so-called "objective" or "truthful" accounts contained in officially sanctioned historical archives. All three writers point to the importance of, and issues surrounding, addressing the apartheid archive in the production and presentation of "different kinds of knowledges". In addressing the apartheid archive, they reflect back on the past from within the present, whilst looking towards the future-to-come.

In her reflective piece, de Jager '(re)focuses' on the trauma of the South African War (1899-1902). Her encounter with the War is refracted through different sets of archives: her great-grandmother, Maria's, handwritten 56-page memoir, in which she recounts her experience of having been captured by British soldiers in 1901 and interned in the Winburg Concentration Camp, and documents contained in the Western Cape and United Kingdom National Archives. These offer critical accounts of the War, but do so through the lenses of colonial agendas and ideologies pervasive at the time. Similarly, Maria's narrative does not portray an unequivocally truthful experience, but rather, as De Jager (2017) puts it, 'the visage generated by her own sense-making, mediated by time and language, to be mediated again and again by the reader's interpretative lenses'.

De Jager's own ambivalent apprehensions of the War, and her positionality in relation to it as a white woman of Afrikaner descent, is mediated through these 'partial' accounts. For her, 'refocusing' – the act of looking retrospectively at the past from constantly shifting viewpoints in the present – is a form of 'doing history' (De Jager 2017): a mediated, subjective, embodied experience that simultaneously locates and dis-locates her in relation to the personal and public archives she engages with.

Hennlich shows how, in her collage-based artwork, South African artist Julia Rosa Clark similarly conceptualises new connections between past and present. Driven by what she terms 'traditions of improvised practice' (Clark cited by Hennlich 2017), Clark's obsessive collections of everyday objects, of junk, of the thrown away and throw away, forms the primary medium and content of her work. In his engagement with Clark's archival practice, or 'collector's asylum' of the discarded and the disposable, Hennlich (2017) explores what he calls the impetus to 'work through the materiality of the object', and, in so doing, to 'invent new readings borne from the object's contact between past and present, personal and public'. In this process of to-ing and fro-ing, the present is haunted by the past and vice versa. This reciprocal 'haunting' takes on particular relevance in relation to objects that bear reference to South African history: Clark's repurposing of the discarded remnants of colonialism and apartheid reconstructs a sense of perpetual haunting that, in contemporary South Africa, remains ever-present. Perhaps, then, the Clark's repurposing might be viewed as a response to Bogues's (2010) notion of 'historical catastrophe', where the events of the past reverberate in, and work to shape the present.

O'Connell looks at what Bogues (2012:36) calls the 'archive of the ordinary' – an archive that reflects what Walter Benjamin (cited by Bogues 2012:30) calls 'traditions of the oppressed'. As O'Connell (2017) notes, the archive of the oppressed prompts recognition of the modes of survival of those who were dominated, and consideration of 'how they reconstructed/reconfigured a world for themselves in which they could see themselves as human'. O'Connell's focus is on the "ordinary" lives of those racially oppressed under apartheid, as pictured through the lenses of street photographers working for the "Movie Snaps" company in Cape Town from the late 1930s to the early 1980s. In her analysis of images depicting South Africans historically designated as "Coloured" and "Black", O'Connell shows how, despite their subjugated status, the subjects' pride in their form of dress, awareness of fashion and dignified poses reflect a claim to "humanness"; they portray individuals as they wish to represent themselves be seen, particularly within visual narratives of respectability. In these instances, personal surfacings become a means to negotiate, challenge and/or assert a form of independence from colonial, western images of dehumanisation, degradation, objectification and disempowerment. O'Connell (2017) thus sees these cameo performances of identity, as captured by Movie Snaps, as imaging the creative agency of humans who 'carved their own lives and

moments of freedom'.

It is, perhaps, in the intersecting spaces between the vectors of personal surfacings, creative agencies and their relation to Bogues's (2012) conceptions of "imagination" and "freedom" that the relevance of the writings featured in this edition lies. In their pluralities, their discontinuities, and their public intimacies as spaces of articulation and affective encounter, personal surfacings may provide opportunities for the enactment of creative agencies that, in turn, might suggest ways of rethinking of humanness and freedom. Creative agencies that draw on the imagination as a "faculty of capacity" might be considered as catalysts for the creation of openings or opportunities for decolonial interventions: moments in which categorical binary constructs and the power relations that these embody can be negotiated, subverted, ruptured or resisted. Recognition of archives of the ordinary, such as Burke's "archive of the self", McMillan's recreated front room, Netshia's rememorying of the role of the doily in her childhood home, or Muholi's reconfigured archive in which she fashions herself on a daily basis, provide glimpses of how freedom might have been, or is being, imagined, in terms that are not necessarily conducive to understandings through critical analysis alone. As such, instances of personal surfacings are of critical importance in that they may challenge the ways in which knowledges of the past, and of the present, are produced. In light of South Africa's fraught historical legacies of injustice, personal surfacings enable possibilities for social transformation by opening up space for those excluded from, or marginalised in, colonial and apartheid archives to "reclaim the past" through acknowledgement of their voices and experiences, and prompt the telling of different narratives and alternative histories of thought that can offer insight into larger questions of humanness, self-representation and imagined freedoms.[13]

13. I thank my colleague, James Macdonald, for his careful reading of, and insightful input into, this editorial.

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Intimate lives, interior places

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ABSTRACT

This is a meditative piece on intimacy, exposure, skin, opacity and relations between human and other-than-humans. It is a reflection in various registers on ways in which intimacy can be understood, drawing on a set of interleaving instances from theory, art and literature. It is an experiment with form which makes use of critical insights from academic inquiry, but which moves closer to ways in which we often think and feel, not always attended to by academic writing. It adopts a mode of writing which offers an imagined dialogue with the reader, as it invites the reader closer to the material being explored. Thus it invokes an intimacy of form intended to renew the search for ways of writing thought.

Keywords: Intimacy, selfhood, opacity, disentanglement, human-plant, other-than-human.

Intimate life, or intimacy, is never only about selfhood, self-exploration, or self-scrutiny. It always involves another – someone who, having been brought into the sphere of trust, can be talked to and is disposed to listening. It is always a matter of disposition and reciprocity.

At the same time, until recently, the sphere of the intimate only existed in relation to that which had to be guarded against, or concealed from the public. It was understood that the human subject did not need to reveal herself in her "natural state". Public life and its dominant codes of decency required of her that she wear a mask, that she keep for herself and a trusted few her frailties, vulnerabilities and fantasies, especially those deemed embarrassing or shameful.

As a consequence, the intimate sphere was a space of relations that were off-limits because they dealt with inner experience and private life. Through the sharing of

secrets, of that which had to be concealed, a person became bound to some others while being protected from the world at large. An intimate sphere promised warmth, disclosure, saying what one really meant, the expression of vulnerability as a means of getting closer and closer, even a fusion of selves. Although social and cultural, the sphere of the intimate was nevertheless located on the outskirts of the public.

Such a highly-stylised understanding of intimacy has been dominant in Western philosophical traditions. The invocation of democracy posited the need to screen off personal identities and desires in order to pursue a disinterested common good through rational discourse. Here, intimacy has been both a cult object and an object of suspicion. During the twentieth century, it was embraced as an ideal, yet critiqued as the fulfillment of the dominant cultural ideology, a retreat from worldliness as well as a lazy accommodation to the strangeness of everyday life under late capitalism. A similar ambivalence has characterised modern South Africa in many respects, but with a number of different historical inflections. The denigration of the private was a crucial dimension of apartheid – and of the political struggle against it.

The writer and critic Njabulo Ndebele associates intimacy with having a home in the first place. In his essay "A home for intimacy" from 1996, he invokes the demolition of homes, forced removals to strange places, forms of temporary, makeshift living, and a shared experience of homelessness, shaped by loss and the desperate need to regain something, in the lives of black South Africans. All of this amounted to the 'forced jettisoning not of the inner self' but of the conditions for intimacy to flourish, he writes. In terms of political struggle, the finding of a home for intimacy became a matter of seeing home as 'some concept belonging to some historic process, some sense of historic justice, assuming, on the day of liberation, the physical space of a country'. Building a home meant building a country. In 1996, he claimed that country by living in it for the first time without interruption ('the fear of being stopped') and challenge ('the challenge to my existence'): 'This is my newly found home; not a building with rooms but a country full of people, trees, mountains, rivers, factories, farms, mines, roads, the coastline, parliament, schools and universities, military bases, the museum, the art gallery' (Ndebele 1996). Kerry Bystrom, reflecting on Ndebele's essay in her own essay "Johannesburg interiors", writes that while pouring one's energies into building a free country is in many ways the culmination of a dream, Ndebele insists that it also 'carries a risk of losing or perpetuating the loss of intimacy shaped within individual homes and families' (Ndebele cited by Bystrom 2013:338). 'Can there be any society without private lives, without homes where individuals can flourish through histories of intimacy?', Ndebele (1996) asks, and then concludes: 'Public intimacies do need private intimacies'.

And so begins a complexly patterned movement between exposure and concealment, between searching for connection and acknowledging distance in post-apartheid culture. For many artists, this has meant a drawing on racial and gendered identities and histories without sacrificing opacity or promising full access to the self. It has meant, too, the drawing of erotic life into the public, making sex ordinary, tracing occluded routes of desire.

Underwritten here is the other political life of intimacy: the coming close to the body of the enemy, the victim, in murder, crime or rape. Here, politics moves into the body, leaving its traces all over the face or body of a neighbour, a stranger, a young woman, a gay man. Is it that our understanding of intimacy itself has been too narrow? Does intimacy rely, in turn, on too narrow a definition of the human? Should we not also include within the scope of the human – or for that matter the intimate – the inhuman, the darkness to be found in the innermost recesses of the self, a force that drives acts of cruelty and a deep degradation of others? Here, intimacy is the unconstrained explosion at the core of the human. More than this, we must also think of intimacy with, and as, a form of energy within, the other-than-human, a manner of thought I return to further on.

The artist Penny Siopis (2014:261) recently described exhibiting her early, now famous work, *Melancholia* (1986) as like 'crying in public'. It is a phrase that speaks powerfully to South Africa's post-"truth and reconciliation" years. Yet, 30 years on, to evoke intimacy as a public act, one needs to pay attention to major shifts in the conditions of our age. What was once considered shameful or indecent is no longer so. The self, including its modes of secrecy, is increasingly enmeshed with things, as a kind of prosthetics. We live increasingly under conditions of almost total visibility: there are more apparatuses of surveillance and tracking, certainly, but there is also an increase in willing self-exposure. More and more, too, one enters the realm of the intimate as a pre-scripted figure, with the image as a surrogate. Surrogate intimacies emerge everywhere.

If intimacy has been indexed via two broad questions – of embodiment and of desire – it sometimes seems as if we now live in an era more often characterised by disembodiment. Visual images no longer seem to need any referent; technologies of the image are said to have eviscerated the real and to have liquidated reference. The technologies constituting subjectivity and intimacy shift radically, and in the shift to the digital, the embodied human being is gradually displaced by more abstract regimes of code and different standards of subjectivity and vision. Does intimacy increasingly play and perform along a set of surfaces? What kinds of interiors, or interiority, does it then presuppose, what sort of relationship to privacy – and to new publics? What

is the relationship between expressions, invocations and figurations of intimacy and contemporary rubrics of secrecy, transparency and opacity? These are some of the new considerations on the status of the self and on the changing conditions of intimacy that we need to undertake.

Secrets, transparency, opacity

One way of approaching the contemporary lives of intimacy is by considering what a culture deems private or secret at any given time. 'Even private secrets of the most intimate kind are inevitably linked at some level to sociality and to living in a world together with others', Don Kulick (2015:241-242) writes. 'Because secrets are social, they are also socially distributed. Some groups of people come to be expected to have few or no secrets; while other kinds or groups of people are expected or even required to have secrets'. The Cold War years were coloured by the McCarthyite insistence that gay men and lesbians were inherently and dangerously secretive, duplicitous, treacherous and threatening; in the era of Donald Trump and the alt-right, the same applies to Muslims. The desires and inner lives of adults with significant physical and/or intellectual disabilities, the focus of Kulick's research, are often regarded by non-disabled people as 'mysterious and perhaps inaccessible, implying a kind of invisibility and concealment that is fundamental to the notion of secrecy' (Kulick 2015:241-242).

Life in South Africa after apartheid has been characterised by the pouring out of what used to be concealed or repressed. Autobiographies, blogs, documentaries, radio talk shows, lurid exposés, love dramas and sex scandals: dramas of the body in public. What formerly remained confined to the bedroom and the kitchen has exploded into public culture. At the same time, there is a privatisation of what was previously a state project: urban segregation. Gated communities, secured shopping districts, and security walls attest to the paradoxes of desegregation and re-racialisation. Meanwhile, the demand for homes by those who do not have permanent and legally recognised private spaces to protect has intensified. The Johannesburg architect Sarah Calburn (2010:66) writes that urban dwellers are still 'both hiding and hidden from each other in the franchised, car-bound landscape, where the "public" is characterised as criminal simply because access is denied to everything except the leftover space'. We move continually 'between interior spaces, eyes wide shut' (Calburn 2010:66). Under such conditions, she asks, why not conceive of our cities as large interiors in which we are all welcome? If this were so, an urban space previously composed of impenetrable surfaces would become instead a string of openings or lounges. It would be an 'affective substrate' (Bystrom 2013:335) for an alternative urban vision, yielding or forcing open the closed city.

Intimacy, secrets, privacy, a sense of interiority, the interiors of a home each exist in relation to surfaces, exteriors; they operate as opacities in relation to transparencies. What can a surface do or be, Anne Cheng (2009) asks, when it is not just a cover? Siopis (2010:462), in her movement from an exploration of trauma or wound as a figuration of depth, to a new painterly attention to skin surface, writes that a 'certain depthlessness' is a key to the production of the new. Skin itself is an ever more complex embodiment of the relationship between our interior and exterior lives. We think of the skin, Rachel Hurst writes, as revealing our interiors regardless of our wishes. We also adhere to a notion that our skins fail to reveal the entirety of our being. 'Skin is a remarkably vulnerable yet often an opaque obstacle between the self and the world. It fails to consistently conceal or disclose the interior life' (Hurst 2015:151).

In the cosmetic surgery patient, as with the body builder and the self-lacerator, we see aspects of what Steven Connor (2004) has called a 'skin mirror'. A "skin mirror", Hurst (2015:156) elaborates, embodies the fantasy of 'an exterior without an interior through the seamlessness and rigidity of its surface'. The self-lacerator makes an intentional mark. Both this figure and the cosmetic surgery patient share a desire to 're-establish their psychical containers as intact' through the intentional breaking through, and reparation of, their skins (Hurst 2015:156). Others, including Claudia Benthien (2003) and Virginia Blum (2003), have argued that an earlier understanding of the body as a house has been replaced over the course of the last two centuries by the idea of the body as a dress. Instead of skin as a window-orifice, we think of skin as a permeable site of exchange. Cosmetic surgery makes use of both: for example, the repair and maintenance of the skin-house could be compared to middle-class ideals of respectability through the upkeep and repair of one's property (Hurst 2015:178). The skin-as-house metaphor marks the subject as separate from others through walls and barriers, whereas the skin as dress metaphor marks the subject as separate from others through individuality and expression of identity through appearance. Both metaphors hold 'pure exteriority as an ideal to be achieved' (Hurst 2015:175).

In the realm of psychodermatology, psychic distress is no longer conceptualised at the level of interiority, but is exteriorised onto the skin's surface. The dermal, like the photographic, Hurst and others have shown, each, and together, fantasise dramatic personal change through transforming the body's surface. The intractability of the body is disavowed and becomes a source of personal frustration and personal failure. In thinking about cosmetic surgery, photography and skin, we can think through the implications of surface imagination for contemporary conceptualisations of embodiment (see Hurst 2015:187-188).

Notions of skin, especially within contexts of late market capitalism, as a surface, a screen or a slate, the desire of the self to be an object, co-exist with more narrative-based

formations – what Connor (2004:90) refers to as an 'archipelago of meaning, experience and memory': the earliest interface through which we encounter otherness, and difference, a reading by others at the point of exchange and connection between our interior psychic lives and our exterior social world.

We might think about intimacy, intimate archives and autobiographical acts, then, in relation to notions of the secret and the private, but also via imaginations of surface and underneath, interior and exterior. A third set of indices for thought about the contemporary lives of intimacy, or intimate exposures, relate to notions of transparency and opacity. Édouard Glissant, in his essay entitled "For opacity" asks: what would it mean to demand the right to opacity? What about 'those times when the topicality of the question of differences (the right to difference) has been exhausted'? He goes on to say that the theory of difference is invaluable because it has allowed us to struggle against 'reductive thought', but that difference itself can still contrive to reduce things to the 'Transparent' (Glissant 1997:92).

Glissant opposes a 'transfer into transparency', arguing that respect for mutual forms of opacity seals the impossibility of being Other, making it impossible to reduce anyone 'to a truth he would not have generated on his own'. The opaque 'is not the obscure, though it is possible for it to be so and be accepted as such. It is that which cannot be reduced' (Glissant 1997:96). Opacity, writes Elvira Dyangani Ose (2015:169), reflecting on Glissant, refers to the possibility that every individual be plural and mutable. In that respect, she considers, we are in one way or another single islands in an all-encompassing world, a 'meta-archipelago, centreless and boundaryless'. Here she recalls Umberto Eco's (2015) notion of the 'open work', which he refers to variously as a field of possibilities, a series of sequential permutations, a complex structural polyphony, susceptibility to many readings while not impinging on its specificity, and an exposure of the work to the maximum possible openings versus closing it into context. Eco invokes a work's 'broken surfaces', and the important thing is to prevent a single sense from imposing itself at the very outset of the receptive process (see Eco 2015:70). For Ose, Glissant's poetics of relation is a poetics of the open work.

How else could we characterise opacity as artistic form? The London-based Otolith Group produced a film entitled *Nervus Rerum* (the nerve of things, in Latin), in 2008 that directly references Glissant's notion of opacity. The Otolith Trilogy is known for its exploration of the critical potential of the "essay film" – a 'distinctive mixture of documentary and dramatic imagery accompanied by poetic, historical and often autobiographical narration that works to disrupt clear boundaries between fact and fiction, subjectivity and objectivity and the real and the imaginary', writes TJ Demos

(2009). *Nervus Rerum* takes as its subject the Jenin refugee camp in the Palestinian Occupied Territories. It confronts the problem of the representability of a people confined to a geographical enclave by a longstanding military occupation. Demos shows how the essay film brings visibility to the camp without positioning the camp's Palestinians as transparent subjects of a documentary exposé. Avoiding anthropological insights and cultural access to Jenin's inhabitants, the film, Demos writes, is ruled by the right to opacity. It takes us to the 'conundrum of representing Palestine'. The camera glides about as if 'undistracted and unconcerned by individual figures, people ignore the camera, eyes of the camp's figures and the viewers never meet', never become a site of mutual recognition (Demos 2009:114). The film, Kodwa Eshun of the Otolith Group says, does not give up on intimating the psychic and spatial conditions inside the camp, relaying the horror of enclosure that permeates the camp's ambience by offering an 'intimacy without transparency'. It constructs 'an opacity that seeks to prevent the viewer from producing knowledge from images' (Eshun cited by Demos 2009:19).

Opacity as form, then, could be approached through the notion of the open work, conceptualised by Eco, elaborated upon by Ose and others, or through the idea of non-representation. One might further ask whether Eco's open work is so open that it is closed; and one might consider that the refusal to represent difference in an economy that produces a form of depoliticised transparency reaches its end point in the impossibility of the image. Consider South African photographer Michael Subotzky's (2017) reflections on a recent show of his photographs, in conversation with Lwandile Fikeni: 'In *Retinal Shift* I smashed my own photographs. In retrospect, by doing this, I put my own violent feelings into the photographs themselves because I was frustrated that my images of violence could be put on a gallery wall and consumed for their beauty'. Subotzky finally disavows photography as a practice with which he can continue: 'I have come out completely from the world of making photographs' (his new work is a fictional film). Elsewhere in the interview (2017), he says, 'I feel like I have lost faith in photography, or at least I have lost interest in practicing it myself'.

If the poetics of relation offers a way in to thinking with opacity, and enables us to elaborate a set of analytical pathways in relation to transparency, difference, form and intimacy, I turn in the next section to recent debates in South Africa, partly in the wake of decolonisation movements, about the poetics and politics of *non-relation*.

The refusal of reciprocity

Investigating what Lisa Lowe (2015:18) calls the 'political economy of intimacies', a recent collection of essays published in South Africa explores race and friendship. The essays in the book map the overlapping genealogies of liberal colonialism, discourses of affection and the bonds of intimate ties as they relate to settler colonial governance, the codifying of racial difference, white supremacy and anti-blackness. Rather than assume that cultural entanglement necessarily disrupts or diminishes difference, the editors, Shannon Walsh and Jon Soske, are interested in the inverse: how intimacies expressed through friendship produce and structure difference. In examining friendship, *Ties that bind: Race and the politics of friendship in South Africa* (2016) engages with emerging critiques of non-racialism, an idea often treated as uniquely South African; with critiques of solidarity, and with a *politics of refusal* – that is, 'the ethical and political rejection of the gift of friendship, a refusal that includes rejecting what is deemed good, rational and sensible by a given social order' (Walsh & Soske 2016:5).

Although committed ultimately to the possibility of friendship across race, authors featured in this book draw energy and analytic edge from a widespread rejection of relationality infusing student movements and calls for decolonisation in South Africa. Drawing on Afropessimist lines of thought, the editors argue that thinking about white supremacy and anti-blackness requires that we 'confront a relationality that exceeds the language of relation: the constitutive violence of settler civil society works to render full, ethical reciprocity between white and black – that is, friendship in the classic, Aristotelian sense – impossible in advance' (Walsh & Soske 2016:18).

Thus, they argue for the 'unavoidable centrality of a relation of non-relation' in thinking through the politics of friendship in South Africa (Walsh & Soske 2016:18). On the cover of the book is this image by the South African artist Mohau Modisakeng (Figure 1).

Of this image Walsh and Soske (2016:308) write: 'we see the image as one of release, letting go perhaps of the structuring force of racialised categories. Letting go of "blackness" that is both part and not part of the body'. This reading of the image seems to contain contradictory imperatives, one of an embrace that is an embrace of the self and not of another; a second which is about exiting racialised categories which could open a pathway to an entanglement with other bodies. The poetics of non-relation comes back to the problematic of re-asserting, while also letting go, of race. Authors in the book dramatise this complex conundrum, as they think with a notion of non-relation as a form of gaining access to a deeper self, while finding it hard to forego the promise of friendship beyond race as a proposition.

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Mohau Modisakeng, *Inzilo 1* (2013). Inkjet print on Epson Hot Press Natural. 112.5 x 150.2cm. All efforts to secure copyright permission for this image were made.

It is usually taken that art or literature and friendship extend the possibility of immersion into another consciousness (a wager that the Humanities at large has relied upon). Both are forms, as Stacy Hardy puts it in her contribution to the book, in which we find the power, in language, to 'inhabit, perceive and recreate a shared world'. Having always felt herself to be alone in the world, she considers how literature offers an aloneness that undermines aloneness: 'a portrait of loneliness leaves us less alone' (Hardy 2016:50). This then is the relationship between friendship and reading that she speculates upon. But her hopes for friendship on the basis of a love for art, for literature, and as writers, are undercut by Hardy's contribution to the book in the form of a failed interview with her ostensible friend and colleague, writer and poet Lesego Rampolokeng. In her account of their email exchanges, many of which she quotes, 'he sees no inherent affinity between art and friendship. My questions about artistic relationships as a form of friendship via inspiration, affiliation or collaboration go unanswered' (Hardy 2016:58). Nor is he prepared to directly engage any of the personal relationships that were seminal to him, to his writing, his existence, to his coming to consciousness. 'We all know artists exploit artists', he says wryly, calling up a litany of failed friendships, betrayed dreams, the disappointed expectations and fraught alliances of community drawn together under economic and political or interpersonal stresses (Rampolokeng cited by Hardy 2016:58).

One could consider how more widely in South African non-fiction, the elaboration of non-relation or the refusal of reciprocity in the face of desired intimacy (at least on the part of one of the people involved, usually the white person) is dramatised. In Jonny Steinberg's non-fiction work *A man of good hope* (2014), what begins as a point of connection through a search for interiority ends with a renewed sense of difference and disentanglement. The book centres on the story of Asad Abdullah, but also on the relationship between Steinberg and Abdullah. At eight-years-old, at the beginning of the 1990s, Asad fled civil war in Mogadishu. Asad's story traverses state collapse in Somalia, clan loyalties, statelessness and undocumented international travel, chauvinistic nationalism and xenophobia. Starting to make a decent living in Addis, he puts USD1200 in his pocket and heads for South Africa. He arrives in 2008, the year of crushing xenophobic violence. Asad agrees to talk to Steinberg – but only in a car parked on a curb in Cape Town Mitchell's Plain where he can watch in the rear-view mirror.

As Asad talks, he looks in the mirror to see who is coming. While his internal eye peers into his childhood, which he is relating to Steinberg, the 'eyes on either side of his nose scan the street'. On Asad's shoulders rests 'the incessant burden of dodging his own murder' (Steinberg 2014:xv). Steinberg (2014:xvi) begins to feel Asad's fear '[a]s if it is a virus', he writes, 'as if it jumped off him and sank into my skin and is now coursing through my veins'. This becomes in the writer's mind a point of connection between

them: 'his fear crossed a boundary and inhabited me. I saw what he saw and felt what he felt. It was a gift. In that moment he gave me the ink with which I have written this book' (Steinberg 2014:293).

Steinberg spends more time than he does in earlier books trying to think about how to tell Asad's story, how to garner its meaning, and about the act of writing itself. He attempts to read Asad's interior life – with often relatively little expressed interiority on Asad's part to go on. His self-consciousness extends to this caution in his preface: 'I have not found a way of writing the books I do without exercising power' (Steinberg 2014:xiv).

The breaking of the point of connection between the two men comes through the revelation of difference (Steinberg 2014:313). This breaking point has two features. One is to do with 'the relationship to the unknown' that each man has. The second, not unrelated point, centres on their attitude to death. Steinberg reflects towards the end of the book on Asad's relentless desire to keep moving. For Asad, deeply immersed in ancestral clan politics and traumas, 'to have lived a fully human life is to have altered radically the course of his family's history'. This must entail plunging into the unknown. 'I have come to understand', Steinberg (2014:313) writes reluctantly, 'that Asad and I are very different. He is prepared to court death in ways that I am not'.

As for Asad, he explicitly does not want to be too self-reflexive, or to see his life laid out before him. What he wants to see, are those moments when the trajectory of his life in which he is viciously thrown about, is nonetheless shaped by his own decisions. Or this is what Steinberg sees him wanting. This he reads as a very powerful agency made possible by curtailed self-knowledge. He extrapolates further by writing:

> I have spent the last couple of years memorializing his life. But there is no intrinsic value in remembering. He has in fact just told me that he cannot afford to take in the sweep of his life. To remember in this way is crippling. It is better for him I think to see his past as a series of sparks or flashes, a selection of moments when he was the one who decided what would happen next (Steinberg 2014:326).

One of the recurring motifs in *Ties that bind* takes the form of an anecdote: James Baldwin talking about the breakdown of his friendship with the white writer Norman Mailer, says: 'there is a difference between Norman and myself in that I think he still imagines that he has something to save, whereas I have never had anything to lose' (Baldwin cited by Wilderson 2010:172). Invoking this anecdote among others, Frank Wilderson, key figure in Afropessimistic discourse, says in an interview with Shannon Walsh, that ultimately it is only the white person, in such exchanges, or literary friendships,

who can 'put on the garment of affiliation or relationality'. He goes on: 'so you're dealing with two people who have friendship attitudes towards each other, but one person has no capacity for relationality. And the other person has all the capacity for relationality' (Wilderson cited by Walsh 2010:76). Such a position derives strongly from race analytics in the United States (US), but is a discourse that has emerged increasingly in South Africa in recent years, and is to be found in the writings of Hortense Spillers and Saadiya Hartman, as well as Jared Sexton.

In the current moment, relations of antagonism between terms such as literary friendship and the politics of refusal; entanglement and non-relation; non-racialism and Afro-pessimism are growing apace. It is possible that in each case, we must now look to the second term in order to identify the conditions of change and the production of the new. Does this amount to the shock of the new, via the resurgence, at least in part, of anachronism? As apparently outdated ideas about race rise again, repetition becomes the occurrence of the old but in new forms and in different registers. Racism too takes on old forms in new languages, and the afterlives of colonial power still linger. In the politics and poetics of non-relation considered above, there is a resurgence of antagonism as a mode of critique, a forceful politics of negativity which works to sharpen contradictions, and to undercut an earlier model which invokes a less confrontational mode of inquiry built around terms such as "conflict" or the elaboration, analytically, of "complexity".

In a related but distinctive vein, the need for a renewal of critical thought that is widely called for in cultural theory has to do with mapping emerging forms of human life in an age of radical climate change and technological advancement. One of the interesting questions we need to ask, as I intimated early on in this article, is how we might think of "intimate lives, interior places" in relation to these radically shifting conditions, shaped by an increasingly entrenched, pervasive and invasive neoliberal capitalism. In the section below I consider human-plant relations as a means of grasping how we might rethink the human through an analytic lens which focuses on the *other than human*.

My plants are my lovers

In an essay on gardens and gardeners in the small Mozambican town of Inhambane, Julie Archambault (2016:1) writes about palm-leaf fences that conceal bougainvillea, hibiscus, crotons, impatiens, aloes and other succulent plants, and how gardeners in the area tell her that they grow plants 'because plants are beautiful, to embellish the yard'. She thinks of Jack Goody's (1993) observation that there were no flowers in Africa. Plants, she writes, inspire deeply romantic commentaries that speak of

'authenticity and attachment'. In fact, gardeners articulate their engagement with plants as guided by an overriding principle: the love of plants (*o amor das plantas*). They also construct their human-plant relations as markedly different from their interpersonal relationships. Unlike intimate relationships between lovers and relatives, which are seen as tainted by ulterior motives, she perceives from her ethnographic work, human-plant relations are understood as far more authentic (Archambault 2016:1).

When Kenneth, a gardener in Inhambane, tells her 'My plants are my lovers', Archambault (2016:3) reflects that human-plant relations are what gardeners wish their relationships with people could be. 'They inspire novel templates for intimacy'. And this in turn is based on 'a refusal of the commodification of plants themselves'. It is thus an affective response and a stance in favour of authenticity that Archambault calls 'authenticity above ground'. In the visible world of ornamental plants, 'things are what they seem. Or at least, things are closer to what they seem' (Archambault 2016:3).

To think through human-plant relations, Archambault engages with the growing post-humanist literature on multispecies ethnography and questions it raises about human exceptionalism. She draws this into her wider interest in affective encounters, in the transformative potential of everyday engagement with the material world. She does this work by actively suspending – in an echo of Glissant's impassioned defense of opacity – the desire to explicate the other. The new materialist ontological turn within which she situates her work calls for an exploration into the literal rather than the metaphorical, and a rethinking of alterity by encouraging us to consider the possibility of other worlds, and therefore to move beyond the more classic recognition of other world views (Archambault 2016:3).

When he described his plants as his lovers, Archambault (2016:9) considers, Kenneth meant that his plants 'commanded the same sort of time, attention and affection that lovers normally would. The plants in turn, loved him back through beauty and growth'. In other words, his plants were quite literally his lovers. Plants were 'autobiographical, as particular plants 'became associated with specific events in a person's life such as a move or the beginning of a new friendship (Degnen 2009 cited by Archambault 2016:9). Plants mapped out time and became repositories of social relations. When Kenneth describes his plants as his lovers, he also meant it 'as a critique of the politics of love and intimacy in a post-socialist, postwar economy marred by deceit and growing inequality'. Human-plant relations are not only experienced and constructed in contrast to commodified forms of intimacies. They also, in turn, offer a template for new interpersonal intimacies. The love of plants is also productive of new social relations among fellow gardeners that are themselves modeled on human-plant relations (see Archambault 2016:12).

An anthropology of affective encounters focuses on the transformative potential of 'everyday engagement with the material world, with moving things and other-than-human beings, to explore what it entails, or might entail, to be human' (Archambault 2016:17). She writes as an anthropologist who still retains the importance of an anthropocentric view. In other words, she is interested in maintaining a focus on the constitution of "the social" as such, as in the production of new kinds of social relations among gardeners that the love of plants produces. If we turn to an artwork by Kenyan artist Jim Chuchu, or a woodcut by William Kentridge (Figure 2) as I do below, we see that the human body itself changes form, to become plant inflected. This suggests a different order of intimacy between plant and human, while still offering an implicit critique of and reinvention of the social order of the present.

Chuchu is an openly gay photographer and filmmaker living in Kenya, where homosexuality is illegal. His photographs imagine a pre-Christian, pre-Islamic Kenya that is, he has said in interviews, far removed from the experience of his own generation. Chuchu takes black and white photographs and draws in pencil or watercolour on his original shot, then digitally scans the original photograph and digitally manipulates it. The result, writes Michael Upchurch (2015), is a collage-like world that is primal and sophisticated. As a gay man, he is rejected by mainstream religions in his country. He says he is interested in discovering spiritual alternatives; he explores histories that predate patriarchal, homophobic colonial religious systems. Left with the embrace of the present, or the ability to take comfort in the past, he 'remixes a new past', writes Jen Graves (2015). 'I am interested in moves to reshape blackness ... a blackness not afraid to exist in another world', he says. And: 'I don't think when we see our skin we see light', Chuchu says, 'light associated with black bodies is still a political project in 2015' (Chuchu cited by Graves 2015). When his work was shown in 2014 at the Dakar Biennale, the exhibit was shut down by the authorities for being detrimental to 'our morality and our laws' (cited by Graves 2015).

Kentridge's woodcut of a suited man, much like his protagonist figure Soho Eckstein, the megalomaniac mining boss who appears in many of his short films, now sports not a human head or face at all, but a planthead. One may speculate on the nature of his fate, and imagine this to be a commentary in part on, variously, his not quite humanity in the face of the apartheid-inspired dispossession his selfhood and business empire is founded on; his unraveling, politically and psychically, away from the safe and stolid container of a strictly human body, as his world implodes; or, just perhaps, a form of reinvention of self that begins to take hold as his suitedness comes to mean nothing – the plant is metaphorically, one feels, a signifier of a different kind of growth towards an unknown form of self. Framing this image from an Anthropocenic view, in which the resources of a sustainable planet are at stake and the earth is vulnerable

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Jim Chuchu, *Pagans VIII*, 2014. Archival digital print. 100 x 100 cm. All efforts to secure copyright permissions for this image were made.

to human destruction, Eckstein's embodiment of a capitalist ethos that ruins the earth is now implicated in the continuing possibility of plant life, and newly vulnerable to other life forms with which he shares the trembling planet. Ultimately, for the purposes of this article, the replacement of the central stem of the nervous system, the seat of interiority, the mind as such, with a plant, opens numerous windows for thought and analysis, in multiple registers from humour to satire, and the literal to the metaphorical. Here, perhaps is an image that is not so much about surrogate intimacies lost in a world of social media, but a differently inflected suggestion of a re-imagined more than human self re-routed through plantlike form.

FIGURE **Nº 3**

William Kentridge, *Walking Man*, 2000. Linocut in tableau. 248 x 101.5 cm. (Edition of 24 on paper, edition of 4 on canvas). All efforts to secure copyright permission for this image were made.

Conclusion

I have intended to suggest, in all of the above, an array of registers within which we might read the intimate, the interior, the self-reflexive, both in and beyond South Africa today. I have sought to identify emerging registers of cultural analysis that take us into the contemporary moment. Thinking through questions of intimacy and interiority from the vantage point of South African cultural production opens research in this terrain to new contestations, and extends the reach that such a rubric poses. Literature and art, text and image, offer condensed forms and operations, pathways of thought in the work of deciphering our present.

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The Front Room 'Inna Joburg': A hybrid intervention

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ABSTRACT

The material culture of the front room, created by the Windrush generation from 1948 through to the 1960s, and later by black British families, expresses a shift from the "sacred" codes of respectability, propriety and decorum, to the "profane" stylistic signification of modernity and consumer culture. This dynamic formed the basis of an installation-based exhibition entitled *The West Indian Front Room: Memories and Impressions of Black British Homes (WIFR)* (2005-2006, Geffrye Museum, London) that I guest-curated. The exhibition evoked and invoked a range of responses from a diverse range of audiences. Many of the responses from black British visitors spoke to their lived experience of the material culture of the front room. In recognition of thetranscultural appeal of the installation, subsequent iterations of *The Front Room (TFR)* were staged in various locations, the most recent being an installation-based exhibition entitled *The Front Room 'Inna Joburg' (TFRiJ)* (2016, FADA Gallery, Johannesburg). Instead of focusing on the end product, in this article I concentrate on the process through which it was created, looking at how *WIFR's* theoretical framework and other *TFR* iterations informed the curatorial intentions, as well as what practical strategies were developed to support the curation, production and public engagement activities of *TFRiJ*. Rather than seeing *TFRiJ* as a replication of *WIFR*, through this approach, I revisit the process that led to it becoming a "hybrid intervention".

Keywords: Hybrid, intervention, trans-diasporic subjectivity, creolisation, front room.

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Michael McMillan, *The West Indian Front Room*, 2005-2006. Installation comprising found objects, home furnishings, wood. 2 x 4 x 3 metres. Geffrye Museum, London. Courtesy of John Neligan.

Introduction to *The Front Room* project

There is often a designated space in the domestic interior, if space is available, where the ritual of receiving guests takes place. This is usually the living room, sitting room or lounge, where the "outside world" has an opportunity to view the private lives of the family or individual. The aesthetics of this room would therefore suggest how these acts of hospitality are socially and culturally modulated, and how the family or individual want to represent themselves externally. The quintessential example of this material culture is the traditional African-Caribbean front room in Britain, where there was a shift from the colonial "sacred" codes of respectability, propriety and decorum, to the "profane" stylistic signification of post-colonial modernity and consumer culture.

The dialogic relationship between theses tropes is distinctly expressed in the front room of the Windrush generation 1948, and later by black British families. My experience of growing up in such a household formed the basis of an installation-based exhibition entitled *The West Indian Front Room: Memories and Impressions of Black British Homes (WIFR)* (2005-2006, Geffrye Museum, London) that I guest-curated. *WIFR* attracted

over 35 000 visitors, and invoked a range of emotional responses from a culturally diverse audience. Coming from a kaleidoscope of generational, gendered and familial perspectives, many expressed recognition of, and identified with, the material culture of the front room because it resonated with their lived experience. It spoke to creative agency in the formation of black British subjectivities, notions of working class respectability and aspirations and cultural adaptation of migrant aesthetics in the home. In recognition of its inter-cultural appeal, subsequent iterations of *The Front Room (TFR)*[1] were staged, the most recent being an installation-based exhibition entitled *The Front Room 'Inna Joburg' (TFRiJ)* (2016, FADA Gallery, Johannesburg).

TFRiJ was produced in collaboration with the Visual Identities in Art & Design Research Centre (VIAD), University of Johannesburg (UJ), as part of a two-month artist residency I undertook in Johannesburg. However, unlike previous *TFR* iterations, *TFRiJ* was not preceded by an extensive organic research process that would usually enable me to work peripatetically in the field with local communities to identify and source specific materials. This work includes identifying and sourcing specific materials, and gathering oral history interviews and archival images that might be used to dress the installation.

As practical circumstances did not provide the time and space to faciliate this kind of research process for *TFRiJ*, VIAD staff made preliminary contact and conducted informal audio-recorded interviews with selected respondents in their homes on my behalf. This was challenging for them, firstly, because I could not be present to lead the research, and secondly, because at the time, the VIAD staff comprised middle-class, white females. In a post-apartheid Johannesburg where, amongst other complexities, race is still contested, and our choice to work with the local black, coloured and Indian communities (taking account of apartheid's legacy of racial hierarchies), were factors that compounded the situation. We were acutely aware of these cultural politics. Any attemps to "re-present" these local communities in an installation-based exhibition based on research carried out by white women and remotely by a black British man, ran the risk perpetuating an orientalist 'grand narrative' that paternalistically claims 'knowledge of the unknowable' (Said 1978:72; Lyotard 1984:52). I was also aware that in contemporary Johannesburg, the cultural politics of globalisation might resonate in my being seen as a "foreign" black person from the United Kingdom (UK), who has the privilege of being able to travel internationally. It was therefore agreed from a pragmatic and ethical standpoint that *TFRiJ* would be reconfigured curatorially, and that I would draw on what had already been tested and proven to work in previous iterations of *TFR*.

1. *TFR* iterations include: *The Black Chair: Rediscovering the West Indian Front Room* (1999, Wycombe Chair Museum, High Wycombe); *The West Indian Front Room* (2003, Zion Arts Centre, Manchester); *Van Huis Uit: The Living Room of Migrants in The Netherlands* (2007-2008, Imagine IC, Amsterdam, OBT: Bibliotheek Midden-Brabant Central Library, Tilburg; Stefanus Church/Kosmopolis, Utrecht); *A Living Room Surrounded by Salt* (2008, Instituto Buena Bista, Center for Curacao Contemporary Art, Curacao); *The Front Room in the African Diaspora* (2014, an inter-cultural workshop project in Accra, Ghana with 24 young people from Tobago, London and Amsterdam). *WIFR* also inspired a BBC4 documentary entitled *Tales from the Front Room* (Percival 2007). It was documented in *The front room: migrant aesthetics in the home* (McMillan 2009), and archived in an interactive website (thefrontroom2007).

In this article, I focus on the process of producing *TFRiJ* by looking at how the curatorial intentions towards *TFRiJ* were informed by *WIFR*'s theoretical framework, as well as how other *TFR* installations were made. I examine what practical strategies were developed in response to the parameters of the residency, and how these approaches supported the curation, production and forums for public engagement with *TFRiJ*. Finally, on a self-reflexive level, I look at my experienceas an artist/curator and black British person during the residency in contemporary Johannesburg. Unpacking the process that led to *TFRiJ* provides an opportuntity to revisit what was "re-represented", not as a replication of *WIFR*, but as a potential "hybrid intervention" that extended my understanding of *TFR* in a different way.

Theorising the "West Indian" front room

The term "West Indian" refers to a particular moment that began with the post-war Windrush generation arriving in England from 1948 onwards. Upon their arrival, these migrants came into contact with other West Indians, such as Jamaicans, Trinidadians, Vincentians and St Lucians, amongst others from the different parts of the Caribbean, which led them to realise that they were, in fact, West Indian. Imbued with an English culture through their colonial education, these migrants saw themselves as citizens of the British Empire coming home to the "Mother Country". Their dreams soon evaporated as they found themselves 'Othered' (Said 1978) in a racist society that accused them of "taking our jobs".[2] Initially, they were forced to live in rented one-room accommodation, but later bought houses and rented council flats. This was also the moment of post-colonial modernity, signified through the 'conjuncture' (Hall 2013:51) of major global cultural political shifts, such as anti-colonial and anti-imperial struggles. These "conjunctures" led to former British colonies becoming independent, emerging anti-racist Civil Rights, Black Power, anti-apartheid movements, and the democratisation of popular culture through mass consumption, mass production and mass communication.

The colonial sensibilities that these migrants brought with them and the post-colonial modernities they encountered in Britain were both manifest in the material culture of the front rooms that they created. Typically, the front room was decorated with colourful floral patterned wallpaper (sometimes velvet flock) and maroon-coloured carpets. Furniture included ornate glass drinks cabinets that displayed rarely-used glass and chinaware; plastic covered upholstered three-piece suites with lace antimacassars or "throw backs"; coffee tables with tapered legs; and side-boards, which preceeded the "space-saver" buffet, although ironically it did not save any space as it allowed

2. Ironically, they were doing jobs in a ruined post-war Britain for wages the English working class were not prepared to accept.

for the display of trinkets. There was also a “Blue Spot” radiogram which housed a phono turntable and radio in a veneer wooden panelled cabinet, sometimes accompanied by a compartment for storing and displaying alcholic drinks. Imported from the United States and the Caribbean, vinyl seven-inch records that were played on the radiogram provided familiar music with which Caribbean migrants could entertain themselves at home, as they were often racially excluded from British pubs and clubs. Family portraits – where the frames were just as important aesthetically as the pictures – were displayed on the walls, together with black velour scrolls depicting a tourist map of a Caribbean island that reminded families of their diasporic ties “back home”. On every available surface there were colourful starched crochet doilies displaying vases of artificial fabric and plastic flowers, bowls of plastic fruit, blow glass fish and a host of ceramic ornaments. The front room was also a contradictory space where the efficacy of the display was sometimes more important than the authenticity of the objects – for example, a reprint of Leonardo da Vinci’s painting *The Last Supper* would be juxtaposed with a reprint of JH Lynch’s painting of a scantily clad, exoticised *Tina*.

Coded in the dressing and maintenance of the front room is a form of “impression management” that pleases by repeating the aesthetics of the familiar or what has been perjoratively termed as “kitsch”. Anthony Giddens’s (1991:40) concept of ‘ontological security’ responds to a form of ‘disembeddedness’, where institutions and practices ‘uproot individuals’ (Giddens 1991:40 cited by Binkley 2000:135). According to Sam Binkley (2000:149), the ‘embeddedness’ of kitsch provides ‘a general corrective to a general modern problem, that of existential and personal disembeddedness’. For Binkley (2000:134), kitsch relishes 'embeddedness' in routines that adhere to conventions rooted in the everyday, which ‘preserv[e] a unique aesthetic sensibility that spurns creativity per se while it endorses a repetition of the familiar’. As uprooted individuals, Caribbean migrants sought “ontological security” in response to the traumatic “disembeddedness” of migration.

Diasporic subjectivity – as Stuart Hall (1993:401) characterises it – is within this narrative a process of ‘becoming’, where identity is constructed performatively by negotiating a ‘complex historical process of appropriation, compromise, subversion, masking, invention and revival’. In this journey, diaspora is less about identity being secured by returning to a “sacred homeland” than a metaphor for a space in which there is no “essence of purity”. In the latter, Hall (1993:401) embraces the idea of difference through heterogeneity and diversity. Diasporic black identities have been culturally, historically and politically constructed in a process of “becoming” within the context of what Hall (2006) calls the ‘multicultural drift’. Within the African-Caribbean and later black British

home, there is a liminality between the political edge of the public realm or 'frontline', and the complications of the private domain or 'backyard', to use Hall's (1998:38) conceptual framework.

Inscribed in the front room's material culture and prescribed codes of behaviour is a deeply-aspirational black culture that idealised Victorian bourgeois tropes. These tropes were, as Denise Noble (2015:21) suggests, 'shot through with colonial Caribbean preoccupations with hygiene, social status linked to gendered *racial* respectability', and therefore signify a conservative element of black domestic life (Hall 2009 cited by McMillan 2009:20). This echoes Daniel Miller's (1996) duality of the 'transcendent' and the 'transient'. The *transcendent* resonates in diasporic vernacular with "good grooming" practices as a register of respectability, where in the front room 'artificial things … are viewed as long lasting, and things covered over … are seen as cherished for the future' (Miller 1996:137). Meanwhile, the *transient* finds a register in reputation, which in a similar vernacular, values the public performances of speech, music, dance, sexual display and prowess.

The culture of respectability has its roots in colonialism and the post-emancipation struggle, where it played a critical part in the reconstruction of a sense of humanity and self-respect out of the brutal circumstances of enslaved plantation life (Hall 2009:19). Registered in the trans-diasporic front room is the 'habitus' (Bourdieu 1984) of being civilised through civilised behaviour, which is not about comfort, but rather, the cultural capital of respectability, dignity and self-reserve. In the front room, an etiquette of decorum, protocol, polite manners and socially acceptable behaviour is performed in ways that echo the rituals of the Victorian parlour. The "bric-a-brac" practice of the Victorians to collect things and cram them together comes through the aesthetics of the front room, where objects of emotional attachment, like wedding and other familial-framed photographs, religious imagery, certificates of educational and other forms of achievement, as well as souveniors and romantised symbols of 'back home', are personally modulated (Hall cited by McMillan 2009: 20).

The dialogic relationship between the transcendent and the transient in the material culture of the front room comes through the joy, pleasure and spirituality derived from displaying objects of emotional attachment in the form of a sacred shrine, and the profane prosaics in their everyday use. In many African-Caribbean families, the front room was out of bounds for children, unless guests were visiting, which would often be on a weekend. It would be ritually cleaned on a Satuday, and come alive on a Sunday with Jim Reeves playing on the radiogram, and adults socialising over drinks after the big Sunday dinner. The front room was also where church prayer meetings

took place, as well as life-cycle celebrations such as Christening, birthday, wedding, and funeral receptions, with the open coffins of the deceased on display (McMillan 2009).

For Michel de Certeau (1984), the practices of 'everyday' life are worth exploring, because they bring life to the ordinary aspects of daily activities that are often taken for granted. De Certeau's approach addresses how the agency of consumers is a form of 'cultural consumption' (Storey 1999:49), which he labels as 'secondary production' (De Certeau cited by Storey 1999:49). In this sense, consumers are active and discerning, rather than passive and compliant agents who re-appropriate goods into their everyday lives. For De Certeau (1988:166), critically interrogating the practice of cultural consumption implies questioning the notion that 'assimilating' means 'becoming similar to' what one absorbs, and not 'making something similar' to what one is; making it one's own by appropriating or re-appropriating. As 'poets of their own affairs' (De Certeau 1988), this sense of consumption is produced in the process of re-appropriation, such as the stylistic creolisisation that takes place in the front room where Western or European aesthetics were appropriated and infused with African sensibilities to create that which was hybridised. Like creole languages, creolisation was seen as a bastardised and uncivilised form of the other (Brathwaite 1984). Yet for Frantz Fanon (cited by Williams & Williams 1993:37), creolisation as entanglement resists this psychic inferiorisation, by providing a political understanding of racial hegemonies at the level of black subjectivity.

This sense of aspirant becoming, the dynamics between the transcendental and the transient, and the creolisation of the material culture in the African-Caribbean front room, was registered during the ethnographic research that I conducted to develop *WIFR* curatorially. In Denise Noble's (2015:14) essay about *WIFR*, she argues that it 'ignited a collective alternative historical lived narrative of black British [diasporic black subjectivity] immigration, one shaped not by problems but by aspirations, creativity, cultural continuity and change'. Noble quotes Toni Morrison (1995 cited by Noble 2005:10, 12) to suggest that while *WIFR* is a 'fiction' that does not require verification because 'much in it can be verified', it is a 'site of culture-making', to 'yield up a kind of truth' that in the re-representation of the front room fuses the subjective with the collective. The narratives enunicated by audiences in response to encountering *WIFR* reveals an aspirational aspect of black interiority in the process of *becoming* (Hall 1993) that is rarely portrayed in the 'regime of representation' of the other (Hall 2013:50).

Noble's analysis of *WIFR* affirms the value of an organic research process in developing other *TFR* iterations, which are intrinsically collaborative and participatory, and in which oral history work is a core operational practice. As part of the process of *TFR* projects, I usually conduct unstructured interviews in the homes of respondents,

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Michael McMilllan, *The Front Room 'Inna Joburg'*, 2016. Installation comprising found objects, home furnishings, wood. 2.5 x 4.5 x 5 metres. FADA Gallery, Johannesburg. Courtesy of Eugene Hön.

where acts of hospitality allow others into the private realm and seek to make them feel comfortable. Jacques Derrida (2000) argues that there is hostility in hospitality, because even as hosts offer themselves and their private domestic space to guests, the host also gains symbolic power or claim over their guests. In offering hospitality, Derrida (2000:9,14 cited by Bystrom 2013:343) suggests that the host becomes the 'hostage' of the guest and that it is impossible 'to open up or offer hospitality, even in order to be generous, without reaffirming: this is mine, I am at home, you are welcome in my home on condition that you observe the being-at-home of my home, the being-itself of what I am'. The 'hostipitality' that Derrida (2000) explores is an agonistic ritual of welcome that enables a sense of being at home, and underscores the host's identity and authority through the very act of surrendering their home to others, even strangers, since this surrender is what compels a kind of recognition of both home and host.

I am aware of this dialectic of "hostiplitality" when carrying out this form of oral history work. During the interview, I subvert the objectivity of the interviewer by sharing my personal experience with the interviewee as a means of developing a relationship based on trust, so that they might feel free to be more open about their oral history (McMillan 2013).

The Front Room 'Inna Joburg'

Before coming to Johannesburg, my memories of witnessing the racist brutality of the apartheid system on television, reading about it in newspapers and books, and hearingof it from South African visitors to the UK resurfaced. This took place during my formative years as a teenager, growing up in the 1970s, and has shaped how I came to understand my own black Britishness, as well as my place within a wider collective diasporic black subjectivity. As a system and policy based on racial segregation, apartheid was legally introduced in South Africa in 1948 and repealed with the democratic election of President Nelson Mandela in 1994. Yet, just as post-colonialism does not signal complete decolonialisation, the current post-apartheid moment raises questions about the psychological and physical legacies of apartheid in terms of contemporary South African cultural politics.

The empire travelled, which meant that colonialism was transnational, but it was also 'transcultural', as suggested by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Oritz (1995); it was a space wherein 'cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today' (Oritz cited by Pratt 1999:62). Across the British empire, including South Africa, the colonial elite often recreated romanticised – and some would argue kitsch –versions of England through architecture, aesthetics, customs and values as a means of *embededdness* for *ontological* security. These colonial practices and aesthetics, which replicated an idealised sense of home, were often appropropriated and *creolised* into ones of their own by indigenous South African cultures, as happened elsewhere in British colonies. These colonial tropes have also been contested by what has been experienced through post-colonial modernities in popular culture, with what Paul Gilroy (1993) calls 'The Black Atlantic', where there is a culture that is not specifically African, American, Caribbean or British, but all of these at once as a "black Atlantic culture". It was this sense of an entangled rhizomatic "trans-diasporic black subjectivity" that informed my curatorial desires towards seeing *TFRiJ* as a "site of culture making", where domestic practices and aesthetics could reveal that was similar, yet differently mediated kinds of hybridised constructions.

Once in Johannesburg, the VIAD staff member who had carried out preliminary research prior to my arrival took me to the homes of respondents whom she had initially interviewed. This included Indian families living in Lenasia, coloured families in Eldorado Park, and black families in Soweto. These townships were created under

the apartheid policy of "forced removals", which was a key instrument of racial segregation from the 1950s into the 1960s. For instance, in former multicultural areas of inner-city Johannesburg, such as Fietas (currently the suburbs of Pageview and Vrededrop), Indian families were forcibly removed, while the same happened to black families in Sophiatown (or Sof'town), which was renamed "Triomf"– meaning "triumph" in Afrikaans. That said, in post-apartheid Johannesburg, there has been an exponential growth of the black middle class and those in the high-income earning bracket (colloquially known as "black diamonds"), who have moved to previously white-only upmarket areas such as Sandton and Hyde Park. There are also immigrants from other countries on the African contintent, such as Zimbabwe, Congo and Nigeria, who have settled in "informal communities" in Johannesburg. These immigrants are often subject to hostility and xenophobic attacks from local black communities. The complexities of the current post-apartheid moment are mediated by the trauma of apartheid, such as forced removals, which are still remembered.[3]

Before coming to Johannesburg, I also liaised with VIAD staff to identify materials that could be used to dress the *TFRiJ* installation. As there was limited space at VIAD for objects and furniture to be stored before and after *TFRiJ*, we decided to source most of the objects and furniture from The Cottage Hire – a company that hires out props for film and television shoots. Some objects like a rug, soft furnishings like lace curtains, plastic doilies and other small accessories were bought from the Oriental Plaza.[4] Materials to build and decorate the installation structure were bought, while some fine glassware was loaned. It was evident from VIAD's research that while colourful crochet doilies could be locally sourced, none were starched, so in keeping with the aesthetic of *WIFR*, I brought some from my collection, which had belonged to my mother.

The FADA Gallery is essentially a large white cube, with a large upper level and a smaller lower level.[5] *TFRiJ* was accompanied by another thematically-related installation-based exhibition entitled *The Arrivants* by Christine Checinska.[6] In *TFRiJ* and *The Arrivants*, Checinska and I were exploring similar themes: how through Caribbean diasporic migration a black British subjectivity has emerged, and specifically how this is manifest in the material culture of the front room and masculine dress. We also brought with us either original or reproduced personal family archive materials such as vinyl records, gloves, immigration papers and photographs. These materials were housed in a 1950s period cabinet with glass shelves and doors that was located at the back of the gallery, and was used in an interactive performance piece entitled *Back a Yard* that Checinska and I scripted and presented at the exhibition opening. Beside this cabinet was a black plinth onto which was placed a flat-screen framed with a gold-painted ornate wooden picture frame. The BBC4 documentary *Tales from the Front Room* (Percival 2007), that was inspired by and produced after *WIFR*, was screened on the television.

3. The participants of the Oral History Workshop – the people that the VIAD staff had made initial contact with through home visits – that I facilitated at the FADA Gallery as part of the *TFRiJ* programme of public events, highlighted these legacies.

4. A sprawling shopping mall near to the UJ campus where many Indian and Paki -stani, as well as Afrikaans- and English-speaking housewives, buy clothes and materials for their homes.

5. The Gallery is situated in the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture building, Bunting Road Campus, University of Johannesburg.

6. The title *The Arrivants* comes from the Barbadian poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite's poetry collection (1981). As a UK-based black British artist-designer-academic of Jamaican migrant heritage, Checinska investigates the relationship between culture, race and dress. The conceptual departure point for the work is the arrival of the Empire Windrush at London's Tilbury Docks in 1948, carrying some 500 Jamaican migrants – colonial subjects invited by the government to assist in rebuilding post-war Britain. The Empire Windrush's arrival marked the first time that African-Caribbeans had travelled to England in great numbers, thereafter establishing themselves as communities in major cities such as London, Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester (Checinska 2016). For Checinska, the inspiration of the Windrush generation provides a route into an exploration of the role of dress in the negotiation of geographical, psychological and social borders and the refashioning of identities, or the recreation and presentation of self.

The front room installation was situated on the other side of the Gallery. It consisted of a 2.5-metre x 4.5-metre x 5-metre four-walled wooden structure painted dark brown on the outside with a mock-pressed steel ceiling, and a 2-metre entrance-exit draped with lace curtains and a wooden pelmet. The walls of the interior were covered in dark maroon floral-patterned velvet flock wallpaper, and the floor was lined with laminated vinyl wood flooring. The ceiling was covered in polystyrene pressed tiles in the centre of which hung a frosted glass globe light fitting. We had initially acquired a 1950s-style long-stemmed three-armed light fitting, but this was changed, not only because it was too large for the space, but also because it would have been used in a middle-class English home, where the ceiling would have been higher than that of a working-class home. Having to source a smaller light fitting made me realise that the design of the installation embodied a working-class or lower-middle-class domestic aesthetic. Moreover, my original floor plan design for the installation was smaller than what was eventually built, because I thought that visitors needed space to move around in the installation. On reflection, it would have been more "authentic" to keep the smaller and potentially more cramped spatial environment that visitors would have had to negotiate, because this would have been more to the scale of the actual front room.

The furniture and fixtures in *TFRiJ* were similar in aesthetics and spatial arrangement to *WIFR*, and featured similar 1970s period appliances, soft furnishings, ornaments and wall hangings. Curatorially, my intention was not that *TFRiJ* should be a fascsimile of *WIFR*, but rather to use its aesthetics to construct a hybrid intervention in post-apartheid Johannesburg, so as to open a dialogue about what was similar locally to the material culture of the African-Caribbean front room, and what was different. Consequently, on the top of the radiogram was a clay bowl that traditionally South African Venda women would have used to make home-made beer to supplement their income. This object would not have been present in *WIFR*, yet like crochet doilies, it pointed to black women's home-made craft practices and creative agency in the domestic interior. Similarly, tunes such as Miriam Makeba's *Pata Pata* (1957), Millie Small's *My Boy Lollipop* (1965), and Jim Reeves's *Distant Drums* (1966), amongst other tunes that were mixed with a selection of oral history interviews from the *WIFR*, could be heard via the radiogram in *TFRiJ*. This incorporation of music marked the importance of music played in enacting moments of revelry across the diaspora as a distraction from the trials and tribulations of daily life.

On the wall above the radiogram was a vintage 1960s modernist styled clock, and on either side were portraits of my family members placed in second-hand frames.[7] Two life-size ceramic dogs flanked either side of the radiogram, as if keeping guard. In the centre of the installation floor, lay a rectangular "Oriental/Persian" styled rug,

7. I felt that it was not ethically appropriate to use portraits of subjects that I did not know and did not have any relationship with.

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Michael McMilllan, *The Front Room 'Inna Joburg'*, (detail), 2016. Installation comprising found objects, home furnishings, wood. 2.5 x 4.5 x 5 metres. FADA Gallery, Johannesburg. Courtesy of Eugene Hön.

onto which was placed a greenish faux marble coffee table. A glass vase filled with artificial flowers and a ceramic bowl containing plastic fruit, under which was one of my mother's starched crochet doilies, rested on top of the table. Against the right wall upon entering the installation, there was also a cream and orange patterned upholstered three-seater sofa with two armchairs making up a three-piece suite. Above the sofa were wall hangings that included a print of Stephen Pearson's iconic painting *Wings of Love*. Beside this was a circular light fitting displaying the painting of a deer in an idyllic natural setting that might have been popular in Afrikaner homes of the era, and on the opposite wall of the installation was a matching light fitting display painted in a similar style as the deer, depicting the Taj Mahal. On the left wall of the installation and opposite the sofa was an ornate black wooden framed drinks cabinet displaying glassware. Above the drinks cabinet were prints that included *The Last Supper* and a black velour scroll displaying a tourist map of St Vincent that I had brought. On one side of the drinks cabinet was a faux marble ornate side table with table lamp, and on the other, a paraffin heater. On either side of the inside walls of the installation was a painted portrait of Nelson Mandela and a chrome etching of Queen Elizabeth II.

"A room of her own"

As mentioned previously, participants had been invited to bring objects from their living rooms or domestic spaces about which they could share stories in an Oral History Workshop that I facilitated. Noble (2015) suggests that *WIFR* enacted the dialogic African aesthetic of 'call-and-response' in the request that I put out for materials that might be used to dress the installation; a call that prompts responses in the form of oral histories. The responses to these calls adds to the experience of the front room as a site of personal and collective memory.

The Oral History Workshop was also a call and response that foregrounded the role of black women's creativity and agency within the domestic sphere. In the dressing and maintenance of the African-Caribbean front room, it was women who were traditionally responsible for, and judged on, the basis of its "good grooming". For Caribbean migrant women, working mothers and wives 'gendered *racial* respectability' was used as a means of 'self-making' or creative agency in the home to counter representations of the black family as 'pathological' (Noble 2015:19). Such practices, along with "spring cleaning" rituals, were inscribed in a moral code as "habitus" (Bourdieu 1984) that fused religion, hygiene and the Protestant work ethic: "Cleanliness as next to Godliness" and "By the sweat of your brow, thou shall eat bread". This ethos would find expression in the presentation of the home and self, where order meant

beauty, and beauty meant order. This was not a simple valorisation of Westernised/white bias or ideals of beauty, but rather the consequence of negotiating cultural hegemony and regimes of power that objectified race in the domestic realm. As Anne McClintock (1994) points out, the institution of the home under colonialsm was used to maintain hegemony over the division of domestic labour and the subordinate 'Other' in the colonies. In hegemonic "regimes of representation" of domestic and popular culture, the black subject has either been erased or stereotyped as objects of servitude, caricature, fear and desire. Consequently, the making of the front room signifies a black woman's aspirant mobility, and functions as a means of expressing her femininity through the fruits of her labour; 'through the slog of long, remorseless and difficult work' (Hall 1998:42).

Shonisani Netshia, a post-graduate researcher and lecturer at UJ, introduced me to the black women from Soweto who attended the Oral History Workshop. One of the objects that they brought and shared stories about was the crochet doilies that they had made themselves and used in their homes. The crochet oral histories recounted in the workshop correlated with Netshia's post-graduate research into Dutch lace, crocheted doilies and Shweshwe fabric (Maphangwa 2010), and for me, both Netshia's research and the stories shared resonated on a trans-diasporic level. Before she came to England in 1960, my mother worked as a maid for a Dutch family for six years in Curacao, yet "seamstress" was put down as her occupation in her passport. Seamstressing, domestic science and crocheting were taught to girls from poor backgrounds in a rudimentary and limited colonial education system in the Caribbean in preparation for the only "vocation" available to them – domestic labour. It was the missionaries who brought crocheting to the Caribbean, but it was women there who transformed the plain colours of traditional European crochet into colourful three-dimensional sculptural pieces with copious folds that, once iron-starched or stiffened with sugar, stood erect. The crochet doilies were amongst the many other soft furnishings that many Caribbean migrant women used to enhance the display of ornaments and other objects in the front room. Like the black women from Soweto who attended the Oral History Workshop, many African-Caribbean women supplemented their income by selling crochet "sets" they had made, with each design being unique to the individual maker. Crocheting practices in the front room in *trans-diasporic* terms could be seen as a form of creolisation of popular culture in a diasporic migrant context diasporic context. In this hybridised culture, the 'dialogic interventions of diasporic, creolizing cultures' speak to a culturally entangled Caribbean where 'there is no such thing as a pure point of origin' (Hebdige 1987:10).

From a self-reflexive perspective, my experience of oral history crocheting practices by South African black women invoked a *rememory* of my mother and how she used

crochet doilies in the front room. In Johannesburg, many of the people carrying out domestic labour and working in the service look like me. This corporeal recognition invoked an epiphany with my mother's experience as a maid in Curacao, and how she took on cleaning jobs in the UK to provide for her family. The audience that visited *TFRiJ* was predominantly white, who like the few black, Indian, coloured and other visitors from other ethnic groups, shared the middle-class inscribed cultural capital of visiting art galleries and museums. Consequently, one of the most rewarding moments for me, was inviting the black security staff and black female cleaning staff whom I encountered whenever I came to the Gallery to respond to the installation. In their responses, they shared with me the aesthetics of their own living rooms, and the importance of having food of seven colours in their Sunday dinner. On a spiritual level, for me, it was like my mother was seeing the installation I had created.

For black women, dressing and investing in the front room was a means of expressing themselves; a form of creative agency. Jacob Dlamini's (2009) personal experience of what he terms 'reflective nostalgia', which he employs to unpack the material culture of township life of his youth in apartheid South Africa, provides a means of *trans-diasporic* identification with the key *conjuncture* where black youths rose up at the Notting Hill Carnival in the summer of 1976, and at that same time, black students rose up in Soweto. These were not homogenous black revolts, but a generation rebelling against what they saw as the complacency of their parents in response of state-legitimised oppression. Critically interrogating how these significant events have been represented provides analytical tools for resisting the homogenisation of the diasporic black experience in favour of a more differentiated and complex portrayal.

It is evident from my discussion above that inthe limited research process, collaborating with VIAD to curate and produce *TFRiJ*, the Oral History Workshop, *WIFR*'s theoretical framework and my experience gained from other *TFR* iterations all played a significant role. It is also evident that as a hybrid intervention, *TFRiJ* did resonate with Johannesburg audiences in terms of the recognition of and identification with the aesthetics of an aspirational culture, as expressed in the material culture of the front room. Experientially, *TFRiJ* also extended TFR as an iteration by revealing how similarly, yet differently entangled, trans-diasporic subjectivity is expressed through the complexities of post-apartheid Johannesburg where the legacies of apartheid remain.

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“The same but not quite”: Respectability, creative agencies and self-expression in black middle-class Soweto homes

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I explore notions of South African black middle-class respectability, focusing on the use of crocheted doilies by two homemakers in Naledi Extension 2, Soweto, Johannesburg – my mother, Geneva Maphangwa and Mam’ Ramuhulu. I explore their use of crocheted doilies as a means of decorating their homes, upholding status, and presenting themselves and their families as respectable. I regard crocheted doilies as metaphoric connectors, linking maternal generations, as well as signifiers of respectability. I also highlight how my mother’s and Mam’ Ramuhulu’s preoccupation with maintaining good status, cleanliness and order is linked to a form of respectability that is embedded with notions of good moral standing.

In examining the roles that Victorian lace and its contemporary derivative, crocheted doilies, play in colonial and post-colonial contexts, I identify the Victorian era as the possible origin of using crocheted doilies to cover surfaces. I unpack how the Victorian impulse to decorate every available surface could be a forerunner of way in which doilies are used in my mother’s and Mam’ Ramuhulu’s homes. Homi K Bhabha’s (1994) notions of desire, the displacing gaze and mimicry, are applied and used as connective devices throughout the article.

Keywords: Soweto; homemakers; crocheted doilies; respectability; cultural hybridity; domestic worker.

I am a black, middle-class woman who was born in the last decade of apartheid. I am a lecturer, a painter, a wife and a mother. My relationship with crocheted doilies is owing to my lived experience – I grew up in Naledi Extension 2, a suburb in Soweto, Johannesburg – in a home where crocheted doilies and ornate objects were accepted as a "normalised" or "given" practice of interior decorating.[1] Doilies were, and still are, placed under specific ornaments, covering surfaces of furniture in some rooms. Visiting my grandmother in Meadowlands Zone 5[2] was not any different, except that I seem to remember my grandmother's house as being more opulent. A tiny set of porcelain shoes sat on two small circular doilies on the window sill, which was too high for me to reach, so I spent most of my time daydreaming that one day I would be tall enough to reach them and slip my feet into them. Needless to say, when the time came my feet were too big.

Rozsika Parker (1996:11) states that the practice and presence of embroidery promotes particular states of mind and self-experience, pointing to the historical conception of embroidery and homemaking as "feminine". She continues that, in the nineteenth century, embroidery and femininity were fused; the link between them was considered to be "natural". For Parker (1996:11), embroidery signifies femininity – 'docility, obedience, love of home, and a life without work – it showed the embroiderer to be a deserving, worthy wife and mother'. I suggest that this link between femininity and homemaking can also be applied to my mother, Geneva Maphangwa, and Mam' Ramuhulu,[3] particularly in relation to the activity of crocheting.[4]

Lou Cabeen (cited by Livingstone & Ploof 2007:197) states that embroidered tablecloths, runners, and crocheted doilies 'linger' in our mothers' or grandmothers' homes, and describes them as 'objects of forgotten utility'. By this Cabeen suggests that the above-mentioned objects are ordinary, everyday items that are often considered as "unimportant" and consequently overlooked. In my own home, I use modern versions such as contemporary table runners as "replacements" for doilies. I explore my role as a woman and mother, as well as how this role has shifted when compared with my mother's role when she raised me. For me, doilies have a strong, yet soft presence; they no longer represent respectability, but as part of a new liberated generation, for me the doily speaks of nostalgia. I see doilies as carrying memories of home, the past, and a certain level of femininity that is arguably no longer relevant in contemporary homes.

Domestic service

The development of townships in South Africa grew as a result of the industrial boom which impacted on the housing needs of people moving from the rural areas into the

1. I am aware that the use of doilies is not limited to my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu. The use of doilies is common to many contemporary South African black households, as well as in the households of homemakers from other races.

2. Meadowlands is one of the oldest sub-locations in Soweto, Johannesburg. It became home to the residents of Sophiatown, who were forcibly removed and relocated there in 1955. My mother recalls that she was five-years-old when her family was moved, and that the move took place in November, as they spent Christmas in Meadowlands (Maphangwa 2017; An overview of Soweto 2017).

3. Mam' Ramuhulu is a retired *MaGogo* (grandmother) who has lived in Naledi Extension 2 with her family from 1978 to the present. Mam' Ramuhulu (2008) used to work in "white kitchens" in the 1970s as a "tea girl". Once she retired, she sewed curtains, and sold chips and sweets for income. She no longer manages these activities owing to fatigue and old age.

4. In my painting practice, I draw on notions of femininity, respectability and cultural hybridity, and attempt to evoke these notions through the representation of doilies and other objects by painterly means. I regard doilies as metaphoric connectors; for me they signify a transitional space of female community or familiarity between my mother, her mother, and myself, as well as other homemakers such as Mam' Ramuhulu. I have developed a personal and intimate relationship with crocheted doilies. Through the application of paint with brushes or a palette knife, I "weave" or "crochet" the different visual references together. Through my paintings, I acknowledge the work that was made by my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu; instead of crocheting doilies, I paint them in an attempt to raise their importance through their association with the "traditional" context of oil painting on canvas (historically a valued medium of "high art").

city.[5] Many black women from 1885 into the mid-twentieth century took up positions as domestic workers. Domestic service was one of the few "respectable" occupations open to women like my grandmother (Giles 2004:66). Black women would become domestic workers if they were not able to register for nursing or teaching, which were considered to be the only recognised professions that could raise the status of black women (Berger 1992:27). Currently, black women, who have limited education – South African, and those from its neighbouring countries such as Lesotho and Zimbabwe – continue to work as domestic workers. Karen Hansen (1992:5) states that domestic service played a crucial role in the cultural ordering of African history. In apartheid South Africa, domestic service was, and remains, a sensitive practice and topic because of the 'interaction of race and class' that it necessitates (Goodhew 2000:244). Marion Arnold (1996:90) echoes Hansen's statement, maintaining that 'servitude is part of the South African history of human relations. Servitude is a condition of bondage generating control over labour, and it exists because race, gender and class establish unequal relationships of power between people'.[6] Thus, contends Cherryl Walker (cited by Arnold 1996:94; see also Giles 2004:78), while black women viewed themselves as different from their white employers, they were willing to learn and imitate the ways of their employers who were in positions of power and imposed authority over them. Jean and John Comaroff (cited by Hansen 1992:38-46) elucidate that the work of domestic service became the 'mirror image of the other', whereby behaviours were reflected, and that the home was the place which was used to instil 'Western family ideology'. Some black women emulated 'white ways'; others appropriated them partially, and others rejected them completely (Comaroff & Comaroff cited by Hansen 1992:45). Domestic service grants a "girl"[7] permission to emulate perceived "white ways" of expressing gentility.

In the South African system of domestic service and the available living spaces, despite the domestic servant's intimate presence in their employer's home, the gap between black and white women was experienced physically and materially. Often, domestic workers were housed in small rooms attached to the back of the employer's home, and spent most of their life inhabiting the space of their employers, and caring for their employer's children, rather than being with their own families. My grandmother lived with her mother's "madam" from the age of nine, and was taught by her to do the domestic chores. When she was old enough she learned how to crochet. Later, as a homemaker in Meadowlands, my grandmother adopted, and, as I suggest later in my discussion, adapted her madam's tradition of laying crocheted doilies on surfaces under ornaments. Her adoption of this practice was probably because she had absorbed the significance of doilies from her upbringing in the social milieu of an Afrikaans-speaking, white middle-class woman. This sensibility or tradition was passed down to my mother, who similarly adorned her home with crocheted doilies and decorative objects.

5. Black-only areas such as the South Western township (Soweto) were laid out in 1930 (History of Johannesburg 2009; South African History online 2017). Soweto was created when the South African government began to implement legislated separation between the then-racially defined categories of "Blacks" and "Whites" under the Urban Areas Act in 1923 (South African History online 2017). Blacks were relocated to zones separated from white suburbs by a cordon sanitaire (sanitary corridor). This might be a river, a railway track, an industrial area or a highway.

6. As Arnold (1996:91) states, 'domestic service has not been the exclusive domain of the black women'. However, for the purposes of this discussion, I focus on black women as domestic servants.

7. "Girl" was a derogatory and infantilising term used to describe an adult female black domestic worker.

My father, sister and I knew that the objects placed in her glass-fronted room divider[8] were my mother's most prized possessions – ornaments, vases, glassware, cutlery, and framed phographs. They were on display for all to see, but for none to use. The only time I remember us being able to use these highly-valued glasses and cutlery was during my sister's engagement party, which was eight years ago. Before then, throughout my childhood we knew that on a set day, usually a Saturday morning when my mother was off-duty from work, the room divider would be opened and all the glasses, vases and ornaments would be removed, to be washed, dried, and carefully put back neatly placed on top of pink or white crocheted doilies. My father, sister and I could only imagine the satisfaction, gratification and pride that my mother felt after this cleansing ritual. In a similar way to how Homi K Bhabha (cited by Sanders 2006:17) speaks of hybridity as a process wherein "things" are 'repeated, relocated and translated in the name of tradition', it appears that my grandmother's understanding of the significance of a doily for enhancing the status of an object had been passed on to my mother, despite the fact that she was never a domestic worker.[9]

Respectability

The notion of respectability can be traced to the Victorian era, where it applied mainly to the white middle class (Lemmer 2008:27-89). Catherine Lemmer (2008:27) states that:

> Respectability was a code of behaviour influenced by Christian values, [it] governed every aspect of the lives of the Victorians. The centre of this refined behaviour was common to both men and women, yet in every nuance, close attention to gender definitions was essential to gentility.

According to Woodruff Smith (cited by Burns 2008:3), the term "respectability" entered the English language in the late eighteenth century as an extension of the adjective "respectable". Respectability, which initially referred to status, came to be associated with notions of moral character. Smith (2008:3) states that 'by the nineteenth century, [in] Britain, the Netherlands and the United States white men and women had begun to contextualise a new culture of respectability that implied good character and moral standing regardless of social status'. He adds that, 'respectability provided a distinction to which anyone could legitimately aspire – both in his or her own estimation and in that of other people' (Smith cited by Burns 2008:3).

8. Originally a room divider was a cabinet that separates a single room into two spaces, such as a kitchen/TV area and a bedroom. It was, and still is, a popular feature in Soweto homes. Because my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu have houses with separate kitchens, a sitting room, three bedrooms, a bathroom and toilet, they position the divider against the wall as a wall unit, although they still call it a "room divider". My mother currently uses it as a display cabinet.

9. Unlike my grandmother, my mother worked as a clinical nurse at Chris Hani Baragwanath Hospital in Soweto.

David Goodhew (2000:241) posits that respectability is difficult to define; 'what writers mean by respectability varies, but the concept does contain a fixed core'. He (2000:266) elaborates that respectability is not always ascribed to language or race, but that it is associated with orderliness, cleanliness and comfort. In his research on working-class respectability in South Africa from 1930-1955, Goodhew contends that the 'black population of the townships would adhere to a deep sense of respectability premised on a commitment to religion, education, law and order as a means of resisting white domination' (Goodhew 2000:266). If viewed from a different perspective, respectability might be seen as colluding with a "desire for whiteness", which may be unpacked through the lens of Bhabha's (1994) concept of colonial desire. Bhabha (1994:63) hypothesises that desire emerges within or throughout the 'process of identification'. He gives an account of the relationship between the colonialist Self and colonised Other, in which a 'visible exchange of looks' takes place (Bhabha 1994:63). In this exchange, differences or divisions in identity emerge. The historically designated "inferior" black, colonised man (or woman) desires to be like his historically designated "superior" white coloniser.

Whilst taking Goodhew's statement into account, I am interested in how my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu embrace the notion of respectability as a way of life and form of self-expression, rather than using it as a means of opposing white domination, or as a manifestation of a desire for whiteness. Bhabha's (1994:122) theory of mimicry is applicable here; he posits that colonial mimicry is a sign of 'double articulation' or the double-edged sword through which 'the desire for a reformed, recognisable "Other", as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite like the Other' is realised. He states that for mimicry to be effective, there should always be a space where difference is perceived and discovered (Bhabha 1994:122-123). If Bhabha's theory is applied to my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu's use of crocheted doilies, it might be said that their practice is 'the same but not quite' as the Victorian tradition upon which it is based (Bhabha 1994:122).

While the notion of respectability was generally applied to the Victorian white middle class (Lemmer 2008:27-89), it is crucial to note that, contrary to the way in which they have been represented, many black people aspired to be seen, and represented themselves, as respectable. This not only meant conveying the visual narratives of respectability: dignity, pride, confidence, self-assurance, elegance and social standing, but also portraying a form of self-discipline, embodying a sense of moral rigour, refinement, manners, values and personal codes of conduct.

For example, according to Paisley Harris (2003:213), during the progressive era[10] between 1880 and 1920 in the United States (US):

10. The progressive era was an era of social and political change intended to create progress toward a better society. During this era, women received the right to vote (The progressive era online 2017).

> African American women were particularly likely to use respectability and to be judged by it. Moreover, African American women symbolized, even embodied, this concept. Respectability became an issue at the juncture of public and private. It thus became increasingly important as both black and white women entered public spaces.[11]

Another visual manifestation of black respectability at the turn of the twentieth century can be found in the photographs on the *Black Chronicles II* exhibition (2014, Rivington Place, London), which showcased over 200 photographs of black Victorians living in the United Kingdom (Autograph ABP 2017). Alongside numerous portraits of unidentified sitters, the exhibition included original prints of known personalities, including a series of 30 portraits depicting members of "The African Choir".[12] According to Sean O'Hagan (2014:[sp]), the portraits are notable 'both for the style and assurance of the sitters – some of the women look as though they could be modelling for Vogue – and for the way they challenge the received narrative of the history of black people in Britain'. Bhabha's (1994:122) theory of mimicry as sign or symbol of "double articulation" or being "almost the same but not quite" is also applicable here; I suggest that O'Hagan's acute description of the portraits highlights how black Victorians desired to be seen as respectable, but on their own terms. For example: the women are wearing dresses with high necks and long sleeves like those favoured by the Victorian middle classes. As such, the exhibition offered "different ways" of viewing the black subject in Victorian Britain, and added 'to an ongoing process of redressing persistent 'absence' within the historical record' (Autograph ABP 2017:[sp]).

Likewise, in South Africa, black respectability in the late nineteenth to mid-twentieth century is articulated through the artist, Santu Mofokeng's artwork entitled *Black Photo Album/ Look at Me 1890-1950* (1997) (Figure 1). Mofokeng created the archive of 35 images from photographic copies of old photographs, covering the period 1890 to 1950, which he obtained from black families (Williamson 2002:[sp]). According to Sue Williamson (2002:[sp]),

> State sponsored publications, like the tourist brochure entitled *Native Life in South Africa* (1936) seemed intent on portraying black people as resistant to change, perpetually locked into old rural tribal cultures. Mofokeng wished to recover a different reality, showing the sophistication and richness of black family life, thus setting up an archive of inestimable value to the country.

Figure 1 shows the family of Bishop Jacobus G Xaba posing against a backdrop in a photographic studio. They are all poised and well dressed. Bishop Xaba is standing on the far right hand side, dressed in a three-piece Victorian suit, with his cross pendant clearly visible under his half coat. Standing on the chair next to him is one of his children, who is wearing a matching outfit, while another child stands next to his/her mother.

11. Representations of African American respectability can be found in the *American Negro in Paris* exhibition, held in 1900 at the Paris exposition. Curator, WEB DuBois invited black photographers to produce images that challenged the blatantly racist and stereotypical representations of black people of the time. DuBois's exhibit ran counter to the de-humanising and exoticising displays of popular culture, by visualising black people as an inextricable part of society. In the images the African American community is represented as a group of spiritually, socially, and economically diverse individuals. While not disregarding racial concerns, black photographers were primarily interested in locating and reproducing the beauty and fragility of their communities, portraying their lived experiences of everyday life in ways that convey a sense of dignity, pride and respect (Willis 2003:52).

12. The choir toured Britain between 1891 and 1893. The photographs constitute 'perhaps the most comprehensive series of images rendering the black subject in Victorian Britain, these extraordinary portraits on glass plate negatives by the London Stereoscopic Company have been deeply buried in the Hulton Archive, unopened for over 120 years … Their presence bears direct witness to Britain's colonial and imperial history and the expansion of Empire' (Autograph ABP 2017).

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Santu Mofokeng, *The Black Photo Album/Look at Me: 1890-1950*, 1997. Bishop Jacobus G Xaba and his family, Bloemfontein, Orange River Colony, c. 1890s. Silver bromide print. Photographer unknown. Copyright Santu Mofokeng / Courtesy of Lunetta Bartz, MAKER, Johannesburg.

The mother/wife wears a simple but sophisticated Victorian two-piece outfit with minimal trimmings teamed with a high neck lace blouse and gloves. It seems as if the Bishop might have wanted this photograph to be taken to depict his importance as a Bishop in his community, as well as to "show off" his family's status as a "respectable" family. The black and white photograph is compelling as the family look outward towards the camera lens, and consequently at the viewer with a sense of confidence. Thus the observer becomes the observed, a process that Bhabha (1994127) calls the displacing gaze, which 'reverses "in part" the colonial appropriation by now producing a partial vision of the coloniser's presence'. Similarly, Okwui Enwezor (1997:25) postulates that the colonised man 'wants to write his own history, to retrieve his own body from the distortive proclivities of white representation'.

Applying both Bhabha's and Enwezor's theories to a reading of Mofokeng's work, it can be said that because the sitters arranged for photographers to take photographs of them, they were taking ownership of their identities. By commissioning studio portraits of themselves and their families dressed in colonial clothing – an activity commonly undertaken by white people – the sitters adopted their colonisers' dress, as well as the social practice of having themselves photographed as a signifier of respectability. One might read a sense of "genuineness" in these photographs, as they show 'how these people imagined themselves. We see these images in the terms determined by the subjects themselves, for they have made them their own' (David Krut Projects 2004). In other words, although the displacing gaze sets up an interesting and tense dichotomy between "observer and observed", it must be noted that although the observed appropriates some of the observer's tradition of studio portrait photography, the observed never fully becomes like the observer. He becomes "the same but not quite" as his (white) observer, as he re-appropriates the tradition to renegotiate or validate his own identity.

In the following section, I apply Bhabha's theory on mimicry in unpacking how "difference" plays a significant role in how respectability is constructed and how black Victorian and South African identities – including my mother's and Mam' Ramuhulu's – are re-articulated, renegotiated and validated.

Victorian and Sowetan households: "The same but not quite"

In the Victorian household, the separation between servants and family, employee and employer, was defined through a spatial organisation and social rituals that kept them apart (Giles 2004:67). In order to run a "respectable" household and secure the happiness,

comfort and well-being of her family, the upper-class Victorian woman was expected to ensure that her servants performed their duties intelligently and thoroughly (Giles 2004:67-88). Griselda Pollock (1996:6-7) points out that in the nineteenth century, as a result of major social and gendered divisions in Victorian English society, bourgeois women were confined to the "inside", private, domestic sphere: men were associated with the public sphere, women with the private. Judy Giles (2004:90) furthermore suggests that women have 'traditional links with and obligations to domesticity … be it as wives, mothers, or domestic servants'. While I am aware that in a feminist and post-feminist context this statement is a contested one,[13] I consider my mother's and Mam' Ramuhulu's positions to be similar to that of the Victorian bourgeois women who, confined to their homes, decorated them in order to raise the tone of the interiors; to create a safe haven and a place where they can dream, desire and fantasise as part of an attempt to experience domestic liberation.

One can draw comparisons between the Victorian ideal of women as the moral housekeepers of society and black women such as my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu. For my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu, the domestic space is a place that is warm and comfortable; a place in which they are free to be creative; a space where they can express themselves (Maphangwa 2008; Ramuhulu 2008). This is in contrast to those contemporary women who might regard the domestic space as a source of entrapment, rather than liberation. The home can be read as the expression the self. In decorating their homes with artefacts such as ornaments, knick-knacks, tea sets, and crocheted doilies in particular, my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu assert a form of creative agency and self-expression. In my view, doilies have become representations through which specific areas of my mother's and Mam' Ramuhulu's lives are articulated. Metaphorically, doilies have become "threads" of self-discovery and translation, which contribute to their status of respectability.

Crocheted doilies are made by looping thread with a hooked needle to form a design. The maker starts with no physical surface as a foundation and the work is done entirely by hand. The thread is looped, pulled through a loop and knotted. Like lace, making crocheted doilies requires a fair amount of practice for perfection to be attained (Jones 1951:26-27). The lace maker creates a piece by copying a design from another lace maker or according to her own pattern, depending on her level of skill and imagination (Montupet & Schoeller 1990:16). Similarly, my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu create crocheted doilies by copying existing designs, or creating new ones.[14] My mother uses pattern books and looked at existing designs as a reference for making her doilies.

Material objects are significant in that they mediate meanings between women from different environments, and are embedded with the functions that are ascribed to them. The tradition of laying crocheted doilies underneath objects to elevate them, to enhance

13. A key point of Western feminism emphasises that women's lives are larger than their traditional restrictions in the realm of the private and personal (Broude & Garrard 1994:20). Women have the desire and demand the right to be represented as part of "the outside", the public sphere – as citizens, as consumers who are active within the public domain, to make contributions in society and participate in public affairs and employment (Giles 2004:91).

14. Most black female homemakers make crocheted doilies for themselves, although some buy them.

the domestic space, or to protect the surface on which ornaments were placed in a post-colonial environment references the practices of Victorian homemaking, as well as the copious decoration ubiquitous in the Victorian era. Speculatively, in both the Victorian era and apartheid South Africa, this emphasis on decoration formed a contrast to the unwelcoming outside surrounding the perimeters of the houses. For example, as a result of the Industrial Revolution, the Victorians burnt a large amount of coal, thereby creating soot, which darkened the outsides of the houses (Filbee 1980:138-139; Victorian Style/Britain 2008). The need of a woman living in the Victorian era to decorate her interior so that it might serve as an escape from outside, may be compared with the Sowetan women of the 1970s to 1980s during apartheid, who might have attempted to counter the inhospitable external conditions of the time with interior warmth and comfort, creating a safe haven. Post-apartheid, my mother states: 'the interior of my home cannot be as plain and boring as outside, that is why I make the effort to enhance my home inside' (Maphangwa 2008). For my mother, home provides a sense of stability amidst the rush and chaos of life outside the house. She decorates her home because it is the sphere in which she can do so freely, seeing it as a personal contribution to her own well-being and the well-being of her family – a space in which she can exercise her creative agency. Furthermore, she states: 'I decorate my home as a mother because no one else will do it, it is my responsibility to create a good, warm and presentable home … crocheted doilies make my house beautiful, visually it becomes more interesting and is neat' (Maphangwa 2008). She explains that she uses doilies under her ornaments to draw attention to the latter, because these are of value to her (Maphangwa 2008). My mother spends time at least once or twice a month shining her brass ornaments with Brasso[15] and, as mentioned earlier, on some weekends she cleans the glasses, vases and ornaments in her room divider. For her, having crocheted doilies in her home makes her feel dignified:

> When my family, friends and neighbours come to visit me and see that I have crocheted doilies in my sitting and dining room and other places in the house, the main area being my sitting room area, they get a message about the kind of woman I am; I love myself, I love beautiful things (Maphangwa 2008).

The use of doilies as a decorative choice made by women such as my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu might have its roots in the Victorian era. Victorian interiors were elaborate and opulent. Rooms were embellished with intricate patterns and heavily patterned wallpaper; surfaces were covered with fringed cloths and possessions were adorned with detail and decoration. Items such as 'chenille and embroidery covered everything in sight, including the mantel shelf … even the legs of the tables and piano were covered' (Filbee 1980:138). The Victorians were fond of lace and surrounded themselves with it;[16] gracious

15. Brasso is a retail product used for polishing brass.

16. Costly handmade laces were replicated with machine-made laces which were more readily available at a reasonable price (Cusick 1993:6).

FIGURE Nº 2

Large doilies used as antimacassars. Maphangwa residence Naledi Extension 2, Soweto, Johannesburg, 2008. Photograph by author.

rooms were enhanced by antique furniture together with 'treasured pieces of lace' (Cusick 1993:6). Despite the different conditions and climate, colonial women created interiors that mimicked styles in Britain, seen as the imperial centre of good taste.

The Victorian impulse to decorate every available surface might be considered as a forerunner of the use of doilies in my mother's and Mam' Ramuhulu's homes. An example of this can been seen in the tendency for Victorian women to use the lace pieces that they produced to cover some surfaces for display in their homes. Antimacassars were used to prevent the macassar oil used by their husbands on their hair from ruining the upholstered furniture (Cabeen 2007:140). My mother similarly uses large crocheted doilies as antimacassars because of the greasy oil from the hair moisturisers used by members of her household (Figure 2). In Mam' Ramuhulu's home, at first glance, doilies may be seen as ordinary objects, which draw attention to particular decorative choices that she has made (Figure 3). However, upon closer analysis, it becomes evident that doilies are placed under almost all of the objects in her room divider. Mam' Ramuhulu learnt the practice of making and using doilies through observing and initially mimicking her employer. She recalls that in the 1970s, her employer would make crocheted doilies, tablecloths, and antimacassars at work during her lunch breaks (Ramuhulu 2008). Here, Bhabha's (1994:127) notion of the displacing gaze can be applied as it is within the

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Mam' Ramuhulu's dining room. Naledi Extension 2, Soweto, Johannesburg, 1987. Photographer unknown. Courtesy of Mam' Ramuhulu.

domestic space where difference is perceived, where mimicry begins to take place and the pursuit of becoming almost the same through the gaze, routine and repetition arises. Mam' Ramuhulu emulated what she saw as the 'white way' of making and using doilies. She states 'I used to watch her make doilies from a distance whenever I got the chance; I was very interested in what she was making and how she made them' (Ramuhulu 2008). Mam' Ramuhulu adds that she eventually asked her employer to teach her how to crochet and make doilies. The practice of making doilies became a regular routine that occupied her when she had time:

> After I got used to crocheting, I started buying crocheting books, and would use the patterns in the books to create different kinds of patterns. I used to make a new doily with a new pattern every week, I even started creating my own patterns, soon after that I began making crocheted baby sets and toilet sets. I became a specialist, and got a good income from selling these (Ramuhulu 2008).

It can thus be deduced that, to use Bhabha's (1994:122) words, Mam' Ramuhulu emulated her white employer's activities in a way that was "the same but not quite".

Grant McCracken (1988:104-117) postulates that "things" or objects have the potential to evoke power when connected to, or associated with, humans. He states that they are bridges to hopes and ideals which humans have 'to cultivate' what is otherwise beyond their reach. The value and importance assigned to crocheted doilies arises within the domestic sphere where 'femininity is performed, where versions of femininity are legitimated and negotiated' (Andrews & Talbot 2000:1). My mother and Mam' Ramuhulu use crocheted doilies to distinguish themselves from other homemakers, and, within the home, to distinguish certain objects from other objects. In other words, their use of doilies as forms of creative agency can be read in two ways. Firstly, they use doilies to highlight the objects that are placed upon them. In so doing, the objects on the doilies are raised to an elevated position; they are given status as features to be admired. Secondly, doilies call attention to my mother's and Mam' Ramuhulu's skills and attempts to concretise their aspirations to be respectable representatives of the black South African middle class living in Naledi Extension 2.

Jean Baudrillard (1996:73) states that 'objects answer to other kinds of demands such as memory, nostalgia or escapism which are characterised by sentiment'. My mother and Mam' Ramuhulu experience a sense of domestic freedom or liberation through the satisfaction of making and ownership and through the display of their crocheted doilies. The value of a crocheted doily is not only constructed according to its physicality, but also in close relation to emotions and the realm of fantasy. Notions of aspiration and desire, based on emotions and fantasy, also relate to the consumption of physical objects, through which the value of objects increases and decreases in relation to how they are exchanged. For them, handmade, labour-intensive, expensive objects which are passed down from generation to generation tend to have more significance and bear greater value than those which are mass-produced. Inherited objects, in particular instances, represent personal relationships and are often regarded as being highly valuable because of the memories they evoke of loved ones, even though they might not be valuable in monetary terms. Doilies also answer to such demands in instances where they have been passed down or inherited, or given as a gift, or as noted previously, they may support and serve to elevate other objects that carry sentimental associations. As Igor Kopytoff (cited by Appadurai 1986:78) highlights, objects that have 'personal sentimental value' for their collector become venerated. I suggest that this is especially so for the crocheted doilies of my mother and Mam' Ramuhulu, and that they have personal sentimental value, particularly if inherited.

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At Home with Vanley Burke

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I reflect on the exhibition *At Home with Vanley Burke* (2015, Ikon, Birmingham). Three objects from Burke's archive – a Pitchy-Patchy Jamaican Jonkonnu Carnival costume, an old-fashioned wooden school desk and a photograph of a boy with a Union Jack flag – are used as catalysts to explore the relationship between personal/private/intimate and public/collective cultural histories, remembering, memory and material culture. In so doing, I demonstrate how hidden diasporic histories in Britain can be uncovered via the close reading of everyday objects. Using an autoethnographic approach, I examine how Burke's archive functions as a site of memory and source of individual and collective knowledge.

Keywords: Black British material culture; everyday objects; creolisation; archives; memory; rememory; history.

Introduction

> The narratives we create will depend upon how we piece together fragments of the past. The objects we save act as keys to different stories (Curtis 1999:2).

> I don't collect the things I like. I collect what represents (Burke 2013).

In this article, I reflect on the exhibition *At Home with Vanley Burke* that was staged at the Ikon, Birmingham, from 22 July to 27 September 2015. For over two months, the entire first floor of the Ikon was given over to *almost* the complete contents of the Black British documentary and vernacular photographer Vanley Burke's flat; everything save his bed, computer and desk. Referred to as the "Godfather of Black British photography" within certain Black British art circles, Burke is also an archivist and collector of everyday objects relating to Black British culture. His home, a small flat in Nechells, northeast of

Birmingham, has been described as a 'cabinet of wonderful curiosities' (Watkins 2015:6). To many in the local African-Caribbean community, Burke is the 'custodian of the history and the cultural memory of Black Birmingham' (Chambers 2012:14).

Burke came to England in 1965 at the age of 14 from St Thomas in Jamaica, where his parents had left him behind when they emigrated to Birmingham to start a new life. "Left-behind/sent-for" children are a common feature of stories of mid-twentieth century migration from the Caribbean. Parents often went ahead and sent for their children once enough money had been saved, or when a suitable house had been bought, the deposit for which was invariably accrued via the "Pardoner", or *Pard'na*, system.[1] Burke's 'archival impulse' (Foster 2004:3) took hold when he started taking photographs of the local community in Handsworth using a Box Brownie camera that had been given to him by his parents in 1961. He began collecting objects in the 1970s, storing them in his parents' home. By the 1990s, the collection had grown to such an extent that more space was needed. In 1991, the majority of the collection was therefore moved to Birmingham Central Library. This allowed Burke to continue collecting. All the new objects that he gathered were housed in his flat in Nechells. In 2013, the Vanley Burke Archive was re-homed again, this time to the stores of the new Library of Birmingham where the objects can be preserved in a fireproof, oxygen-regulated environment (James 2015).

I have a particular connection to Burke and his work. The details of our life experiences are different, but there is common ground. I was born in 1964 to Jamaican parents who had settled in Gloucester after traveling to Britain in the mid-1950s at the height of migration from the Caribbean. Although my parents grew up in neighbouring rural houses in St Ann, they did their courting in England and were married in Gloucester. My parents' first home was purchased via the *Pard'na* system. This house was situated on the same street as the nineteenth-century church in which they were married. It was also the house in which I was born. Hence, Burke and I each have personal knowledge of our subject matter. My work as an artist, writer and curator is characterised by the analysis of everyday objects and the use of textiles as a catalyst not only to uncover hidden diasporic histories, but also to discuss issues such as race, post-coloniality, cultural exchange and creolisation. I have drawn on memories of my childhood home in previous writings (Checinska 2015), and have incorporated objects from that home into exhibitions such as *The Arrivants* (2016, FADA Gallery, Johannesburg).

In what follows, I deploy a similar autoethnographic methodology to narrate my reflection on Burke's exhibition and archival practices. I draw on key moments of my life, triggered by specific objects, to make connections between my personal/private /intimate re-memberings and wider African diasporic cultural, social and political histories in Britain. Using three objects from Burke's collection – a Pitchy-Patchy Jamaican Jonkonnu

1. The Pardoner system, or "*Pard'na* hand" to use the Jamaican vernacular, is a method of saving common in the Caribbean. A group of friends each put in an agreed amount of money per week and then take it in turn to draw the *"pard'na* hand".

carnival costume;[2] an old-fashioned wooden school desk and a photograph taken by Burke of a boy with a Union Jack flag (c.1970) – I explore the relationship between personal and collective cultural histories, re-membering/memory and material culture. Using an inductive approach, I embrace the writings of Walter Benjamin (1999), Toni Morrison (2007) and Stuart Hall (2004) to analyse my responses. I examine how Burke's archive functions as a site of memory and source of individual and collective knowledge. In so doing, I demonstrate how diasporic histories that would otherwise be absent from institutional archives and received cultural and social histories can be uncovered through the close reading of everyday objects.

There have been a number of recent exhibitions in London that either examine the artist as collector or investigate the place of everyday objects and living spaces in the mapping of histories (see for instance, *Magnificent Obsessions*, 2015, Barbican; *Disobedient Objects*, 2014-2015, Victoria & Albert Museum; *Teenage Bedrooms*, 2016, Geffrye Museum). Hence, in this article, I ask: what is the significance of Burke's intervention to the mapping of British cultural and social histories and, by extension, to perceptions of Britishness?

Exhibition overview

I visited Burke in his flat two years prior to the 2015 exhibition, so I was curious to see how his home would be interpreted and re-presented in the Ikon gallery. What follows is an overview of what I found to be a show that gave me not only a unique insight into the photographer/archivist's kaleidoscopic world, but also a glimpse into aspects of the everyday worlds of Britain's African-Caribbean communities.

Entering the gallery space, via a white-walled corridor in which paintings, photographs, posters and black-skinned busts hung, the other visitors and I became part of a living archive that shifted in emphasis depending on who inhabited it. Our reflections in a large mirror at the entrance ensured that we were all included in the show as exhibits, just as Burke himself became the subject of his own enquiry. Moving through the space, my overriding feeling was one of being wrapped in domesticity. This was a particular kind of domesticity that was not only African-Caribbean at its root, invoking memories of my childhood home, but was undoubtedly connected to the basic human need for a sense of at-home-ness and belonging.

Each room was filled with keepsakes and trinkets, memorials to many moments, reminders of particular events in Burke's life. Objects that I was particularly drawn to

2. Pitchy-Patchy is a central character of the traditional Jamaican Jonkonnu carnival that takes place annually at Christmas-time.

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Vanley Burke, *At Home with Vanley Burke*, 2015. Installation view, Ikon Gallery. Birmingham, UK. Courtesy Ikon Gallery.

included a Pitchy-Patchy Jamaican Jonkunnu carnival costume that filled a corner of the living room; a gilt drinks trolley, a radiogram and a glass-fronted cabinet full of best glasses and *objets d'art* that would not have looked out of place in my parents' 1970's front room. Each of these surfaces was adorned with a crochet doily, some of which were starched to create a sculptural effect. Even the tower of VHS videos adjacent to the Pitchy-Patchy costume was topped with a crochet doily. The window and conservatory of Burke's flat were reworked into an open grid-like structure that looked out from the living room onto a narrow corridor, the walls of which were painted in a vibrant blue colour, which reminded me of the painted wooden houses characteristic of an imaginary Caribbean idyll. This structure constituted a network of struts and shelves that, like a 1970's room divider, drew the disparate objects on display into a more formal composition without over-regulating its eclecticism. Yet it was not only the distinctive décor that placed this space within the African-Caribbean community in Britain. The near constant soul, Blue Beat and reggae music drifting from the stereo, interrupting the BBC Radio 4 received English voices emanating from the kitchen, provided an unmistakably African-Caribbean diaspora pulse.

Walking from Burke's reconstructed office to the front room, to the kitchen and back, I was reminded of Walter Benjamin's (1999) meditation on the packing and unpacking of his library. Benjamin considers the relationship that a book collector has to his books. He suggests that the act of collecting is of equal importance to the collector as the collection itself; the act of acquiring possessions is, according to Benjamin, linked to memory. The 'poles of order and disorder' (Benjamin 1999: 62). that the collector attempts to straddle by creating order out of the chaos of books, in Benjamin's case, parallel African-Caribbean migrants' attempts to hold the tension between trying to settle in a new homeland but longing to return to the old, whilst navigating a Mother Country that did not welcome them as a good mother should. For me, the fastidious tidiness of the piles of VHS videos, towers of newspapers, books, souvenirs, bric-a-brac, golliwogs, shackles and other ironmongery relating to enslavement, together with the many photographs, carvings, collages and paintings produced by Burke himself, seemed to create a precarious sense of order out of such disorderly emotions.

Just as Benjamin's relationship to his numerous volumes is not based on an emphasis on function and utilitarian value, the now unused objects in Burke's front room, for example, metamorphose into signifiers, able to unlock memories – the artist's and my own. Benjamin (1999:69) observes that the personal memories of the archivist stem from the intimate relationship between collector and object. It is as though the objects bear a trace of the owner: 'not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them' (Benjamin 1999:69). The things inside Burke's home, through their initial acquisition and handling, bear traces of their life journeys, at once personal history and, in my opinion, an under-represented aspect of British cultural and social history. The relationship between the personal/private/intimate and the public/collective is tightly enmeshed. To draw on the feminist mantra, from my perspective as a young black woman growing up in Britain during the 1970s under a white gaze, there was a growing realisation that the personal was always going to be political. However, in the context of my childhood home and Burke's flat, the notion that "the personal is the political" was not solely tied to the female gender. It was my father who hung the wallpaper, painted the ceilings, skirting boards and doors, whilst my mother dressed the space, crocheting and sewing the soft furnishings. It was my father who knocked down the connecting wall between the front room and the "telly room" to create a fashionable 1970's open-plan look. The presentation of our home became an extension of my parents' presentation of themselves. What was at stake was the issue of personhood.

The reconstructed bedroom was home to a 1950's prom dress belonging to Burke's mother, and the dressing table was the resting place for a tablecloth hand-stitched by her mapping different points in her life by capturing the signatures, and therefore

memories, of certain people that she had met (Frances 2013). This further demonstrates Benjamin's thoughts on the act of collecting. There were also the eye-catching porcelain figurines nestling inside brightly-coloured, starched crochet doilies; figurines and doilies that are familiar to me and have become familiar to certain audiences within and beyond the African-Caribbean diasporic communities in Britain through exhibitions such as *The West Indian Front Room*, by artist/curator Michael McMillan (2005-2006, Geffrye Museum, London), and BBC documentaries such as *Back in Time for Brixton* (2016). Over time, these now unused objects increase in perceived value and become 'sacrelized' (Kopytoff 1986), as is the case for Burke's objects that are destined to be re-housed in the Library of Birmingham archives. This is precisely the sort of transformation that intrigues Burke (2015a), who states: 'I collect these things but they are not mine … there is a sense in which the collection has gone beyond me'.

Perhaps the most surprising discovery for me about Burke is the way in which he has brought his creativity to bear across so many artistic genres beyond photography. There were barbed wire sculptures, costumes, large-scale naïve paintings and carvings, all of which were produced by Burke. His home is not about preciousness. It is about the expression of a remarkable creative energy that compels him to collect stories – his own and those of the community's. I was left with the impression that Burke's creative practices are unbounded and unceasing.

In conversation with Burke (2013), it became clear to me that his practice is built around collecting; he sees no separation between the photographs and the objects, including his own artworks. Each continually changing, continually progressing creative output forms a strand of an interlinked archive-in-process that I was allowed to both witness, and become a part of, on my visit to the exhibition. This, to me, speaks to the notion that remembering is not only a conscious and deliberate act, but also a creative process.

Burke's installation provided a catalyst for my own re-membering, by which I mean my own reconstructed memories born out of a creative process. As I engaged with the objects that drew me in, for example the crochet doilies, memories were pieced together like the mismatched multi-coloured scraps of cloth that formed Burke's Pitchy-Patchy costume. Layers of amalgamated memories emerged from fragments of my remembered childhood home, from flashbacks to the homes of relatives and family friends, from imaginings ignited by books read in adult life, such as Andrea Levy's *Small island* (2004) and *Every light in the house burnin'* (1995), both set in the context of African-Caribbean migration and settlement.

On the day of my visit, Burke served me tea in the "kitchen" and challenged me to a game of dominoes. I was transported back to the Formica table that sat in the tiny kitchen of my parents' first house, my first home. My father played dominoes with his brothers and his friends from "back home" on that table. It is where he taught my sister and I the rules of a game that was so popular back then that it could have been regarded as a Jamaican national sport. I declined Burke's invitation to put a record onto the turntable. Yet, inwardly, reggae anthems of my youth such as the Natural Ites' *Picture on the Wall* and Steel Pulse's *Handsworth Revolution* catapulted me back to a mid-1970s moment of Black cultural awakening in Britain. I was too young to have been fully aware of the implications of this moment when we became "Black" instead of "coloured", but I do "remember" it and know it intimately. It is a "memory", the meaning of which I have learnt through listening to my sister's generation. It is a memory that I later understood and absorbed as my own. The invisible borders between the personal/private/intimate and the public/collective collapsed. The unreliability of memory was made apparent as personal and collective cultural memories became enmeshed.

Rememorying as reconstruction work

Morrison's concept of 'rememorying' introduced in the novel *Beloved* (2007), articulates the piecing together of personal and collective cultural memories through the encounter with Burke's archive that I discuss. For Morrison, rememory defines the act of remembering a memory, of invoking a past reality, or of calling to mind something once known but forgotten. A rememory is also an object, place or person that triggers the process of individual and collective re-membering (it is as though a rememory exists in its own right; it is independent of the person remembering; it is there even though it has been temporarily forgotten). Re-membering signifies a putting back together of reconstructed memories that proceed self-making and self-knowing. Yet, as a particular rememory is called to mind another inevitably slips away.

The maternal protagonist of *Beloved*, Sethe, reconstructs her past through repeated rememory. The novel is set in Cincinnati in 1873, after the American Civil War but through a series of flashbacks, returns to a Mississippi slave plantation named "Sweet Home". This name is a cruel irony since the past reality that is reconstructed is framed by beating, scarring, escape and infanticide committed in a bid to circumvent the Fugitive Slave Act. Sethe does achieve a form of freedom once she reaches 124 Bluestone Road, but she remains enslaved since she is haunted by Beloved, the child that she killed, and by the resulting guilt. Paul D, the last remaining Sweet Home slave apart from Sethe, arrives at 124 eighteen years later to tell his part of the story of escape and

liberation. This empowers Sethe to share hers. In sum, in *Beloved*, Morrison tells of a brutal history of enslavement in America and its present trace through the rememoried stories of Sethe and Paul D. Their two fragmented stories, rememoried by each other, come together to form a multi-layered whole that signifies or stands in for the disremembered/forgotten stories of individual enslavement.

There is a symbiosis between Morrison's concept and what Hall (2002) describes as 'reconstruction work'. On the topic of the suturing of fragmented diasporic histories, Hall (2002:252), himself a migrant from Jamaica, writes

> The history of Black settlement in the post-war years is only just beginning to be written. One of the essential preconditions of such an account is the collection, preservation and interpretation of "documents", public and private, formal and informal … The past cannot speak except through its "archive".

Hall (2002) examines the efficacy of the use of documentary and domestic photographs alongside oral testimony as a means of uncovering and writing diasporic histories. A primary concern in Hall's writing is the impact that the post-World War II, postcolonial African-Caribbean diaspora cultures have had on British national culture. His methodological approach combines personal memories and reflections on everyday materials, such as family photographs, with political and theoretical investigations. The question underpinning Hall's article is whether or not it is possible to represent the lives of post-war Black British migrants without portraying them as "social problems" as they were represented in the media, or solely as victims of racism. Through close readings of documentary photographs from the Hulton-Deutsch Collection and domestic photographs taken by High Street photographers, Hall demonstrates that broader collective cultural and social meanings can be gleaned by examining the details of individual everyday lives. There is a correlation between this piecing together of such details to reconstruct collective histories and the rememorying that I outline in this article.

The photographs discussed by Hall suggest histories of Black people in Britain alternative to the dominant narrative. Not that they bear an essential truth, rather they are open to layered interpretations, contingent and dependent on context, through which multiple histories might be told. He notes that the formal portraits taken by High Street photographers 'signify a certain democratization of representation … They documented where people were at a certain stage of life, and how they imagined themselves, how they became "persons" to themselves and to others' (Hall 2002:257). These photographs constitute a "counter-archive" that foregrounds the possibility of "counter-narratives". Here, drawing on Okwui Enwezor's (2008:22) definition, the notion of the 'counter-archive' points to

the concept of the archive as an active producer of knowledge, as opposed to the archive as a passive receptacle in which knowledge resides. This notion also suggests a critique of received knowledge and/or history through the cross-examination of the representational politics of the institutional and/or public archive. Hall notes that numerous meanings will already have been inscribed onto each photograph through their appearance in the field of representation via magazines, newspapers and colour supplements and so on. He nevertheless urges readers to look 'beyond the frame', to search for the 'counter-narratives', to be mindful of the 'absences' (Hall 2002:256). Hall (2002:255-257) writes that each photograph is a 'structure of "presences" (what is represented, in a definite way) and "absences" (what is unsaid, or unsayable, against which what is there "represents")'. These photographs depicting everyday life are regarded as 'informal evidence' vital to the uncovering of 'the frequently unrecorded, unrecognized, unspoken history of everyday life and practice in the black communities in Britain' (Hall 2002:258). I suggest in this context that the reading of such documents heralds a democratisation in history-writing. Burke's installation further demonstrates the way in which such reconstruction work can be achieved through individual and collective memory-work or rememorying. My reading of selected objects from his exhibit – the Pitchy-Patchy costume, the old-fashioned school desk, the picture of the boy with the Union Jack flag – explores this connection between the creative processes of rememorying and reconstruction.

The Pitchy-Patchy Jamaican Jonkonnu carnival costume

As the central character of the traditional Jamaican Jonkonnu carnival, Pitchy-Patchy's role is to ensure the good behaviour of the masqueraders and the crowd. He is charged with maintaining order (Lewin 2001). Positioned in the corner of the "living room", Burke's Pitchy-Patchy presided over the comings and goings of the exhibitions' visitors whilst keeping watch over the artefacts housed in this home-cum-archive. I suggest that the "bits-and-piecesness" of his costume could be seen as a metaphor, not only for Burke's collecting behaviour, but also my process of rememorying set in motion by engaging with his archive. In spite of being randomly stitched together from mismatched strips of leftover cloth, the Pitchy-Patchy costume has a harmonious feeling to its design. This speaks to the stitching together of fragmented diasporic histories to create coherent multi-vocal, multi-layered wider histories of migration and settlement.

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Vanley Burke, *At Home with Vanley Burke*, 2015. Installation view, Ikon Gallery. Birmingham, UK. Courtesy Ikon Gallery.

If Burke's archive is viewed through the prism of rememory, an encounter with it sparks a train of creative memory-work that facilitates self-making and self-knowing. This in turn, potentially encourages African-Caribbean communities to tell their own stories. In my case, when I visited the Ikon, my own diasporic sense of uprootedness and homelessness was temporarily stilled by meditating on objects such as the garland of dried orange peel draped along the kitchen shelf and the scars on the misshapen base of a Dutch pot. The memory that I rememoried was set in the kitchen of my childhood home. My nine-year-old self, my older sister and my parents populated it; my mother in her floral "tie-head" and apron, my father in his navy blue paint-splattered overalls. Orange peel garlands were a constant feature in our kitchen and the kitchens of family and friends. I remembered my mother's attempts to teach us how to create these scented garlands that were used in cooking and as a decorative device. We came to learn who we were, from a racial and cultural perspective, through such lessons learnt at the kitchen table. Similarly, the well-worn family Dutch pot, hand-carried from Jamaica, marked us as African-Caribbean. The once mundane everyday objects re-presented in Burke's archive were transformed into a source of re-membering and self-knowing that connected me to, and made me aware of, wider collective knowledge and histories.

From Burke's (2015a) point of view, his archive houses records pertaining to a diverse history of African-Caribbean migration and settlement in Britain from the mid-twentieth century to the present day. His collection of everyday objects – the Dutch pot, the doilies, the posters, the pamphlets – document a range of lived experiences. This material is re-presented to a new generation of Black Britons who do not see themselves represented in the current received histories of Britain. He states,

> I am informed by my desire to capture people's experience, history is a by-product of lived experience … History has always been a starting point, but we [the African-Caribbean community] didn't trust the history that was written … we needed to start documenting and writing our own history so I collected material that reflected us … newspapers, pamphlets, leaflets … a lot of street posters advertising dances and events, conferences, meetings (Burke 2015a).

Burke (2015a) explains, 'It's about the process of collecting objects which are full, pregnant with history, history of the people who have used them'. There is a sense in which informal evidence – such as the street posters and pamphlets – have the potential to speak into the gaps found in institutional archives and therefore received histories. Importantly, the use of such informal evidence allows the community to tell its own stories.

The archive has become a recurring feature of contemporary creative practice as artists, curators and critics alike succumb to what Hal Foster (2004:3) identifies as the 'archival impulse'. Foster (2004) draws on the work of artists such as Thomas Hirschhorn, Sam Durant and Tacita Dean to demonstrate a move by international artists to expose and utilise the inconsistencies and gaps within the institutional archive as a portal through which lost or obscured histories and life experiences might be retrieved. Foster (2004:5) notes that the work of these 'archival artists' is as much

> preproduction as it is postproduction: concerned less with absolute origins than with obscure traces … these artists are often drawn to unfulfilled beginnings or incomplete projects – in art and in history alike – that might offer points of departure again.

The installations created by these artists suggest "other kinds of ordering". 'Reconstruction work' and 'other kinds of ordering' – Hall's (2002) and Foster's (2004) respective phrases – are useful in understanding the function of Burke's archive as re-presented at the Ikon.

It is important to consider the complex meanings and use of the term "archive" itself. What might the concept of the archive mean currently? How can Burke's re-presented home-cum-archive be read in this context? Jacques Derrida (1995:9) writes that the archive is a place of origins, the place from which order is given, the place where order and knowledge based on 'official' records are to be found. Received history, public memory and memorial are partially generated, regulated and maintained as "objective truths" by the documentary evidence hidden within institutional archives. As Carolyn Steedman (2002:68-69) observes,

> The archive is made from selected and consciously chosen documentation from the past and also from the mad fragmentations that no one intended to preserve and that just ended up there … in [the archives] quiet folders and bundles is the neatest demonstration of how state power has operated.

Similarly, Foster, drawing on Michel Foucault (1976:129 cited by Foster 2002:82), describes the archive as 'representative of the system that structures the discourse of a particular historical period'. Hierarchies of power and value rooted in such discourse are inextricably bound to the process of archiving. Foster (2002:82) writes, 'an archive structures the terms of discourse', but also 'limits what can and cannot be articulated at a given time and place'. The gathering, demarcating and preserving undertaken by the *archons* (those who come first, or at the head: the leaders) that dictate the guiding principles underpinning this process, naturally involve the obverse – loosing, misnaming and neglecting. Hence there are always inevitable gaps, silenced

subjectivities and overlooked histories. However, like Foster's "archival artists", it is the absences and disconnections, the fragmentary nature of these collections, that seems to inspire Burke to collect.

In his curated exhibition *Archive Fever* (2008, International Centre for Photography, New York), Enwezor presented works by 25 contemporary artists who prise open such cleavages to interrogate questions around identity, history, memory and loss. Enwezor's aim was not to generate a theory of the archive, but to show the way in which Foster's "archival impulse" infuses current work, producing "counter-archives" and therefore "counter-narratives" (Enwezor 2008:22). As stated, the counter-archive is a space that is an active producer of knowledge, rather than a passive receptacle in which knowledge resides. It exists in part to critique received knowledge and/or history by highlighting the representational politics of the public archive. Burkes' archive, whether situated in his flat in Nechells, or in the Library of Birmingham, or re-presented at the Ikon functions in this manner. The relationship between each of these sites has become increasingly fluid as artefacts move freely between public and private spaces (James 2015:26). However by placing the contents of his home-cum-archive inside the Ikon, Burke opens his collection to a potentially more diverse audience, which encourages the possibility of a cross-cultural multi-vocality that might not be achieved when the collection is in his flat in Nechells or the Library of Birmingham.

Such use of the archive is not new. Much has been written on the "archival turn" in contemporary art as in the example of Foster's work cited above. The phrase, when used in conjunction with art and curatorial practice, references 'the increased appearance of historical and archival … artifacts, and the approximation of archival forms' (Simon 2002:101-102). The archival turn characteristically involves the repositioning of materials that would ordinarily sit outside an art context into a gallery setting by artists and/or curators. Burke's archival practices trouble this definition since, part of his archive ordinarily resides in his home, whilst his collection is not usually housed in a gallery.

Writing on the archival turn in contemporary art, Cheryl Simon (2002:104) notes a shift towards materiality: 'emphasis is now placed on the forms of institutional discourse and the objects they frame'. Simon's analysis suggests a middle ground; a space between the concern with the critique of the relationship between knowledge and power represented by the public archive, and the fetishisation of the object. Here the archive is viewed as a site of exchange in which artists' interventions, like that of Burke's which reframe the archive and redefine the archival artefact, act as catalysts for dialogue and the re-ordering that results from it. Sven Spieker (2011), discussing contemporary art practice, defines the archive as, '[s]ome kind of relay station on the global trajectory

along which documents travel, where they are exchanged, transmitted, mediated and where new meanings or combinations of the two are tested and in turn exchanged'.

This relates to Hall's, Foster's and Enwezor's notion of the archive as a place of constant creation, where the critical engagement with the archival documents by artist, curator and viewer becomes a form of ongoing knowledge production. This, in my view, underlines the allure of Burke's home-cum-archive as re-presented at the Ikon.

As a left-behind/sent-for child and as an artist, Burke sits simultaneously within and on the edge of both the Caribbean community and the museum/art/academic world. This in-between positionality manifests itself in an eye or an inner motivational force that is comfortable with the juxtaposition of tabloid newspapers, doctoral theses, religious tomes, golliwogs, prom dresses and a Pitchy-Patchy Jonkonnu carnival costume. His is an inner motivational force that is also comfortable with the blurring of the boundary between home and archive, between personal/private/intimate and the public/collective. By situating what is already a somewhat unorthodox archive into the Ikon, Burke adds another layer of complexity to the stories/histories that might be told through close readings of the objects. Returning to the Pitchy-Patchy Jonkonnu costume, carnival represents a site of dialogue in Jamaica; a public space where the "bits-and-piecesness" of a characteristically creolised culture can be freely expressed; a public space where societies' hierarchies and power structures rooted in negative readings of racial and cultural difference are temporarily reversed. It is as though Burke's home-cum-archive constitutes a 'counter-archive' that is imbued with a carnival sensibility where open multi-vocal, multi-layered dialogue is actively encouraged by the artist and curator.

The old-fashioned wooden school desk

One of my lasting memories of visiting Burke's flat in 2013 is being invited to sit at an old-fashioned wooden school desk situated in his front room. I was instructed to open the lid and look inside. I dutifully did so. Just as my childhood memories of learning to read and write at a similar desk came rushing back, I was shocked to discover a set of iron shackles and chains. There was also a scrapbook in which had been pasted images of other iron instruments of torture. Any sense of cosy at-home-ness came to an abrupt end. In that moment, to reference Frantz Fanon (1986:110), I was 'battered down by tom toms'; reminded of a history rooted in and through the history of enslavement in the Caribbean, in the buying and selling of human beings; a history characterised by fracturing, learnt in fragments by reading between lines or, to use a textile metaphor, picking up lost stitches. That which was ordinarily hidden was suddenly revealed. Burke left me visibly squirming in my seat.

In the exhibition at the Ikon gallery, the school desk was placed in the "living room". It stood in the corner diagonally opposite to the Pitchy-Patchy carnival costume. The original contents of the desk were hung from the struts of the reconstructed conservatory area described above. Accessories such as a pair of women's organza evening gloves dangled from a scold's bridle. It is unclear whether or not members of the public were given the opportunity to open the school desk in the way that I had been invited to when I had visited Burke's flat. In my view, some of the impact of Burke's original statement was lost, since the sensory engagement through touch was not possible as a result of this curatorial choice.

Burke (2015a) explained to me that the shackles, chains and neck irons were made by blacksmiths in the Black Country. During the nineteenth century, the Black Country became the worldwide centre for the manufacturing of such goods essential to the success of the transatlantic slave trade (Burke 2013). The region got its name from the smog generated by the British Industrial Revolution's (1760-c.1840) coal mines, iron foundries and steel mills that belched black smoke into the air. Sitting at the school desk, handling the irons, leafing through Burke's scrapbook, I was shown, in a most powerful way, the efficacy of the use of material culture to uncover hidden interconnecting histories. This immersive sensory encounter enabled me to reconnect the other items in the living room, such as the golliwogs, the religious tomes and the porcelain minstrel figurines, to their historical contexts. I was compelled to reread, to re-evaluate his collection at a deeper more complex level that moved beyond a celebratory nostalgia for my own rememoried past. I was made to remember an historical past that is all too often obscured, and that I, at times, would prefer to forget; to disremember.

Burke's front room and the décor of my parent's house look the way they do because of the interdependent, yet uneven, relationship between Britain and Jamaica that was born out of the Caribbean plantation slavery system. The creolised aesthetic underpinning the style choices present in each space has its genesis in the enslavement of African peoples and their transportation to Jamaica. On opening the desk, I could not escape this realisation.

Richard DE Burton (1997) defines African-Caribbean identities as 'creolised' identities that emerged from the Caribbean plantation system. He uses the term 'Afro-Creole' to emphasise his focus on the traces of African cultures within the creolised culture of black-skinned Jamaicans of African heritage. Kamau Brathwaite (1971:212) takes up the same term, but gives it a political impetus by equating Afro-Creole culture with the emerging cultural nationalisms of Jamaica in the 1960s. He sees the process of creolisation itself as the source of Jamaican culture, which is rooted in and through the

"folk" or vernacular culture of the enslaved. Braithwaite (1971) defines creolisation as a cultural process that emerged as people mainly from Britain and West Africa interacted with one another to create a distinctive culture that was neither British nor West African. However, creolisation was not a process of blending. The dynamics of domination and subordination present within Caribbean plantation society were central to it. As Percy Hintzen (2009:93) elaborates, 'to be Caribbean, then, is to occupy the hierarchical, hybridized 'Creole' space between two racial poles that serve as markers for civilization and savagery'. Indeed, Burton (1997:6) defines creolisation as 'a process of contention'. In as much as the creolisation process was cruel, so it was creative. Considering the mid-twentieth century Britain to which Burke was sent and my parents migrated, the contention experienced on arrival, for example the shock of racism, provided a catalyst for the creolised reconfiguration of popular culture seen in their respective homes. Each object in each home evokes 'hope as much as fear, feelings of alienation as much as celebration, active resistance and demands for equal opportunity as much as the enjoyment of new opportunities' (Watkins 2015:6).

The photograph of the boy with the Union Jack flag

In the Ikon gallery exhibition I came across a framed copy of Burke's photograph entitled *Boy with Flag* 1970 on the living room floor, leaning against a shelving unit filled with vinyl records and cassette tapes. I first encountered this iconic image in 2007. At the time I was immediately drawn to this black and white image of a half-smiling young black boy, no more than nine or ten years old in my estimation. He strikes a langourous pose with his right hand on his hip and his left hand holding onto his bicycle saddle. He steadies his bicycle with his left knee. He is dressed in two layered skinny t-shirts that hug his pre-teen torso, gently flared jeans cropped to just above the ankle and laced up plimsolls. The Union Jack flag attached to his handlebar flutters in the wind. The setting is a tree-lined lane in Handsworth Park in Birmingham, 'the community's front room' as Burke calls it (2015b). The boy seems at home (Smith 2015: 22).

In my view, *Boy with Flag* speaks to the cultural exchanges that have occurred following large-scale migration from the Caribbean to Britain during the mid-twentieth century; the Empire came home, irreversibly changing the racial complexion and cultural landscape of the country. African-Caribbeans set up home cheek by jowl with white British people. Cultural exchange or 'colonizin' in reverse', to borrow from the Jamaican vernacular poet Louise Bennett (1996), was inevitable. This photograph also marks a coming of age in terms of Black empowerment, not through syncretism or hybridity, but through social action. By the 1970s, Handsworth had come to represent the emergence and

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Vanley Burke, *At Home with Vanley Burke*, 2015. Installation view, Ikon Gallery. Birmingham, UK. Courtesy Ikon Gallery.

presence of Black Britain, alongside areas such as Brixton in London and Moss Side in Manchester that had sizeable populations of African-Caribbean people living there. Whereas many parents educated under a colonial education system in the Caribbean saw England as the Mother Country, when faced with unexpected racism, sought either to conform, or to take up quiet day-to-day resistance through the establishment of their own clubs, churches and community groups, the left-behind/sent-for and "born-here" 1970's youth mobilised themselves; they refused to remain invisible. They became Black Britons, assuming the same national status as their white-skinned counterparts. In 1970, the dashiki-wearing vocal duo Bob and Marcia released the reggae version of Nina Simone's song *Young Gifted and Black*. This was the soundtrack of my early years: 'To be young, gifted and black is where it's at!' The radio in our house was always turned up to full volume when this track was aired. We had a new Black identity and that identity carried value. This moment of awakening coincided with Britain's gradual transformation into a European state following the demise of its empire a decade before.

It would be easy to assume that Burke's archival practices can only be understood and appreciated by African-Caribbean diasporic audiences. Such reductive thinking

underestimates the significance of the archive. Interestingly, Burke (2015b) refers to 'the public' in general below rather than referring specifically to an African-Caribbean audience:

> I am using a language that the public can understand, hoping this exhibition will speak their language. It is about time passing. I'm interested in how … people's relationship with objects has changed. Stories and memories are attached to objects and I'm collecting them.

The language that Burke is referring to is the non-verbal language of everyday objects. His collecting is focused on the African-Caribbean story of migration and settlement. However, there is a level on which objects like the prom dress or the VHS tapes or the crochet doilies speak to audiences outside the African-Caribbean diaporas. There is an accessibility attached to everyday objects that closes the distance between the audience and an artwork that is attached to the gallery wall. Everyday objects, particularly those found in the home, also close the distance that can be created by an encounter with unfamiliar cultures since such objects are central to the composition of what it means to be human; they express and mediate human and social relations. Framing the research driven by and centred on everyday objects within the context of material culture studies, Karen Harvey (2009:3) writes, 'material culture is not simply objects that people make, use and throw away; it is an integral part of – and indeed shapes – human experience'. Daniel Miller (2010:4-10) rhetorically asks: 'do things make us as much as we make things?' He notes that 'the best way to understand, convey and appreciate our humanity is through attention to our fundamental materiality … in many respects stuff actually creates us in the first place' (Miller 2010:4). Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's observations, Miller (2010:135) concludes that

> Individuals grow up to become … members of a given society. This happens in most cases not through formal education, but because they are inculcated into the general habits and dispositions of that society through the way they interact in their everyday practices with the order that is already prefigured in the objects they find around them.

Since every object triggers many stories, material culture provides new insight into the past; it allows for layered interpretations and alternative perspectives to emerge for the viewer. The prom dress, the VHS tapes and the crochet doilies evoke different associations for different audiences. For example, a working class narrative of aspiration and consumption can also be told through these objects. Harvey (2009:1) writes, 'history is impoverished without attention to material culture'; such is the power and importance of language of everyday things. Through the contemplation on and analysis of Burke's collection of everyday objects alternative, layered, interconnecting histories are potentially invoked or rememoried.

Conclusion

The purchasing of the first home was vitally important to mid-twentieth-century African-Caribbean migrant families like mine. The Black churches, community centres and sound systems in Britain began in these domestic spaces. West Indians, as we were known from the 1940s to 1960s, were not always welcomed by the British establishments, so we created our own, bringing a creolised aesthetic to them. The first and second generation migrant homes represented by Burke's archive are the result of movement. The dressing of the home, though bound up with notions of Englishness, respectability, aspiration and memories of a colonial past, was a creative act of creolised cultural expression, of agency, that was much more than merely imitation or mimicry, or indeed nostalgia for former island dwellings. These spaces were about newness, about being African-Caribbean in Britain. Time, labour and care were invested into the establishment of the home.

Many African-Caribbean migrants, my parents included, came to England with the intention of staying for no more than five years. For many it turned out to be a long five years. My parents could not afford regular trips back to the Caribbean, so my sister and I accumulated various surrogate aunties and uncles. Educated under the British colonial system, my parents were taught to believe that 'all light and leading came from the Motherland', as CLR James (1993:38-39) reminds. Any longings for our Caribbean cultural home were paradoxically suppressed when in the company of British people outside the domestic setting, yet allowed to blossom "back-a-yard" from behind the safety of net-curtained Victorian windows, that allowed us to look out whilst preventing nosey neighbours from looking in. This is a common story of 1950's migration and settlement in Britain.The repercussions of the tensions resulting from inhabiting two worlds connected by a long and interdependent, yet uneven, history is reminiscent of the 'double consciousness' described by WEB Du Bois (1994). But from a creolised African-Caribbean perspective, it is perhaps more accurate to refer to 'doublings of consciousnesses', since tensions are multiplied three, four, fivefold. It is indicative of the diasporic push and pull between cultures that erupts in the creolised aesthetic of Burke's archive and that of my rememoried childhood home. For those of us who have lost parents that did not return home to the Caribbean, Burke's archive facilitates our mourning for their past and the future that they never had. It facilitates our lament for the future we never had, but perhaps are still searching for.

Burke's archive constitutes a portal through which lost or obscured histories of migration and settlement might be retrieved, simultaneously revealing wider interconnecting histories in Britain. His carefully curated home in Nechells and at the Ikon gallery are contemporary cabinets of curiosities where such histories are mapped through

strategically placed objects. The proximity of seemingly disparate objects, such as a chiffon-trimmed church hat hung next to a leather whip, sets up a feeling of the uncanny in a psychological sense; the memory that I would rather forget or disremember is rememoried; the familiar and the incongruous clash together, suggesting other frameworks against which the objects and/or space might be read.

Burke's "archival impulse" therefore impels him not only to collect but also to commemorate and memorialise the histories of Black people in Britain lest it be forgotten. The act of collecting is thus of equal importance to the collection itself, bearing witness to Benjamin's (1999) observations. For many African-Caribbean migrants the only material trace of their lives in Britain are the orders of funeral services that have been donated to Burke's archive. I am reminded of Benjamin's (1999:63) assertion the the collector's 'deepest desire' is 'to renew the old world', to affirm its existence. These processes of collecting, affirming, rememorying and reconstruction are tightly interwoven. For me, the allure and significance of Burke's archival practice lies in the alchemic power of his media; the haptic quality of cloth, the sensually evocative pull of the black and white image, the lure of nostalgia, the hypnotic controlled clutter that is his creolised aesthetic. Julia Curtis (1999:2) notes that it is memory that makes people who they are: 'The narratives we create will depend upon how we piece together fragments of the past. The objects we save act as keys to different stories'. Burke's photographic imagery and the everyday objects in his archive 'invite us quietly to contemplate and consider our own textures of memory' (Curtis 1999:2). As we do so might we all begin to see personal/private/intimate and public/collective memories and histories as unfinished, uneven but interwoven tapestries of intersecting stories?

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Libidinal economies of Black hair: Subverting the governance of strands, subjectivities and politics

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ABSTRACT

Beginning with an auto-ethnographic account of my experiences of hair, I draw on newspaper coverage of school exclusions and the banning of Black girls' Afros and boys' cornrows in the United States, the United Kingdom and South Africa. I do so in order to analyse the racialised 'libidinal economy' (Wilderson 2010) of Black natural hair as a transnational surfacing linking the African continent and its diaspora. In the twenty-first century, these hairstyles are objects of commodity capitalism and can adorn heads transracially. However, I contend that they remain troubling for schools when they become forms of surfacings for Black bodies. The symbolic, political, material and affective connections made between hair, "race", and racism – that is, hair's racialised libidinal economy – is the frame through which the analysis of contemporary readings of Black natural hair as "dangerous" and negatively affective in terms of fear, disgust, contempt and shame, is pursued. The examples cited show that Black natural hair is vulnerable to political, aesthetic, psychic, social and affective attack by the ideology, politics and practice of the white/whitened state as it operates through school policies. Thus, I contend that Black natural hair, as it surfaces the Black African descent body, is connected to anti-Black institutional racism. Reading "hair stories" as texts on surfacings illustrates the affective entanglements of an anti-Black world shown through attacks on Black natural hair's "unruly" strands, textures and styles. Hair's affective entanglements, normalising aesthetics and anti-Black institutional racism contained within school "rules of conduct" on "acceptable appearance", drag colonial ideology on "race", respectability and aesthetics into contemporary negro-phobia. However, Black natural hair as surfacing also signifies Black transnational affiliation in its (re)turn to twentieth-century Black anti-racist aesthetics within contemporary Black decolonial hair politics focused on "naturalness". This focus illustrates that there is Black political, social and psychic vulnerability alongside agency, which refuses to be silenced within the relational life of Black natural hair as it comes up against white/whitened power.

Keywords: Hair, libidinal economies, decolonial, anti-Black racism, affect, aesthetics.

Introduction

Black natural hair exerts 'sticky associations between signs, figures and objects' (Ahmed 2004:120), by linking the African continent and its diaspora through the politics of hair as surfacings of the body racialised as Black and insurgent. Using hair and school stories in the media from South Africa (SA), the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US), I contend that Black natural hair is located as a zone of anti-Black racism's negative affect. Read as "dangerous", Black natural hair is vulnerable to political, aesthetic, psychic, social and affective attack by the ideology, politics and practice of the white/whitened state as it operates through school rules. By reading "hair stories" as texts on surfacings, I point to the affective entanglements of an anti-Black world shown through attacks on Black natural hair's "unruly" textures and stylisations. However, natural hair also signifies Black anti-racist aesthetics. Natural hair participates in a racialised 'libidinal economy' (Wilderson 2010) of white/whitened disgust, contempt and fear located in institutional anti-Black racism alongside Black affiliation, which affects the politics of the everyday and the personal. The symbolic, political, material and affective connections made between hair, "race" and racism – that is, hair's racialised "libidinal economy" – serves as a critical framework for discussing contemporary Black decolonial hair politics focused on "naturalness", vulnerability and the relational life of Black/white/whitened power. Hair's affective relationalities, normalising aesthetics and anti-Black institutional racism contained within "rules of conduct" on "acceptable appearance" drag colonial ideology on "race", respectability and aesthetics into contemporary times. Beginning with an auto-ethnographic account of my experiences of hair, I move on to examine Black hair's challenge to racism (Hiltebeitel & Miller 1998; Cheang 2008) and its decolonising potential as it resists being read from the perspective of the white norm by drawing on ideologies of naturalness from twentieth-century Black anti-racist aesthetics (Taylor 2000).

Hair stories: surfacings and Black politics

Growing up in Jamaica in the 1960s and 1970s, hair rules for a middle-class girl were that it had to be neat, "looked after", plaited, cornrowed, and/or styled. As a teenager, my Afro had to form a perfect halo around my face, and my short Afro that followed was cut weekly. Short and chemically straightened hair with a fringe followed, then chemically curled hair, asymmetrically cut natural hair, braided extensions, and now in my sixties, my hair is a very short and natural. These stylisation changes were as much about fashion as they were about politics, and straightening my hair did not mean that I doubted my Black identity, or was ashamed of my natural hair texture, or that I had

fallen prey to the "straight hair rule" of white supremacy. Retrospectively, I wonder why I have never had dreadlocks (locks) even as an adult. Of course, they were prohibited at school and in workplaces, and were negatively regarded by the middle class/elite because of their connection to Rastafarianism and its struggle for Black liberation within Jamaica as a colonial/post-colonial state. Locks demonstrate the value attached to natural Black hair by Rastafarians, and are associated with Marcus Garvey's Black conscientisation and critique of the economic, political, social and aesthetic oppression of Black people, in Jamaica and elsewhere (Chevannes 1994). Locks signify working class, urban/rural dispossessed insurrection against the respectable appearance regimes of Jamaican colonial and (post)-colonial society where colourism systematically excludes darker-skinned, African descent bodies (Tate & Law 2015). However, marked by class struggle and dissent from the Jamaican pigmentocracy, locks remained marginal in Jamaica between the 1930s and 1970s until Bob Marley burst onto the international music scene. Currently in Jamaica, there are "roots" and "cultural" Rastas with the former valuing Black bodies and the latter being an appropriation of Black "cool" stylisation.

This begins to illustrate that Black hair's racialised libidinal economy operates:

> variously across scales and [it] is as "objective" as political economy. It is linked not only to forms of attraction, affection, and alliance, but also to aggression, destruction and the violence of lethal consumption … it is the whole structure of psychic and emotional life … something more than but inclusive of or traversed by … a "structure of feeling"; it is a dispensation of energies, concerns, points of attention, anxieties, pleasures, appetites, revulsions, phobias capable of great mobility and tenacious fixation (Wilderson 2010:7).

By 'structure of feeling' Raymond Williams (1967) means a common set of perceptions and values shared by a generation within a particular culture, space and time, which, for Wilderson, is either included in libidinal economies, or traverse them. Media stories on 'Black hair/style politics' (Mercer 1987) show 'the structure of feeling' (Williams 1967) surrounding Black hair that transcends space and time. In other words, these stories show its racialised libidinal economy. This racialising deterritorialisation (Deleuze & Guattari 1980) disarticulates the cornrow, Afro, locks, and braids from their context of emergence. They are (re)-articulated as transnational, natural surfacings so as to reterritorialise them powerfully as Black diasporic cultural artefacts and signifiers of consciousness. The lived experience of natural hair is central to "race" performativity (Tate 2005) and its construction of Black subjectivities through the surfacing itself. These subjectivities construct a new "structure of feeling" regarding natural hair based on affiliation rather than violence.

Structure of feeling: silencing Black hair/style politics

The US

> A 12-year-old girl is being threatened with expulsion from school for refusing to cut her natural afro hair. Vanessa VanDyke, who is a student at Orlando's Faith Christian Academy in Florida, had been *suffering taunts over her hairstyle* from fellow students. But her mother, Sabrina Kent, says that when she complained about the issue, *school administrators took similar aim and told Vanessa that her hair violated school dress codes for being a "distraction". Vanessa VanDyke's natural afro had been called a violation of her school's dress code by administrators*. Vanessa says that she was given one week to *decide if she wanted to cut her hair, and if not, she would have to leave the school*.
>
> She feels that her *hair is part of her identity and for that reason, does not plan to change it.* "It says that I'm *unique*," Vanessa told Click Orlando. "First of all, it's *puffy and I like it that way. I know people will tease me about it because it's not straight. I don't want to fit in,"* she continued. Ms Kent says that school administrators targeted Vanessa after she approached them about the excessive teasing Vanessa was receiving from fellow students over her hair. "There have been bullies in the school", she said. "There have been people teasing her about her hair, and it seems to be that they're blaming her". School officials now say that Vanessa is *violating the institution's official dress code*, which includes clauses about hair care, reports Click Orlando (Florida girl threatened … 2013, emphasis added).

This is the daily experience of a 12-year-old Black girl in a private school with 11 per cent Black students. It is unclear what the school's dress codes are or whether all girls with hair that is deemed a "distraction" are treated similarly. She likes her hair because she sees it as unique. She does not want to fit in by straightening or cutting it. In order to gain acceptance from peers and school authorities, those are her only two options. Hyper-surveillance of her chosen personal surfacing shows neo-liberal racialisation, where there is "freedom" to express identifications through hair, but only certain styles are accepted. "Freedom" is not realised where there are white/whitened rules on acceptable hair. Fellow students taunt her about her long, "puffy" hair; she is told that her hair "violates school dress codes" and if she does not cut it she would have to leave. What must it be like for your hair to be described as a "violation" when you yourself, your bodily integrity, your racial identity as shown through your hair are violated by taunts and school rules? How can a child psychically survive the violence of such contempt?

This hair story shows that while *this* school's culture implies that rules relate to everyone, there is hierarchical valuation of surfacings. Black straightened or natural short hair is included, but "puffy" natural hair is excluded. Vanessa's critique of her hair's devaluation suspends judgement about whether or not the violence that is being meted out to her is just. Instead, it offers a new practice of hair values based on self-validation. She does not depend on what Édouard Glissant (1997) calls 'philosophies of the One of the West' to bring her Black hair/style politics into view. Rather, she critiques the school rules by questioning "hair" itself. That is, which personal surfacings are recognised, given aesthetic, affective, political and social value because of racialisation and which are not. She highlights the operation of racialised power/knowledge that structures bodily surfacings and reduces the possibility for what Michel Rolph Truillot (2015) calls 'alter/natives'. She illustrates that rules on "unruly" hair are racialised, and dictate that Black hair needs to be domesticated to meet expectations of what it "should" be. White racial power is diffuse as it extends from institutional to everyday interpersonal hair surveillance regimes which dictate that Black hair has no place within aesthetic hierarchies based on aggression and destruction. Drawing from the experience of VanDyke, one can say that the racialised libidinal economy of Black hair in this particular case is based on erasure of Black presence from socio-political and aesthetic life through the dissection of Black bodies (see Yancy 2008; Fanon 1986). Hair is the most visible marker of Blackness next to skin (Mercer 1987), and refusing unruly hair is also about silencing inassimilable Black politics. Silencing is attempted here through disgust and contempt (Tate 2014). Disgust at VanDyke's Black hair emerges in the contempt she experiences through taunts and school rules, which make her know that she is not worthy of attention; her views on hair do not matter and her attachment to her hair is misplaced. Being so precariously located individually must open one to feelings of vulnerability, to feel that one is open to being harmed emotionally and psychically by daily micro-aggressions because one's hair speaks alter/native politics. When there are no plans to change one's hair to fit in, hair becomes a matter for the law, as in the next Black hair story of Black British boy G.

The UK – using the law

> A school's decision to bar a pupil because of his hairstyle has come under challenge in a High Court test case. The boy, G, who cannot be named for legal reasons, was refused entry to St Gregory's Catholic Science College in Kenton, Harrow, north London, at the age of 12 because he wears his hair in "cornrows". *The popular West African style of braiding hair along the scalp is prohibited under the strict uniform and hair policy at St Gregory's.*

> Today Mr Justice Collins, sitting at London's High Court, was asked by G and his mother to *declare the "no to cornrows" stance of the head teacher and governors unlawful*. The school was described in court as "a highly successful, hugely oversubscribed" voluntary aided Catholic school which had recently achieved excellent academic results, with black African and African-Caribbean pupils performing well. G, who is of African-Caribbean origin and now aged 13, was banned on the first day he arrived at St Gregory's in September 2009, and forced to attend another school. *A statement from G's mother said the braids were "of great importance to his cultural and racial identity".*
>
> She said her son had been looking forward to his first day at secondary school and being rejected minutes after arriving "was a major blow to his self-esteem". *Mr Wolfe argued the braids ban was in breach of race and sex discrimination laws. Girls at the school are allowed to wear cornrows.*
>
> Mr Wolfe said G and his mother were 10 minutes late for a school meeting in the summer of 2009, when potential new pupils were told orally that cornrows were not permitted. *The school had expressed concern that it was serving an area where there was gun and knife crime, much of it gang related. Hairstyles could be "badges" of gang identity, it said. The school said it did not regard cornrows as specifically gang-linked, but allowing them in school would make it more difficult to keep out other styles, including the skinhead cut popular with right-wing extremists.*
>
> Mr Wolfe submitted the school's argument was legally flawed and the braids ban amounted to "an unlawful and disproportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim". G, still wearing the cornrows he has had since infancy, attended court today with his mother. Outside court, his mother said cornrows were very much an African Caribbean hairstyle, but her son was made to feel he had done something wrong by the school "purely because of his hairstyle". She said: "There had never been any issue at his feeder primary school". "He was left feeling rejected and humiliated on his first day at secondary school". Angela Jackman, G's solicitor, of law firm Maxwell Gillott Solicitors, said in a statement that the school had failed to take account of the "disproportionate, adverse impact of its policy on African Caribbean boys" and had applied the ban in "an inflexible manner". Ms Jackman said: "The school relies on its view of what constitutes a conventional hairstyle for boys, but disregards the cultural values and norms of the community it serves" (Boy 12 banned … 2011, emphasis added).

The school relies on its view of what constitutes conventional boys' hairstyles, but disregards the cultural values and norms of the community it serves. "Conventional" is what is generally done; the traditional norms of ordinary life. In being about everyday cultural practices, it is a part of the white/whitened British structure of feeling about what constitutes acceptable masculine styling. However, it is about more than this

because of the link being made between hairstyles as badges of gang membership. Although G's cornrows were not explicitly linked to gangs, the school claimed that allowing them would make it difficult to exclude other styles such as the skinhead cuts of right-wing extremists. Difficulty in keeping out skinhead haircuts is an interesting turn in the school authorities' argument, as G is being made responsible for dealing with violent right-wing politics within the school, rather than it being the responsibility of the whole school community. His body, through his hair, has been made into the source of racism. The Black community's cultural norms and values are not being taken account of, nor was this boy's hairstyle preference because it was not conventional. The banning of his cornrows was based on white fear of the possibility of Black gang membership and right wing, violent white supremacy. It is interesting how white fear operates within those two polarities – Black gang violence being visited on the school community and fear that allowing such a style would let in far-right tendencies. Is white supremacy protecting its self-portrayal as tolerant as opposed to being skinhead racists? Whatever the reasoning involved, linking Black gangs and white racist violence is a reminder about where British anti-racist politics is in the twenty-first century. That is, precisely where it was in the 1960s and 1970s, where assimilation to societal rules was necessary and even when rules were followed, racist violence was/is a part of everyday life. Violence and the threat of violence are part of the racialised libidinal economy of Black hair in the UK. The school authorities gave no thought to the fact that the ban itself demonstrated white supremacy as it expected something that the Black boy was unprepared to give. That is, subjection to the rule of 'the conventional' as judged by the dissection of the white gaze (Yancy 2008, 2012; Fanon 1986). Conventional is not neutral; rather, it is racialised as white even though it gives the appearance of neutrality. It is racialised because of the violence done to a 12-year-old boy who carried the weight of rejection and humiliation when he was banned from attending the first day at his allocated school. Such was the affective burden that his family took recourse to UK anti-discrimination law on gender and "race" to get fair and equal treatment for their son. In other words, hair is also a matter of (in)justice and (in)equality when neo-liberal racialisation means that "the conventional" in white eyes and that of Black culture do not coincide, as is also evident in the hair protests in South Africa in 2016.

South Africa – using protest

> A South African school has been accused of racism for *allegedly telling black girls to straighten their hair and not wear afros*. Pupils at Pretoria high school for girls have said they were forced to chemically straighten their hair and *not have afros that were deemed untidy*. Over the weekend, students donning afro hairstyles and braids held a protest at the school to voice anger against the alleged longstanding rule. Politicians weighed in on the row, with the *Economic Freedom Fighters party accusing the*

> *school of seeking "to directly suppress blackness in its aesthetics and culture"*. On Monday, Panyaza Lesufi, the minister of the education department in Gauteng province, visited the government-run school for talks with senior staff and students. "I really want to arrest the situation before it gets out of control", Lesufi said. An online petition against the school's alleged policy has gathered more than 10,000 signatures since it was created on Friday. The petition, titled Stop Racism at Pretoria Girls High, calls on authorities to ensure that the "school's code of conduct does not discriminate against black and Muslim girls". *"We are being discriminated against because of our hair. They want us to relax our hair – they want our hair to look a certain way"*, an anonymous student told the Power FM radio station. *The prestigious school in Pretoria was historically attended by whites only* but now admits black children following the end of apartheid in 1994. The school's code of conduct has a detailed list of rules about hair, but does not specifically mention the afro hairstyle, according to the BBC (Racism row … 2016, emphasis added).

> The school's code of conduct on hair reads:

> 6.4. General appearance – *No dyeing, bleaching, highlighting, colouring, colour washing, colour rinsing, relaxing of hair causing a change in colour, or shaving of hair in any way is allowed*. Cornrows, natural dreadlocks and singles/braids with or without extensions are allowed, provided they are a maximum of 10 mm in diameter. Singles/braids must be the same length and be the natural colour of the girl's hair. Braids shorter than collar length must be kept off the face with a plain navy or tortoise shell alice band. Longer braids must be tied back. *No beads or decorations in the hair. Cornrows must run parallel from each other from the forehead to the nape of the neck. No patterned cornrows. All styles must be conservative, neat and in keeping with a school uniform. No eccentric fashion styles will be allowed* (Code of conduct for learners 2015, emphasis added).

In the context of a former traditionally white school, what can be said about school rule objections to natural hair's surfacings of the Black body? Two aspects are of interest here: first, the Economic Freedom Fighter's (EFF) statement and second, the school's desire for all styles to be conservative, neat, not eccentric, not fashionable, and in keeping with a school uniform. Here, the Afro is placed as in opposition to the school's view on what is constituted by hair as part of a school uniform, even though it is not explicitly named in the code of conduct. The EFF argues that the Afro is a traditional approach to Black hair stylisation and therefore Black aesthetics and cultures are suppressed by the school's anti-Afro stance. It is interesting to note that the Afro is not explicitly disallowed by the code so it might be considered as an "eccentric fashion style". What does the Afro speak to that causes such fear to a system, which still seeks to inculcate whitened tastes in aesthetics within the school rules? What is

so specifically unruly about the un-named Afro that it is ruled as out of order and banned from the school, even though other Black hairstyles are allowed so long as they meet the proscriptions of the rules?

As sign of Black radicalism, Black consciousness and insurrection stemming from the Black Power Movement in the 1960s to 1970s, the Afro remains highly politicised when it surfaces the Black African-descent head. Maintaining an Afro is time consuming and like other Black hairstyles, means that this surfacing is (re)creating an approach to 'natural styling'. This approach necessitates moisturisation, plaits at night, blowing out, washing and regular hairdresser visits to maintain its shape, size and texture. This hair is not unruly as the school authorities claim, because its texture and shape needs constant attention on the part of its wearer. What the school authorities are perhaps not paying attention to is that Black hair/style politics have a dynamic relationship to socio-cultural life. Thus, it is that there has been a twenty-first century resurgence of the Afro not as a signifier of Black radicalism per se, but as a style which speaks 1970s "retro-cool", as well as being part of Black transnational traditional styling to show racial consciousness on/through the body. Indeed, to quote Angela Davis (1994:38), the Afro 'has survived disconnected from the historical context in which it arose' during Black Power in the 1960s and 1970s, and from the 1990s has become part of contexts that nostalgically privilege it as "fashion-revolutionary glamor".

It may be argued that the Afro's co-optation by capitalism's markets in urban "cool" Black stylisation has robbed it of its Black Nationalist radicalism, and as a 'pastiche … the imitation of a particular style … a neutral practice', the Afro has lost its critical or political edge (Davis 1994:42). However, it is perhaps still feared in the South African context because it is not politically neutral and carries the potential for insurrection against regimes of respectable styling for Black middle-class/elite young women, as outlined in the school rules. The debate is therefore as much about "race" as it is about gender and class. The school authorities' ban on the Afro is also about trying to shift Black taste, judgements of femininity and beauty, as well as identity politics. This can also be said about the proscription on cornrows which must not be elaborate, beaded or otherwise decorated, must be close to the head and in a straight line from forehead to nape. Arguably, the cornrow is robbed of its artistry and aesthetic interest in being reduced to straight lines. Both shaving and cornrows are examples of traditional Black African female hairstyling, so their banning and detailed description of what is acceptable could be a move to make Black middle-class/elite young women respectable within continuing social inequality.

The socio-cultural life of Black hair/style politics is dynamised by white/whitened fear inducing difference and distance produced by Black young people's aesthetic labour in all three contexts. The material, symbolic, discursive and affective realities of potential

Black insurrection are created through 'natural' Black hairstyles and their difference from the expected norms. Through it links to radical Black ideology and histories of resistance, stylisation's differences always produce distance, which is determined by 'a social and political history of difference' (Thomas & Correa 2016). Difference and distance are part of the colonial machinery of disgust, contempt and fear continuing into the twenty-first century, which produces and maintains negro-phobic social and cultural life. Here white/whitened affect reproduces those Black stylisations seen as problematic by schools in the examples above, as dangerous for the social body, unwanted, unruly through producing and distributing "collective" feelings of disgust, contempt and fear. Through these affects that stick to Black natural hair as surfacings in Black, young, out of control/out of place bodies (Puwar 2004), it becomes clear how "race", class, gender and ideas of who can occupy the body of the ideal citizen cohere. Thus, it could be said that the suppression of Black natural hairstyles is a trans-national practice, which enables the hegemony of neo-liberalism, white/whitened racial supremacy and hetero-patriarchy. However, the young people's responses as well as that of their communities, mean that these stylisations also have the affective power of affiliation, of communal *philia*, to contest these domination projects. They refuse to let their hair be acted upon but rather insist on acting in their aesthetic and political self-shaping. *Philia* refuses white fear, disgust and contempt of Black bodies and becomes a productive force in constructing subjectivities and Black socio-cultural-political life. *Philia* refuses the constraints on acceptable/respectable forms of styling so as not to produce a 'limit attitude' (Foucault cited by Healy 2001) on what is possible in terms of the making of hair as surfacing but rather to critique existing possibilities. Definitive of [Foucault's] limit attitude is a problematising, transgressive style of thinking oriented toward challenging existing ways of being and doing, with a view to liberating new possibilities for advancing 'the undefined work of freedom' (Healy 2001:1). The Afro and cornrows continue the pursuit of Black freedom in the twenty-first century through natural surfacings. Here the work of decolonising discourses on acceptable and respectable Black stylisation is achieved through producing something other than that which is expected by (neo)colonial discourse as in Homi Bhabha's (1994) description of anti-colonial mimicry. Such potential for decolonisation must be silenced through shame such as that produced through banning, taunts and descriptions of what hair can be hair; what hair is acceptable or not within school codes.

Decolonising silencing: shame and natural hair's limit attitude

Reading the media stories above, it seems difficult to deny the premise that hair stories are deeply affective. Black hair is not just hair; as a sign of identity and uniqueness, Black hair is a location of a politics of the personal which reverberates societally in zones in which white/whitened aesthetics continue to be privileged (Mercer 1987; Banks 2000; Rooks 2000; Craig 2002, 2006). It is this reverberation, the breaking of the silence of the norm which the school authorities' suppression of natural Black hair, Afros and cornrows attempts to act against. Once the dismay at anti-Black colonial practices masquerading as school rules has subsided, reading these hair stories leads to some questions with which to continue the discussion. What is it to silence hair? How is shame implicated in Black hair's political silencing? What does anti-Black institutional racism masquerading as school rules mean for the nations in which these events have occurred and for Black transnational hair politics?

Michel Foucault (1978) provides a way of discussing silencing as a tool of colonial governance that maintains hegemony. In his analysis of the 'repressive hypothesis' in Victorian times, Foucault (1978:4) discusses the imposition of a socio-cultural 'general and studied silence' around children having sex, even though it was 'common knowledge' that this occurred. Repression differs from the silencing of penal law because 'repression operated as a sentence to disappear, but also as an injunction to silence, an affirmation of nonexistence, and, by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see and nothing to know' (Foucault 1978:4). Drawing from this, it is possible to say that a "general and studied silence" accompanies the hair stories. Therefore, even though it is known that Afros and cornrows are established Black hairstyles, their presence as a part of wider social life is repressed.

This repression operates through 'epistemologies of ignorance' produced within the 'Racial Contract' (Mills 1997). Within the Racial Contract, the world is constructed to benefit those racialised as white Europeans and their descendants, but can also benefit its signatories that are racialised as non-white (Mills 1997). Epistemologies of ignorance do not mean that nothing is known or said about Black hair, but the norm tries to repress the difference that emerges within what is said and by whom to obtain different results. Thus, epistemologies of ignorance are strategies of *silencing* the non-normative to maintain the hegemony of the white/whitened "rule" on Black natural hair that it should disappear without appearing to do so. Silencing the non-normative works through recognition and authorisation which has subalternising (Spivak 1995) effects, because:

> Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within overall strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say, we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in each case (Foucault 1978:27).

The injunction to silence as a strategy that keeps Black hair style/politics outside of perception is maintained by the shame produced in and through exclusion and calling attention to hair as problematic for the social skin in the first place. For the norm to be invisible, only some discourses will be recognised as they are attached to hegemonic realities such as hair straightening for girls and un-cornrowed hair for boys. Discourses from these hegemonic realities are shaming because it is 'that shame which is both the dishonour with which one can be branded and the feeling that causes one to turn away from it; it is a question of that which is ugly and shameful (*aischron*), in contrast to that which is fine, or both fine and honourable' (Foucault 1984:204). Shame dishonours and produces feelings of aversion, which cause those who feel shame to "turn away" from hair that has been constructed as shameful. However, what the young people's responses to these shaming events demonstrate are new limit attitudes that shame the shamers, because of their decolonisation of power, being, knowledge and affect in terms of Black natural hair.

For a Black girl child in the twenty-first century US to say, "I like my puffy hair" speaks against her interpellation in the Global Northwest/Southwest as having a shameful and shamed body because of the history of conquest, violence, domination and settler colonialism which is shared in these regions (Sharpe 2010). She refuses this shame that produces suffering because:

> Shame is a very sticky emotion, when it brushes you it tends to leave a residue to which other emotions are easily attached, namely envy, hate, contempt, apathy, painful self-absorption, humiliation, rage, mortification and disgust … Shame becomes embodied, and the body begins to speak for itself in specific ways … The fleshy intransigence of shame means that it can take an unusual grasp of a person's whole organism, in their body, soul and mind, sometimes in eccentric ways (Munt 2007:2).

Hair shame relates to corporeality, to subjectivity, as much as it relates to the psyche, because it is a 'bad feeling' that attaches to what one *is* (Sedgwick 2003). These young people in the examples cited are being asked to inhabit shameful bodies because hair is only recognisable through the norm. The norm becomes visible in the moment of

recognition and judgement that the comparator is lacking. The comparator is interpellated as divergent, abject, through negative affective valuation thus attempting to silence contestation of the category "Black natural hair". Shame transforms or intensifies the meanings of body parts including hair and skin, dictates how they are read by others and their interpersonal behaviours, as well as how individuals can occupy life-worlds from a position of difference. Much as there is an attempt to silence natural Black hair stylisation and the identity politics attached to natural and traditional styles, challenges to this are evident, as in the hair stories above.

Conclusion

> As organic matter produced by physiological processes human hair seems to be a "natural" aspect of the body. Yet hair is never a straightforward biological "fact" because it is almost always groomed, prepared, cut, concealed and generally "worked upon" by human hands. Such practices socialize hair, making it the medium of significant "statements" about self and society and the codes of value that bind them, or don't. In this way hair is merely a raw material, constantly processed by cultural practices which thus invest it with "meanings" and "value" (Mercer 1987:34).

Looking back at the hair stories, it seems to me that 'Black hair/style politics' (Mercer 1987) is currently as important for Black liberation as it ever was. This is so because 'within racism's bipolar codification of human value, black people's hair has been historically devalued as the most visible stigma of blackness, second only to skin' (Mercer 1987:35). Black hair continues to exert symbolic currency as its malleability makes it a potent surfacing for contestation at the levels of subjectivities, affects, aesthetic politics and political economy. Indeed, for Mercer (1987:35), 'all black hair-styles are political in that they articulate responses to the panoply of historical forces which have invested this element of the ethnic signifier with both personal and political "meaning" and significance'. What is important to note here is that some styles have been let into representation, have come to represent what Black hair can be/should be through their domestication and cannibalisation which robbed them of their critical potential, as is the case in the list of allowed stylisations at the Pretoria school.

However, the girls' Afro and boy's cornrows continue to be ruled out of school. Thus it is that, 'the counter-hegemonic project inscribed by these hair-styles is not completed or closed and … this story of struggles over the same symbols continues' (Mercer 1987:41). The struggle continues because it is not simply about hair as organic matter but about Black liberation in a "post-race" world where anti-Black racism still matters.

The struggle continues by recuperating the Afro and cornrows as specifically Black stylisation from their positions as commodified product of capitalism that can appear as a pink Afro wig on Samantha's head in *Sex and the City*, which ran from 1998 to 2004, or Kylie Jenner's cornrows featured in *Keeping up with the Kardashians* (2015-2016). What their recuperation has shown is that Black stylisation is still necessary to circumvent the aesthetic valuation codes of dominant culture. Of particular interest here is that the 1960s/1970s Black Power Afro originated in the US, while cornrows exist across the African continent and are a common approach to transnational Black styling with African continental roots. Whilst being within a critical engagement with dominant culture these styles also reject it as source of recognition by creating creolised forms that communicate across the Black Atlantic's (Gilroy 1993) aesthetic channels. Formed in opposition to hair norms, Black hair/style politics construct new subjectivities through 'an acknowledged form of consciousness both here and elsewhere. Relentlessly resuming something [they] have already said' (Glissant 1997:46). Twenty-first century Afros and cornrows (re)-invigorate Black aesthetic politics and identifications by speaking back to anti-Black racism.

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"... if Black girls had long hair"

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ABSTRACT

In his book entitled *The African origin of civilisation: myth or reality?* (1974), the Senegalese intellectual Cheikh Anta Diop makes the observation that, 'The whole aspect of the world would be changed if Black girls had long hair'. I did not think about the full implication of this statement until a student in one of my classes asked why Diop could assert that the pharaohs of Egypt were black when in the images he knew of them, they did not have "Afros". Thus began my search for images and histories of black hair. Never would I have imagined that this research would be relevant outside of my seminar course called "African civilisations". When the students at the Pretoria High School for Girls ignited a conversation about hair and its regulation by schools in August 2016, my already prepared presentation was converted into a written lecture, and I attempted – through the use of archival images and video clips – to answer the seemingly simple question "what is black hair?" I was puzzled by the problematic question of what kind of historical evidence hair is.

In this article, I consider the volatility of the subject of black hair. I begin with Diop's counterfactual and consider the "unfinished" project of black modernity through the politics of hair and hairstyling. I end with the "hair story" as a new mode – enabled by YouTube, vlogging and other social media – through which young black women particularly, express their rejection of the conformity that is often implied in social and written regulations of their hair.

Keywords: Cheikh Anta Diop; black hair; "natural"; Model C schools; black modernity; hair story.

For several years, I taught Cheikh Anta Diop's ideas articulated in his book entitled *The African origin of civilisation: myth or reality* (1974) to students without thinking about hair, despite Diop's (1974:39) throw away statement[1] that, '[t]he whole aspect of the world would be changed if Black girls had long hair'.[2] This was until a student approached me after class and said, 'Professor, how can Diop say that the pharaohs of Egypt were black? In the images I've seen, they don't look black'. I asked the student, 'what do you mean, "look black?" What is the "black look?"' The student replied: 'They don't have black hair?' To which I responded: 'what is black hair?' He paused for a moment and said, 'they don't have "Afros"'. I spent the afternoon thinking about what kind of

1. All Diop (1974) includes on the subject of women's hair and styling is a three-page insert. There are several other references to hair in his argument, but these are general rather than specifically about black women's/girls' hair.

2. The use of the plural "black girls" by a male author has structured the arguments I present in this article. I respond to his comments as a member of this "black girls" group and have also used the term "black women" to include not just myself, but many of my black female friends, acquaintances, relatives, colleagues and hairstylists with whom I have had conversations about hair. Writing from a purely personal position of the "I" would give the false impression that my ideas about "black hair" are singular or unique.

historical evidence hair is. Can the entire fate of a civilisation rest on whether its rulers had straight, wavy or curly hair? Then it occurred to me: the student was saying that in his experience, black people wear Afros and by definition these black people cannot be the same as the black people who were the Egyptian elite. This was an anachronism: contemporary black people have little in common with black people of millennia ago. But, how could I explain this to my students? At that point, I started Googling images of vintage African hairstyles; exactly the kinds of hairstyles that Diop uses to demonstrate the cultural links between Egypt and the rest of the continent, specifically West Africa. At the time, it seemed frivolous to spend an entire afternoon creating a PowerPoint presentation of hairstyles, weaves, wigs, bonnets and reading up on the research that had been done on Egyptian hairdressing. Even when I presented my findings to the students, I was still unsure about the wisdom of my intervention because as a "naptural"[3] myself, I did not want to turn my teaching into an "anti-relaxer" or "anti-weave" debate.[4] I framed the lecture with a disclaimer that I was doing this as a "public service announcement" since many of my students would go on to practice as doctors and dermatologists. I wanted them to know that relaxers and weaves damage black women's hair and that many black women will visit their consulting rooms with balding heads that were not caused by hereditary alopecia, but by the abuse of chemicals and hair extensions. Fast forward to April 2016. Beyoncé releases an album entitled *Lemonade*, in which she is ostensibly chastising her husband Jay-Z, for cheating on her with a woman who she refers to as 'Becky with the good hair'. In the song *Formation*, she takes the hair references further by defiantly asserting that, 'I like my baby heir with baby hair and afros/I like my negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils'. Critics rave about how this album is the new black anthem; how the word 'Negro' is being re-appropriated in the service of #BlackLivesMatter and how Bey[5] has re-opened the conversation about what it means to be black in contemporary America. No one, however, points out that there is a painful and obscure link between 'Becky with the good hair' and the 'baby hair and afros'. Hidden beneath the bravado of *Lemonade* are the politics of blackness to which only black people are privy. As a "creole" herself, Beyoncé is angry that her husband cheated on her with a white woman. She is basically saying, "I'm light skinned; I have good hair; how come I wasn't good enough for you?" Although Beyoncé constantly addresses her unfaithful husband, the album is also a veiled threat to white women: "stay away from my man; you can't afford him".

> When he fuck me good I take his ass to Red Lobster, cause I slay
> When he fuck me good I take his ass to Red Lobster, cause I slay
> If he hit it right, I might take him on a flight on my chopper, cause I slay
> Drop him off at the mall, let him buy some J's, let him shop up, cause I slay
> I might get your song played on the radio station, cause I slay
> I might get your song played on the radio station, cause I slay
> You just might be a black Bill Gates in the making, cause I slay
> I just might be a black Bill Gates in the making (Knowles-Carter 2016).

3. The term "naptural" is a portmanteau combining the possibly derogatory word "nappy" (meaning natural untreated African hair) and "natural". The ambiguity as well as the negativity of the word "nappy" is evident in the April 2007 incident when an American radio host, Don Imus, referred to the Rutgers University women's basketball team as 'nappy-headed hos' (Don Imus [sa]).

4. The politics of hair in the black community revolve around the question: "is that *your* hair?" This question leads to the debate over whether to straighten one's hair – usually with a relaxer, which is an over-the-counter preparation containing sodium or calcium hydroxide – or purchase "virgin hair" and have this attached to one's hair. Virgin hair comes from the East or Latin America and is "bought" from women with "straight" hair. There is some controversy about how such hair is "harvested" and also whether the packages sold commercially are actually "100% Virgin Hair" as they often claim to be. Both processes – relaxing and weaving – involve long hours at the hair salon and importantly, both give kinky or curly hair a "straight" look. These processes are presented as more "professional" or "presentable" than kinky or curly hair. Some natural hair advocates are against both relaxing and weaving. I therefore did not want to seem to be taking sides in a never-ending debate in which emotions run high on both sides.

5. "Bey" is a shortened version of Beyoncé.

This is Black Power philosophy for rich black women. And, I contend, that is what has changed the politics of blackness and the politics of hair. As black women have become wealthy and educated, wearing expensive weaves has become a new tool in the battle with white women over the bodies of black men. This battle is not exclusively a black versus white battle; there are some senses in which dark-skinned and light-skinned black women are also competing for recognition, as terms such as "yellow bone"[6] become popular descriptors of black beauty. Thus, whether weaves are worn as an expression of success or an aspiration towards the yellow bone status, they signify the changes that are taking place within black culture and the shifting boundaries of what it means to be beautiful. The "Lemonade moment" as I call it, is also a signifier for two historical moments that are merging into one: it is a re-assertion of the position of African Americans as the "epitome of black modernity"; a position which they lost, depending on who you ask, in the 1970s when first, George Foreman unadvisedly took his Alsatian dog with him to the then-Zaïre for the "Rumble in the Jungle" fight with Mohammed Ali.[7] Second, as multitudes of Africans were exiled by coups and civil wars; beginning with the Biafran War of 1967, they ended up living in the United States and Europe and the mantle of representing the "black world" was unceremoniously snatched from African Americans by the emergence of "American Africans" (or European Africans). This latter evolution is at the core of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel entitled *Americanah* (2013). To put it succinctly, the presence of American Africans exposed African Americans to be as ignorant about "Africa" as their white counterparts. Growing up and living in isolated and boycotted apartheid South Africa, the film *Coming to America* (Landis 1988) introduced me, even if I did not know it then, to this emerging gulf between African Americans and American Africans. These moments may seem far away from South Africa but in fact, they are not. The reason why South Africans are talking about hair and race is simple; young black South Africans have experienced neither the disenchantment with African American culture that their African counterparts have, nor have they experienced the "black diaspora" and its "exile consciousness". This means that young black South Africa still idolise African Americans and emulate the "politics of blackness" that they see portrayed in popular American culture. This is a very simplified introduction to the "issue of black hair", but it helps frame the cultural moment that undergirds the inexplicable volatility of the topic.

The story of hair the way I tell it begins with two ideas: the first, posed by Diop, is about how the whole aspect of the world would be changed if black girls had long hair. The second is about the Greek concept of "mimesis" and how it helps to explain the history of hair on the African continent. To begin with Diop: counterfactuals are not a good method to use for writing history; they implicitly do exactly what the

6. A "yellow bone" is a person of African descent who has desirable "Caucasian" features – pointed nose, coloured eyes (that is, not brown), fair or light-coloured skin and/or "smooth" or "straight" hair.

7. For an account of how the contest between Mohammed Ali and George Foreman was perceived by the Zairians, see Yaa-Lengi Ngemi (2016).

historical narrative is meant to do, but in the opposite direction. They do so by telling a comfortable and credible story by merely inverting it. Thus, when Diop says that the whole aspect of the world would be changed if black women had long hair, he might be saying that the current stereotypes and misconceptions about black women's hair would be invalidated, and that therefore black women would become the epitome of beauty and grace. Alternatively, Diop could be suggesting that all the energy that black women have spent over the centuries lengthening and straightening their hair would finally be rewarded, and that they would be miraculously liberated from the struggle to "tame the puff", or in his terms, 'to adapt frizzy hair to feminine grace'[8] (Diop 1974:39). For me, Diop is saying neither of these. Instead, the power of his speculative reasoning may lie in his suggestion that without the creativity of black women's hairdressing and hairstyles, the world would have been a poorer place. That is, it would have been robbed of one of the richest visual stories and visual performances in the history of humanity. Here is my reasoning: throughout his writing, Diop (1974) points to the ways in which the customs and practices of the ancient Egyptians are reflected in contemporary African life. Hair is therefore part of this enduring legacy of the Egyptian civilisation. Diop focuses on the descriptions of Egyptian hair found in ancient sources; he does not write about the meaning of hairdressing and its relationship to African history. In this article, I attempt to do just that – to show how hairstyling is as much a part of African history as any other "artefact".

I appropriate the Greek concept of "mimesis" as an explanatory tool for interpreting black hairstyles. The Greeks used the term to refer to the copying of external reality in the creation of art and literature, or 'the representation of life in drama' (OUP 2011:[np]). African hairstyling is mimetic in both senses – it borrows from nature even as it dramatises such nature and such borrowing. This is one of the first misconceptions about black hair; people often assume that black women deliberately choose "dramatic",[9] over-the-top hairstyles. Not really; the hair itself is already architectural and dramatic, the hairstyle just accentuates the drama that is already taking place.

In 2009, the comedian Chris Rock made a documentary entitled *Good Hair* because one of his daughters had asked him why she did not have "good hair". In the trailer for the documentary (Rock 2009), one sees mainly black people explain why they prefer straight hair or weaves to natural hair. What is hidden behind what I would call the aesthetic preferences of black women, are two important drivers of the black hair care industry: the first is the cost of weaves or virgin hair; the second is the size of the black hair care industry; as one hears in the clip (*Good Hair Movie* 2009) African Americans are 20 per cent of the American population, and yet they consume 80 per cent of the hair products. The statistics for South Africa and the rest of the continent

8. Diop's association of femininity with hairstyling is not, I think, ironic. For someone who is of the generation that birthed both the African anti-colonial struggle and the Francophone Négritude movement, it would have been a normal attribution. However, what the comment also points to is that although he is taking hair seriously, there is also perhaps a presumption that hair is a frivolous *historical* topic and should not be discussed at length – thus, the brevity of his comments on black women's hair.

9. There are no neutral words to write and talk about black hair. Maybe it is the paucity of the English language, but there are simply no words that are not hurtful or potentially insensitive. To illustrate the point, one can refer to the "performance" by the group Un-ruly who, in June 2013, staged an art exhibit entitled *You Can Touch My Hair* on New York City's Union Square. They also made a film of people's reactions (Un-ruly.com 2013: [sp]). The point is that there was a counter-protest by black women who resented the idea of strangers being invited to "touch" their hair. As stated, there is no neutral way of talking about "black hair"; every word touches a nerve, including the word "touch".

are more circumspect: in 2014, the market research firm Euromonitor International estimated that shampoos, relaxers and hair lotions were sold in South Africa, Nigeria and Cameroon alone to the value of USD1.1bn (Hair Care 2016). These conglomerates have, however, recognised the emergence of the natural and organic black hair care industries, and have moved in on these as well. Thus, L'Oréal purchased the American brand "Carol's Daughter" (L'Oréal USA 2014:[sp]), and has also launched its own "curly texture" product line called Mizani. Beyond the market statistics and ownership of the dominant black hair products is the issue of professional hair care: simply put, black hairdressers are not trained to deal with natural black hair; they are trained to chemically alter the hair. As far as I know, there is only one technique of doing black hair that is copyrighted and requires specialised training and that is "sisterlocks" (Sisterlocks: welcome to … [sa]).[10] This means that the hair salon is often not the best place to go if you are black and you do not want to chemically treat your hair. The "beauty aisle" in supermarkets and pharmacies is also not useful. As the recent campaign by the natural hair care company SheaMoisture shows, the separation of the "ethnic" and the "beauty" aisles means that women with black hair feel even more isolated and frustrated when they search for products to use in their hair.[11] This is the cultural context out of which the "natural hair movement" has emerged.[12] I would therefore say that there are three cardinal values of the natural hair movement: first, hair is hair – I should not be evaluated or judged based on my hairstyle or texture. My hair should not be in a separate category called "ethnic". Second, this is the hair I was born with; why must I change it? Third, caring for my hair should not be painful. Telling me to accept the burn of the relaxer or hot iron is to tell me that in order to be beautiful I have to suffer.

What then has led to the point that black people have to start a "movement" in order to gain recognition for their hair? Why is it that the subject of black hair still provokes so many extreme reactions on all sides? When my student reasoned that black people wear Afros and therefore could not have been the rulers of Egypt, he was assuming that the Afro is a quintessential black hairstyle, and therefore black people must have worn it for centuries? Although this is partially true in that the Afro is an African hairstyle, the Afro is also not the essence of black hair.[13] One reason the Afro became so closely associated with people of colour might be because of the images of the pejoratively named "fuzzy-wuzzy"[14] that British soldiers who were fighting Sudanese insurgents in the Mahdist War (1881-1899), sent home. This war popularised the image of the wild Afros that people often imagine when they think of black hair. Although it can be argued that Rudyard Kipling's poem *Fuzzy-Wuzzy* (Kipling [sa]) was meant as a compliment and a salute to the fighting prowess of the Sudanese, the word has entered the English dictionary as a pejorative. Importantly, these images are misleading because they suggest that these Sudanese soldiers did not "dress" their hair or wash it, as it often

10. Sisterlocks are micro-locks (twisted matted hair). They are created using a tool that resembles a crochet needle. The important point is that this tool is not commercially available and is only provided to trained practitioners. These types of locks can therefore only be created by a hairdresser trained through the Sisterlocks programme.

11. The campaign was titled #BREAKTHEWALLS (see SheaMoisture: Break the Walls 2016).

12. The movement is cosmopolitan in that it involves women from various parts of the black diaspora. What unites these women is that they use social media to write, talk about, and "display" various techniques for caring for black hair. They often also use their webpages, blogs and Instagram to promote products that they use to grow their hair.

13. The adoption of the Afro by the Black Panther Party and its association with Black Power is also an important cultural marker of the public visibility of the Afro. On the obverse side, even the Black Panther movement could be said to have been appropriating the "Afro" since at that time it was seen as "militant". This is evident in the fact that the "Afro" of the black power movement was supplanted in the 1980s by the popularity of the perm, or what African-Americans call "Jheri curl". The latter process involves the creation of a "wet" curled look and it was popularised by celebrities, especially Michael Jackson. For an explanation of how a Jheri curl is created, see Jheri curl ([sa]).

14. For a dictionary entry on the history of the word, see Jonathon Green (2010).

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Wig made of human hair from the 18th Dynasty, Thebes, Egypt. Trustees of the British Museum. (Wig made of human hair [sa]).

looks unkept in the images. Nothing could be further from the truth. Across the African continent, techniques for dressing hair were as varied as the hairstyles that they produced. The Afro therefore is not some kind of standard African hairstyle; it is simply one of several hundred ways of growing and maintaining curly hair. For instance, in

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Zulu Woman, South Africa. Photograph by AM Duggan-Cronin. *The Bantu Tribes of South Africa* Vol 3, Section 3. Copyright McGregor Museum, Kimberley.

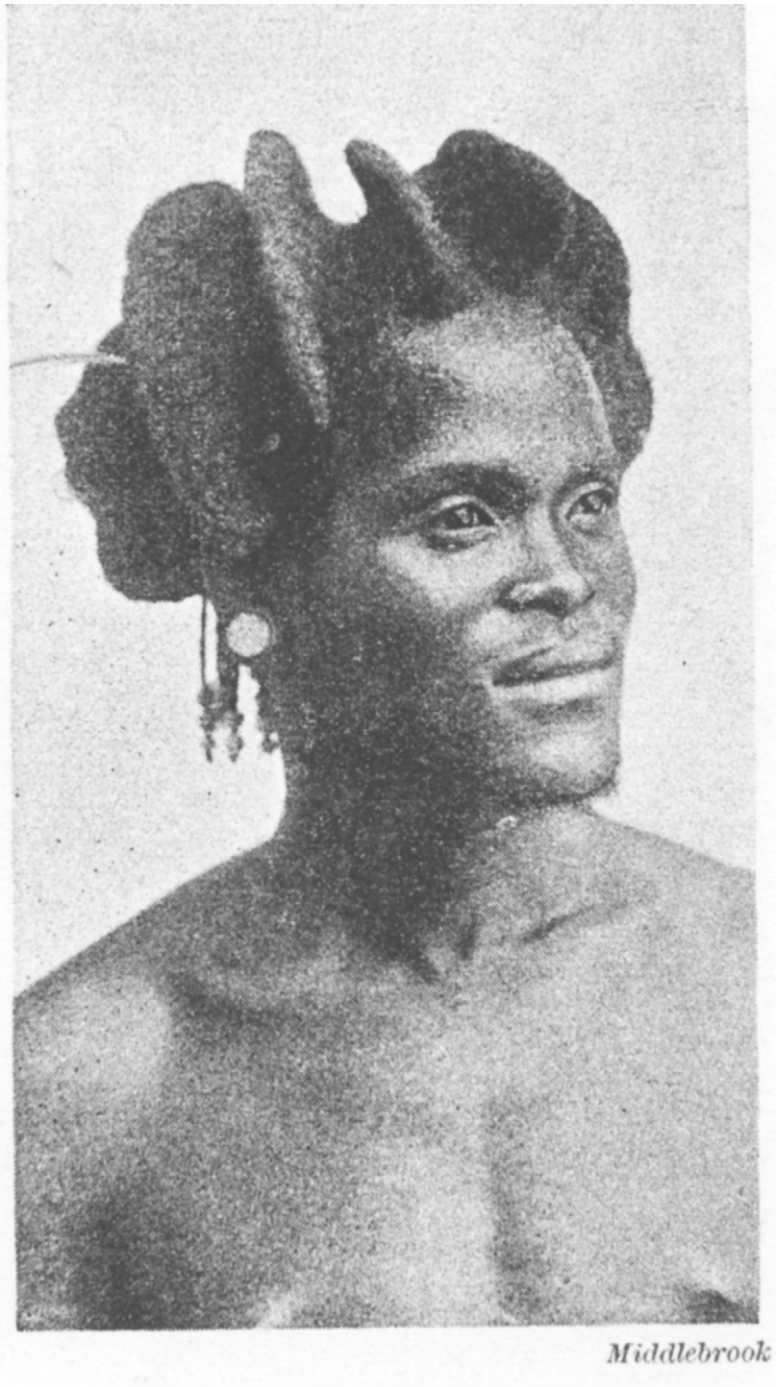

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Native from Southern District. Photograph by JE Middlebrook. Image courtesy of Sandra Klopper.

Egyptian antiquity various depictions of hair as well as hairstyles exist. The image of Egyptian women with wavy, shoulder-length hairdos seems to have led to the conclusion that they must have had "non-black hair". However, in images showing Egyptian children, the story looks different since they have the partially shaved hairdos that are still common in Africa today. The Himba of Namibia have been photographed extensively – especially the children who often have a single or two braids with shaved sides. In modern hairdressing, this shaving is taken to the next level by the inclusion of elaborate hair designs. At its most conservative, the shaving is called a "fade" and often involves the cutting of a single line though the hair. Egyptian hairdressing is important for a second reason, namely that the Egyptians were master wigmakers. An image of a wig from the British Museum illustrates the point that there was not a preference for either straight or curly hair since both could be combined in a single wig (Figure 1).

Significantly, these wigs were made of human hair, which, unlike contemporary wigs, seems to have come from the wearers rather than a donor. In an article published in 1977 by the professional hairdresser and wigmaker, J Stevens Cox (1977:70), he notes that, '[t]he standard of craftsmanship exhibited in the wig is as high as in the best modern wigs, and its survival, with hair anchorages intact, is convincing evidence that its method of construction was suitable for its purpose and the climate in which it was worn'. In 2014, archaeologists working in the city of Armana uncovered the skull of an Egyptian woman[15] with 70 braids and extensions (Jarus 2014:[sa]). This is again proof of the enduring appeal of braids and hair extensions. Moreover, the desire to elongate hair by using artificial or natural materials is common throughout the African continent.

The assumption that "hair" is a feminine issue is also common. This assumption is used in the present to monitor and police the hairstyles of women far more often than the hairstyles of men. Again, the evidence seems to show that such gendered assumptions are simply not part of the history of the African continent. An example is of a series of photographs and illustrations entitled "Zulu Dandies".[16]

The comparison of these Zulu men with "dandies" is not accurate, since these men were not living off the income of women, nor were they "men of leisure". Some were young men who worked as postal runners and were therefore running extremely long distances while sporting these elaborate hairstyles (Klopper 2010:36-37).[17] What is relevant here is that these Zulu dandies represent a refusal to be gendered and "Zulu-ised": many were rebelling not just against the hairdressing conventions of Zulu culture, but also against the patriarchal expectations of their fathers – by spending their money and income on these elaborate hairstyles, they were refusing the expectation that they should marry and set up their own homesteads (Klopper 2010). Another assumption

15. For more detail on this excavation see Jarus (2014:[sa]).

16. For a history of these images and the context in which they were taken, as well as their trajectories from photographs to illustrations, see Klopper (2010).

17. Moreover, there is a separate history of dandyism. For further detail see Monica Miller (2009), who traces the black dandy through three centuries of self-styling.

about black hair that needs to be challenged revolves around matted hair or dreadlocks. Many black women (and men) who wear weaves and relax their hair explain their choice by either saying that their natural hair is "unmanageable" or that natural hair is "dirty". This is one of the most enduring stereotypes about black hair; people even cite the anecdotal evidence that Bob Marley's dreads had 47 different types of lice in them when he died. These are urban legends of the worst kind because they perpetuate the stereotype that only black hair attracts lice and other vermin, which is scientifically untrue. When a black person decides to "dread" or "lock" their hair, they do not need to keep "dirt" in it to make it lock. Black hair – as does all hair – locks naturally when it is left uncombed or unbrushed. The association of locks with dirt partly comes from the Caribbean where Rastafarianism emerged as a subculture. However, even here, the misconception is that dreadlocks equal Rastafarianism. The Rastas got their locks from Africa. To be exact, matted African hair was transported to the Caribbean by images of Ethiopian soldiers who were fighting the Italian invasion that began in 1935.[18] Using the example of Samson in the bible, they vowed they would not cut their hair until their country and emperor were liberated and the latter returned from exile.[19] efore the war, the Ethiopian elite sported neat Afros and so the apparent conclusion reached is that it is only under conditions of war and colonialism that black people present their hair as "unkept". When at peace, the hairdressers and barbers did their jobs and kept black hair looking fabulous. As the photographs from the ethnographic archive demonstrate, hairstyles did not need to be practical, nor were they limited by the frizz of the hair. African hairdressing found innumerable ways to eliminate the frizz and give black women the gracefulness and stylishness that they desired.

A discussion of black hair would not be complete without reference to the "hair story"[20] as a new form of black women's narrative. My hair story begins with the songwriter and musician Tracy Chapman whose eponymously titled debut album *Tracy Chapman* (1988) features her portrait, with dreadlocks, on the cover. It was this image that made me decide to go natural. At the time, there was no information about how to create dreadlocks, and one of my school friends said that we had to use Sunlight soap. No-one told us that we had to first cut off our relaxed hair and we did not know that our hair does not need help to lock; we just had to leave it alone. Needless to say, my mother screamed when I came home from the holidays with hair covered in Sunlight soap. The hair story as a narrative revolves around the moment when a black woman decides to stop straightening her hair. In the United States, this is called "transitioning"; it often begins with the "big chop", that is, cutting off the relaxed hair in order for natural growth to begin.[21] The hair story is also important because it demonstrates the painful fact that even outside of institutional regulations, black women have to defend and/or explain their choice to go "natural" continuously. This is despite the fact that in the public eye, there are now numerous black female celebrities who have adopted natural hairstyles.[22]

18. The history of Rastafarianism, especially its link to Ethiopia and to Haile Selassie is a controversial topic. For an academic treatment of the controversy see Charles Price (2009). In fiction, Marlon James's *A brief history of seven killings* (2014) contains multiple references to the history of Rastafarianism in Jamaica, especially the connection between the subculture and reggae music.

19. The emperor's name was Ras Tafari Makonnnen (Haile Selassie), hence the name of the movement, "Rastafari".

20. The term "hair story" is used in a YouTube video entitled *Black Women Share Their Hair Stories ft. Amandla Stenberg* (Stenberg 20016).

21. Even *Cosmopolitan* magazine published an online guide on how to "transition" from chemically-treated to natural hair (Allen 2016:[sa]).

22. The *Cosmopolitan* article cited above includes many pictures of female celebrities who have "gone natural", including Lupita Nyong'o, Amandla Stenberg, Solange Knowles, Janelle Monae and Tracee Ellis Ross.

Against the rules

The present article was written in the urgent moment of the eruption of the "hair debate" in August 2016 at the Pretoria High School for Girls and other "Model C" schools in South Africa. The debate began when learners at the Pretoria school held a protest against the school's code of conduct that includes rules about hair. The students also made allegations about racism in the school, particularly concerning comments made by teachers to black pupils (Ngoepe 2016:[sp]). What had once been my own professorial and personal reaction to a student's query about the pharaohs of Egypt was repurposed into a public talk presented at the Wits Institute for Social and Economic Research (WiSER) (Mokoena 2016) as an attempt to clarify what was being debated in the media as "racist" school rules governing hair (Makhetha 2016:[sa]). At the time, it seemed like a futile gesture to respond to this debate by offering a sober and historical account of what "black hair" is and why it is that the controversy needed to be contextualised as part of African history rather than just a South African anomaly. Based on some of the comments I received from the audience, I began to read other black women's accounts of "discovering" that their hair was, as Ayana Byrd and Lori L Tharps (2014) put it, 'against the rules'. Paulette Caldwell's (1991) article entitled "A hair piece" was one of the first texts that I read and wished I had read before preparing my talk. Not only does she provide what is a legal account of the American jurisprudence and case law regarding black hair and hairstyles, but she also prefaces her article with an autobiographical note, beginning with her own hair story entitled "Rediscovering my hair" (Caldwell 1991:365-366). It was this opening poetic exposition on the "innocence" of my childhood hair and how it is that hair stories are partly about returning to the place of wanting "to know my hair again" that prompted me to rethink the intersectionality that is embedded in my story of being a black female professor giving a lecture about black hair. Caldwell (1991:369) expresses the dilemma succinctly when explaining her decision to postpone a class discussion of one of these legal cases that concern black women's hair in the workplace:

> [t]he persistent student's embarrassed questioning and my obfuscation spoke of a woman-centered silence: She, a white woman, had asked me, a black woman, to justify my hair. She compelled me to account for the presence of legal justifications for my simultaneously "perverse visibility and convenient invisibility".

Although my student was not as persistent as Caldwell's, I too responded to his query as if to "justify my hair" (at the time I wore my dreadlocks in neat braided styles created by my stylist Ms Tabitha and never wore my locks "out" at work). In so doing, I too was participating in this intersectional conversation in which I either speak for other black women (especially those who are "forced" by circumstances to wear wigs, weaves,

relaxed hair), or resort to the liberal language of "choice", in which my decision to be "natural" is just one of many socially and culturally acceptable choices. Caldwell's article complicates both positions. Although it may seem like a professional duty for black women in positions of power and influence to represent those women who are not there to represent themselves, such representation runs the risk of essentialising black women's identity by presenting natural hair as "authentic" and therefore, by implication, depicting black women with weaves as "inauthentic". The liberal position carries its own risks; by presenting everything as a choice, it runs the risk of ignoring one of the most glaring barriers in black women's understanding of their hair, namely information.

Although it may seem trivial (and maybe controversial), many black women choose what to do with their hair based on scant information. As the Chris Rock documentary on "good hair" illustrates, black women often do not even know what chemicals are in the hair preparations that they find in the hair salon or the "beauty supply store" (as it is called in the US). Black women therefore often construct their hair rules and regimen based on what they see other black women do or what their hair stylists recommend. I have no doubt that this is true of women with straight hair too (racially this would be white, Asian and South-East Asian/Indian women). Thus, one of the most dangerous places for a black woman to be, at least when it comes to hair, may be the hair salon or the company of other black women. The latter conclusion disrupts many of the womanist or feminist claims that have been made about the "safe spaces" that black women construct for themselves away from the "white gaze". Regarding hair, the most uncomfortable gaze can be the gaze of other black women who either explicitly or silently judge each other for being natural and/or for having a "weave". Although it may be claimed that such gestures do not have the same effect as the gaze of the white commentator, I argue that this only serves to evade the painful question of how black women teach other black women the rights and wrongs of caring for their hair. The argument I put forward is that white legislators and rule-makers (whether it is the juries and judges in Caldwell's account or the school governing bodies in the case of South Africa's "Model C" schools) are mostly ignorant about "black hair", and often resort to so-called "common sense" in making their decisions. The painful question therefore is why have black women become "ignorant" about their own hair? In a conversation with my grandmother about the trauma of watching my dreadlocks break, I told her that I had stopped using over-the-counter synthetic hair products and that instead, I was using castor oil to moisturise my hair; to which she casually replied, 'we used to do that when we were young'. This is when it struck me that one of the losses that black women have suffered when it comes to hair care is the knowledge of our mothers, grandmothers and even great-grandmothers. What seems to have been implied in my grandmother's comment is that when she was

raising us, it did not seem appropriate to moisturise our hair with castor oil. I am guessing that one of the effects of the emergence of the black hair industry has been to give black women the false confidence that this industry functions in our best interests, and that we can trust the products it creates. In actuality, mainstream hair companies such as L'Oréal own most black hair products, so such confidence is misplaced. Thus, to return to Caldwell's (1991:365) musings, black women may need to ask each other about what we have lost in our embrace of the "market' logic of "hair products", or as she puts it,

> [w]hen will I cherish my hair again, the way my grandmother cherished it, when fascinated by its beauty, with hands carrying centuries-old secrets of adornment and craftswomanship, she plaited it, twisted it, cornrowed it, finger-curled it, olive-oiled it, on the growing moon cut and shaped it, and wove it like fine strands of gold inlaid with semiprecious stones, coral and ivory, telling with my hair a lost-found story of the people she carried inside her?

It is this reconnection with our foremothers' knowledge that would, I think, lessen the focus on the white gaze since it would remind us that our hair was "loved" long before it was the subject of public scrutiny and debate. More importantly, knowing that African women have been teasing and lengthening their hair for centuries may also allow the contestations to shift away from the binary of natural versus relaxed, which seems to create more problems than it solves.

If the debates and judgements about black hair are partly driven by what Shirley Anne Tate (2015:92) calls 'epistemologies of ignorance … where whites refuse to acknowledge the world they have created', could it also be possible to think about the epistemologies of ignorance that drive black women's denial of their own complicity in the creation of stereotypes about black hair. What would such a dialogue look like? As intimated above, it would primarily involve an account of what I, as a black woman, have lost in not having knowledge of the history of black hair, and especially the care and craftwomanship of the past. As a second move, the "epistemological" question would have to be reconciled to the autobiographical one. In other words, as a black woman I would have to talk about how my hair shapes my consciousness and the making of the self. What kinds of self do I become when I chose to go natural or to wear relaxed hair? And, does it matter? A text to which I return repeatedly whenever I have to write about auto/biography is Linda Anderson (2001). Anderson's text appeals to me because, in it, she considers the place of politics and representation in the theoretical position and interpretation of autobiography. On the issue of autobiography's potential as a "text of the oppressed", Anderson (2001:103-104) points to Zora Neale Hurston's autobiography entitled *Dust tracks on the road* (1942) as an example of a black

autobiographical subject who foregrounds her individuality, while minimising her group identity as a black person and a black woman. By insinuating that her autobiographical self is a fiction, Hurston, Anderson (2001:10) writes,

> is wary of any collapse back into the body or the community which might "fix" her in one place and close off the "horizon" she had directed her "self" towards from childhood. However, if Hurston's autobiography maintains a gap or distance between language and experience, this does not mean that her writing simply transcends her historical and social situation to speak "universally".

In our dialogues and debates about black hair, might we be able to make the same manoeuvre, that is, of avoiding a collapse back into the bind of being "bodies" while also disavowing a universalising language? More importantly, in thinking about how hair speaks to the "now" of contemporary South Africa (Bystrom & Nuttall 2013:307-308), might we, as black women, position ourselves as anything other than victims of a dominant and pervasive "white culture"? Might we talk about hair "now", without denying its over-reaching historicity and facticity? I suggest that the problem is not one of hairstyles, but of the definition of culture. Thus, although a feminist thinker such as Tate (2015) makes several references to "popular culture", black people as the creators of this popular culture are mostly left out of her analysis; instead, she focuses on popular culture as a standard imposed from the outside. Specifically, the notion of black culture deployed in Tate's text implies that black women do not desire each other's bodies (the trajectory of desire is only one way). Although her arguments may be appropriate for a discussion of black women's bodies, do they apply for a discussion of black hair in popular culture? This is especially pertinent since it seems to be the case that hair regulations also regulate the regulators. In other words, whereas it may be physically impossible for a white woman to develop a 'bootylicious' behind (Tate 2015:62), the same is not true for hair. White people can also lock their hair or fade their sides. If, as black people, we are asked to abandon the terrain of our own cultural self-representation and self-reproduction, what are we left with? If indeed, to return to Diop's counterfactual, what if black women ended up with long/straight hair? If by some miracle we achieved a pain-free, chemical-free ability to lengthen and tame our puff, what would the world look like? It is not that we will be left with a world in which there are no spectacular hairdos or flamboyant coiffures. Instead, what society will be left with is cultural appropriation. As black people, we see and will continue to see images of ourselves refracted through other people's interpretations and especially through the churning and workings of the "luxury" markets of consumption. Or, as Geneva S Thomas (2015) puts it, cultural appropriation allows some white people to use black culture as a 'personal kind of stock room of coolness they get to pull from whenever it moves them without ever restocking it'.

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Hair-stylisation and the "Art-of-living": the case of Tendai Huchu's *The hairdresser of Harare*

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I consider the portrayal of hair and hair-stylisation in Tendai Huchu's novel, *The hairdresser of Harare* (2010) as powerful tropes that communicate the 'the Art-of-living' (Veenhoven 2003) and human flourishing. I take a different route from the conventional tradition in which hair-stylisation is seen as site of struggle and contestation, and, by extension, is laden with insinuations of race (Tate 2009; Erasmus 2000). Rather, I argue that hair-stylisation is an expressive genre that conveys meaning to and of the self, the immediate community and the global world. As a form of an extension of clothing, hair styles have the capacity to carry messages that enrich the self in various spaces of dialogue, be they religious, social or political. Conversely, hair styles can also signal the forbearance of sturdy individualism. I explore the centrality of the self, the image, and the body's articulation in various modes. Drawing on Kwame Anthony Appiah's (1998) theory of 'cosmopolitan patriots', I argue that through hair-stylisation processes, black and white women presented in *The hairdresser of Harare* demonstrate the individual capacity to introspect, relate and share "the good life" and versions of human flourishing in a multi-ethnic environment. They extend Ruut Veenhoven's (2003) concept of the "Art-of-living", or 'the capabilities of leading a good life' (Veenhoven 2003:373) to embrace the global visual and aesthetic images typified by black American actresses and singer-songwriters such as Halle Berry and Toni Braxton. Hair-stylisation enables the female characters in Huchu's text to defeat and rezone time-space distantiation, and transfigure themselves into what I interpret as 'citizens of the world' (Appiah 1998). However, in the process, female characters do not necessarily forgo cultural particularities, and this motivates for local cosmopolitanism – a state in which they celebrate the presence of people different to them, and enjoy the pleasures of hybridity as they relate to the global world.

Keywords: the Art-of-living, enjoyment, well-being, human flourishing, Zimbabwe, salon, hair-stylisation.

Introduction

The portrayal of hair-stylisation and the salon in Tendai Huchu's novel, *The hairdresser of Harare* (2010) (hereafter *The hairdresser*) substantiate versions of what Ruut Veenhoven (2003) calls 'the Art-of-living', "the good life" and human flourishing in post-2000 Zimbabwe. Set against a background of hyperinflation, state-sanctioned violence, pillage and wanton expropriation of private property, hair-stylisation is portrayed as one of the ways of "making do" that contains, and at times, subverts the nation-state's narration of Zimbabwean well-being and belonging. *The hairdresser* is a story about Dumisani Ncube and Vimbai's relationship – a relationship that goes through various stages ranging from surprise to admiration, mystification, "love", discoveries, empathy and camaraderie. Recounted by Vimbai, readers learn that Dumisani (hereafter Dumi)[1] finds employment as a hairdresser at Mrs Khumalo's salon where Vimbai, Yolanda, Charlie Boy and Memory work. Dumisani's sharp sartorial style, cheerful character and expertise in hair styling wins him the favour of many clients, much to the chagrin of Vimbai, who has been supplanted by Dumi as the best hairdresser. I explore the salon experiences of clients whose hair is done by Dumi and not Vimbai for a reason. Unlike Dumi, Vimbai's hair-stylisation philosophy is predicated on a stereotype: as she states, 'the secret to being a successful hairdresser … [is that] "Your client should leave the salon feeling like a white woman". Not Coloured, not Indian, not Chinese' (Huchu 2010:3). In contesting Vimbai's standpoint, Dumi believes that hair-stylisation should aim to bring out the best in an individual, or what he calls "natural looks", and it is his ability to work out the best looks for his clients that makes him popular.

Critical works that have been written on *The hairdresser* explore Dumi's homosexuality and the Zimbabwean government's intransigence and persecution of people in same-sex relationships. The theme of queerness in Huchu's text is prevalent in the writings of Gibson Ncube (2013), Anna Chitando and Molly Manyonganise (2016) and Pauline Mateveke (2016).[2] However, there is an alternative reading of the novel. I argue that *The hairdresser* illustrates a specific understanding of the "Art-of-living" and it rehearses "the good life" in the salon through the process of hair-stylisation. I draw on the anthropologist, Victor Turner's (1991) concept of ritual and liminal spaces to argue that hair-stylisation is portrayed as a ritual process wherein identities are forged and celebrated. Turner (1991:15) broadens the definition of ritual from being a referent for a solemn religious practice into a process of creativity in which people 'express what moves them most'. I start from the premise that, 'hair as we know [it] is not just organic matter growing out of [the] scalp that makes us beautiful or not'; rather, 'hair does things and it is a tool which can be used to extend … ourselves beyond our bodies

1. Huchu uses the names "Dumisani" and "Dumi" interchangeably. Dumi is widely travelled and he is homosexual. Vimbai narrates the story of her discovery of Dumi's homosexuality in a society that is deeply conservative and has cultural stigmas that denigrate such an orientation. Vimbai is surprised to note that Dumi is a *ngochani* – a Shona name that is derisively used to define homosexuals.

2. Though the critical works differ in approach, they foreground the trials and tribulations Dumi encounters in his quest to be accepted as a homosexual.

whilst at the same time being drawn back into them' (Tate 2009:13). Amongst the many "things" hair "does", hair-stylisation is a signifier of cultural spaces of well-being and enjoyment into which Zimbabweans, both black and white, withdraw in order to reclaim their individuality against the discourses of inclusions and exclusions propagated by the Zimbabwean nation state.

I examine the portrayal of the salon experiences of three female characters as they interact with Dumi, who works as a hairdresser in Mrs Khumalo's Hair and Beauty Treatment Salon. The women are from different backgrounds, classes and races, and what unites them is that their hair is tended to and plaited in the salon. I argue that the process of hair-stylisation is constitutive of the Art-of-living, enjoyment, happiness and the attendant cultures where people choose to claim their dignity and retain agency in a repressive environment. I focus on an unnamed woman known to readers simply as "Mercy's cousin sister", who works as an accountant for the auditing firm Deloitte & Touche; Trina (a white ex-farmer in Zimbabwe); and Minister M ____ (a black female government minister who is also married to a government minister). Though the three women are not the only ones whose hair-stylisation is artistically captured in Huchu's novel, my choice to focus on these characters derives from a realisation that they are representative of certain traits that can easily be construed as typical in post-2000 Zimbabwe. What connects the worlds of the women under discussion are the diverse experiences they have of Mrs Khumalo's Hair Salon – a salon famed for its customer care. However, it would be premature to take the hair salon as a microcosm of Zimbabwe; rather, it represents one of the liminal spaces through which versions of Zimbabwe are lived through, in, and outside the tumult of politics. I draw from Turner (1991:vii), who argues that in liminal spaces, 'new models, often fantastic, some of which may have power and plausibility to replace eventually the force-backed political and jural models', are created and celebrated. In the salon, the hairdressing and the attendant rituals – which include the enjoyment of music, telling of stories, and buying and selling of scarce commodities in a hyper-inflationary environment – are rehearsals of the good life. Enjoyment of the good life takes place in the salon despite state sanctioned violence and discourses on indigeneity that casts white Zimbabweans as foreigners. Mrs Khumalo's salon is close to the city centre, and is therefore convenient for customers of different races, ethnic groups and nationalities who live in Harare.

Conceptualising the Art-of-living

Veenhoven (2003:373) argues that 'the Art-of-living' refers to 'the capabilities for leading a good life'. Since there are different views on what a good life is, Veenhoven

elaborates that there could also be different capabilities called for in order for one to enjoy a happy life. He distinguishes two main thrusts to the Art-of-living, namely the hedonistic view and the moralistic view. In the moralistic view, the Art-of-living is evaluated against an agent's capability to stick to moral tenets, whereas the hedonistic view centralises enjoyment and pleasure (Veenhoven 2003:373). The Art-of-living is the capability to take pleasure from life. In essence, 'a good life should be "authentic" in the first place, and since everybody is unique it should be "original" ... the Art-of-living is in discovering one's true self and living accordingly' (Veenhoven 2003:375). In a critical survey on the philosophers who have come to be identified with discourses on the Art-of-living, I have found the writers discussed below to be important to my argument.

Joep Dohmen (2003:252) defines the Art-of-living as 'a form of self-direction with a view to good life'. He elaborates that the Art-of-living 'employs a mix of both modern and classical concepts, such as autonomy, authenticity, and "the good life"' (Dohmen 2003:252). Dohmen foregrounds the notion that the Art-of-living falls within the purview of a branch of philosophy that has been distinguished as normative ethics. He notes that there are various versions of this recent philosophy (Dohmen 2003). They range from the pre-modern, stoic version of Pierre Hadot (1995); the virtue-ethic version of John Kekes (2002); and the aesthetic version of Alexander Nehamas (1998). I am particularly guided by Nehamas's philosophy of the Art-of-living, which is based on the aesthetic perspective that is predicated on a particular kind of self-creation. The goal would be 'to acquire uncommon and idiosyncratic character, a set of features and a mode of life that set one apart from the rest of the world' (Nehamas 1998:50). Nonetheless, that in itself would not be adequate to explicate the type of freedom and its latitude in space and time that is captured in Huchu's novel. Thus, I augment the aesthetic perspective with Dohmen's theorisation of the Art-of-living that is based on authenticity. There are various considerations as to why I have made this decision. Authenticity embraces the hedonistic version espoused by Veenhoven (2003), the virtue-ethic version proposed by John Kekes (2002), and the aesthetic value as one discovers one's true self and lives accordingly (Nehamas 1998; Veenhoven 2003).

Research has shown that the hair salon proffers invaluable and multifaceted forms of self-stylisation and self-fashioning, as in it, individuals 'create a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and ways of being so as to transform themselves' (Nuttall 2008:93; Foucault 2003:225). In *The hairdresser*, one way in which the salon creates space that is detached from the nation state induced hyperinflationary environment is through people's determination to keep up appearances and see life as an art form. Although Sarah Nuttall (2009:120) refers to a different context, I propose, in her words, that 'the identities and forms of selfhood projected' in *The hairdresser* 'are compositional' and that in it, subjects aspire to present themselves

as ‘works of art’. In the following section, I foreground the relational aspects in *The hairdresser* through the portrayal of three women. I introduce them not necessarily in the order they are presented in the text; rather their positioning in this article is informed by the patterns and versions of the Art-of-living they exude in conforming to, or through subversion of, the various exclusions and inclusions by the nation state.

Mercy’s cousin sister

Vimbai introduces Mercy’s cousin sister as a ’professional-looking lady with tons of make up on’, who, upon witnessing her cousin’s hair style, visits the salon and says to Dumi: ‘I want you to give me the same style as her’ (Huchu 2010:34). The description is paradoxical in that recourse to the idea that she is a professional woman projects an image of an empowered woman. However, Vimbai’s next comment where she talks of ‘tons of makeup’ conjures up negative images, setting in motion notions where makeup is subject to debate. For instance, Sheila Jeffreys (2005:24) views beauty practices such as ‘figure-hugging, clothing, through makeup, hairstyles, [and] depilation’ as ways in which women collude with being objects of the male gaze. Accordingly, Jeffreys (2005) notes that by wearing lipstick and through other forms of bodily adornment, women occupy spaces that are circumscribed by patriarchy. Jeffreys (2005:6) further argues that beauty practices are time wasting, expensive and painful, and the so-called “beauty standards” confine the body’s spontaneity, posture and gait.

Contrary to Jeffreys’s view, in *The hairdresser*, Mercy’s cousin sister strikes me as an empowered individual who has her own conception of what is important to her. My reading of Mercy’s cousin sister’s visit is informed by theorisations of salon visits by Paula Black (2004:29), who contends that ‘the overarching framework within which beauty salon visits are experienced is that of negotiation between … self-view, world view and appropriateness’. Black (2004) argues that salon visits comprise two related stages namely, getting in and getting it right, and in-between these stages are multiple variables that also play upon time, self-view, worldview and negotiations between the hairdresser and the client. “Getting it right” requires skills, knowledge, experience and performance. What stands out in the cousin sister’s case is the ease with which rapport between the client and the hairdresser is established. Whereas the cousin sister had come with a self-view that considered the other - in this case Mercy - as the model, Dumi, the hairdresser, proposes a different hairstyle for the cousin sister.

Owing to a hairstyle which the cousin sister admires, Mercy becomes the subject of the admiring gaze. Mercy is a person who has access to some secret enjoyment - a factor which pushes her cousin sister to come to the salon. I identify a multi-centred

and multi-directional subject in the portrayal of Mercy's cousin sister. In *The hairdresser*, Huchu (2010) contests the idea of fixed identities. Unlike Slavoj Žižek (1999), who argues that identities are fixed through Cartesian subjectivity which sets a split between the Self and the Other, in *The hairdresser*, characters constantly negotiate their notions of being in diverse spaces that confer identity. When Mercy's cousin sister is in the salon, she is in conversation with the self; she announces to the world that she has a local model in Mercy. However, in addressing the cousin sister, Dumi proposes something completely different. He states: 'You have beautiful eyes and your long hair tilts the balance away from your fine face. Your cheeks are sculpted but your long hair makes it impossible to admire them. Trust me' (Huchu 2010:35). The client listens and agrees to his expert advice in order to minimise the degree of error that may militate against the achievement of an ideal that demonstrates a level of uniqueness.

In reworking her self-view to perfect what she perceives as the Art-of-living, Mercy's cousin sits in the salon to have her hair styled in what I view as a productive process. John Kekes (2002:125) argues that, '[t]he successful practice of the art of life depends on the adoption of a reasonable ideal of personal excellence, on the adoption of a coherent attitude that dominates in one's character, and on avoidance of aberration and other errors that vitiate these endeavors'. The description of the proposed hairstyle is a productive process that makes Dumi a critical role player in the creative process. Dumi's way of flourishing his description, and his notion of enjoyment of the good life 'involves at its core the pursuit of an individual project of excellence' (Harman 1983:312), which necessitates reaching out to others. Vimbai states:

> [Dumi] picked up a large scissors and in one quick movement took a snip from the hair on the left side of her head … He seemed in a trance as he put the final touches to the lady's hair. She slouched in her chair, her eyes closed as he worked his magic. There was fluidity to his movements that I had never seen before (Huchu 2010:35-36).

The agility, care and concentration that Dumi exerts in his job can be interpreted as transformative in that he rejects the old order (old hair style) and asserts a new form of order, which I perceive as a way of conferring a new identity on the customer. Thus, the body becomes a form of dressing for multiple identities, depending on the needs of the customers. After the hairdo, Mercy's cousin sister moves in front of a mirror and, as Vimbai points out: 'she touched her face as if to check if the person in the mirror was really her', saying: 'I look like Halle Berry' (Huchu 2010:36). In complimenting her, Dumi adds that, 'There are some women like Herry Berry [*sic*] or Toni Braxton whose beauty is beyond the ordinary. A face such as yours is a rare thing and it must be shown to the whole world' (Huchu 2010:36). Both Halle Berry and Toni Braxton are black Americans who have scaled world fame through modelling, acting, and in Braxton's case, singing.

In this episode, Dumi becomes the agent who maximises human flourishing (Harman 1983) and the notion of what people in the salon perceive as the good life. Writing on hair politics, Zimitri Erasmus (2000:381) argues that hair is a cultural construct that ought to be perceived as a 'site of contestation, both within black communities and between black and white communities'. Furthermore, she argues that hair implies race and 'styles [have] been socially and politically constructed in a specific historical conjuncture' (Erasmus 2000:385). To some extent, the reference to Halle Berry and Toni Braxton gives credence to Erasmus's observations. Whereas both models are black Americans, Halle Berry's mother, Judith Ann (née Hawkins), is a Caucasian with English and German ancestry, and her father, Jerome Jessy Berry, was an African American (Arogundade 2017). Thus, Halle Berry stands as a typical example of a celebrated hybridised identity. However, the argument that hair implies race is disputable in as much as it can be argued to be valid. Hair in racial politics is a well-researched area (see for instance, Banks (2000); Black (2004); Tate (2009); Latina-Huey (2006)). As Shirley Anne Tate (2009:14) notes, generalising on the racial significance of hair-stylisation or lack of it is a pitfall, given that, 'the meanings of hair are not just formed by white aesthetic concerns but are also constructed out of Black political projects which continue to resonate in Black women's lives'. Even where the hairstyle on a black woman implies race, Tate argues that there is pleasure and fantasy 'produced by the hotcomb' as 'it brings "the elsewhere" of beauty home to the surface of the Black body' … This "homing" releases affective beauty value even though here it is within the parameters of "the straight hair rule"' (Tate 2009:20).

When Mercy's cousin likens herself to Halle Berry, the picture painted is one of a person who is an arrivant in the corridors of embodied beauty. However, something is ironic in this episode. The description of the salon orients the reader's view to the city's infrastructural developments. Vimbai states: 'The building had been crudely extended. A wall had been knocked down to the left and concrete blocks hastily laid to add another seven metres'. From the quotation, one can understand that the building is made of knocked up materials and this shows in its structure, yet people have settled for "making do" or "putting up appearances". It is ironic that in the same building there is, in appearance and stature at least, a "Halle Berry" in virtual time. In spite of the material used for the building, which is cobbled together in an ad hoc manner, Vimbai appreciates the nature of this built environment, pointing out that, 'we were all grateful for the accommodation' (Huchu 2010:2). Thus, the brutality engendered by the Robert Mugabe-led Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) government and the economic hardships are subverted in the salon. It is important to note that Mercy's cousin, who initially had intended to look like Mercy, has undergone what appears to be a transformation. The cousin sister enjoys her new looks and imagines herself as a look-alike to models from faraway places that transcends the borders of nation states. Tate (2009:21) argues that:

> The *feeling* of beauty – both through touch and vision – induces pleasure. Being beautiful is clearly about pleasure in seeing, touching and feeling *differences* on the *body's surface* which make us recognizable within beauty norms. This recognition is important because without it we are excluded from the possibility of beauty.

In applying Tate's observation to *The hairdresser*, it becomes evident that Mercy's cousin is elated with her newly acquired beauty, and the salon experience enables her to go through not only a physical transformation, but also an intellectual one. The rapport in terms of conversation enables her to share with peers and colleagues living in the same political and social environment.

Minister M____

Amongst the clients who frequent Mrs Khumalo's Hair Salon is Minister M____, who is also married to a government minister. Although she is a regular client, the episode in which she opts to have her hair styled by Dumi is significant. She gives Dumi the platform to choose a hair style; he convinces her to go for braids. *The hairdresser*/client relationship is characterised by banter, laughter and rapport. With her trademark "white Mercedes", Minister M____ typifies the affluent political elite that have been brought into prominence through the politics of patronage. As she gets into the salon, her outfit — 'a green African dress with a matching head wrap, both of which had pictures of Robert Mugabe imprinted on them like large polka dots' (Huchu 2010:58) — is significant in the making and unmaking of the Zimbabwean subject in as far as the nation state is concerned. The reader is told, 'it was the design they had used during the last election campaign that had seen the party back into power' (Huchu 2010:58).

Minister M____ is a typical character in Mugabe's land grab politics, given that she and her husband have already amassed eight farms, including the Good Hope farm, which formerly belonged to Trina (a white woman). The non-prescriptive name of the Minister casts the character as an open signifier to be filled in by anyone in the ZANU PF-led government. The pictures of Mugabe on the party regalia she wears are markers of identity; what passes as "good Zimbabweanness" to the ZANU PF government in terms of citizenship, political loyalties and affiliation. In the salon, Dumi uses the hair of the Minister as open space in which identities can be disfigured and reconfigured in ways that suit the client. Dumi chooses braids for the minister. Across Africa and in Zimbabwe, braids were part of hair-stylisation before the dawn of modernity. In terms of significance, the braids serve to re-root the Minister into Shona and African traditional

ethos and beauty aesthetics, given that black people have been having their hair braided before the advent of modernity. After finishing on the braids, Dumi states: 'I am not finished yet. That's just the hair. Now let me give you style'. Readers are told:

> He took the head wrap she'd worn and unbundled it. He grabbed a pair of scissors and cut it in half, right through Robert Mugabe's face … one piece he folded in two lengthwise and placed over her head, tying it round the head, tying it round the back. He cut through what remained of Mugabe in the other piece and rolled both of them … he tied the pieces of cloth around the minister's wrists as bow ties (Huchu 2010:60).

Initially, the reader is told that the Minister was in the regalia that best fits the party's campaign for the election that put ZANU PF into power. However, in the salon, the best fit for a campaign or for winning elections is not the appropriate style for a Minister who should serve the interests of the people. It is tempting to go along with Jennie Batchelor's (2005:3) argument that, 'dress metaphorises sensibility's paradoxical status as both a genuine moral response externally expressed (graceful drap'ry), and a cultivated, possibly fictitious, mode of display (pictured dress) worn by the covetous and the immoral'. The greed with which the Minister and her husband amass farms places her in the latter category, where dress is used to display an affinity for what ZANU PF stands for. Significantly, Dumi does not throw away the head wrap; rather, he opts for innovation and retention through use of the scissors – a tool that is essential in the modification of the design. Thus, leaving the face of Robert Mugabe intact on the head wrap does not serve a purpose in conferring a new hair citizenship onto the minister. Huchu (2010) therefore actively exploits signs to demonstrate how the body self-view, which then metaphorically translates into the nation body politic, can be actively cut through the imagery of the scissors, dismemberment, pummelling and redeployment.

Trina

The image of Trina strolling to her car is significant in that it demonstrates ways in which some white Zimbabweans lived through the ordeal and trauma of losing property. After the hair-do by Dumi, Trina resembles what Jason Raibley (2012:1106) proposes as 'a model of well-being' and 'agential flourishing', where 'an adult human person is doing well at a time to the degree that they resemble the paradigm case of the flourishing agent at that time. The paradigm case of the flourishing agent is a person who successfully realizes their values and is stably disposed to do so' (Raibley 2012:1106). Trina is unperturbed by the circumstances engendered by the nation-state discourse of indigeneity and autochthony as she claims her space and place in the salon. She even shares the same hairdresser with Minister M____, who is on a farm

aggrandisement spree. Starting in the year 2000, white Zimbabweans were branded as Rhodesians who were benefiting from the stolen land and were forcibly removed from it by the ZANU PF-led government. This, in spite of the fact that some white Zimbabweans, like Trina and her husband Dereck Price, were willing to share the land with black Zimbabweans.

Like other clients, Trina feels comfortable as Dumi does his work. 'He shampooed and conditioned her, untangling her frizzy hair. He ran a comb through and tried to style her before … tying a pony tail' (Huchu 2010:46). Thus, when Minister M____ comes to the salon and tries to promote the discourse of Rhodesians, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)[3] and the colonialist/colonised binaries, Dumi lays out the ethics and etiquette of hair citizenship as follows: 'This is not about the MDC, it is not about Black or white or any other kind of division. I'm telling you to respect our clients who are her [*sic*]'. Taken together, hair citizenship becomes a form of Zimbabweanness and an Art-of-living, well-being and human flourishing that also require full observance and respect by the nation state.

The salon and nation spaces

The salon represents a space of conceptualisation, imagination and reflection that is predicated on hair styling as a mode of self-stylisation (Nuttall 2008). Moreover, hair-stylisation is projected as a form of clothing. Renee Baert (cited by Hemmings 2005:175) argues that, 'Clothing is a good second skin, a membrane that separates and joins, that surrounds and divides. Like skin clothing is a border'. In *The hairdresser*, changing looks are perceived as repackaging and changing of identities in the city. The space is enriched by various rituals of politeness, the sharing of scarce commodities (such as tampons), and the openness as displayed in Dumi's distribution of femidoms. Thus the type of life being privileged in *The hairdresser* modifies Erasmus's (2000) argument that hairstyles imply race to a level where they become a form of dressing; they are not masks but rather, outlets to demonstrate the dynamism of identities and preferences.

The reference to Halle Berry and Toni Braxton may mean that the professional lady accountant, Mercy's cousin sister, aspires towards black models or that she has an appreciation of circulating cultures and images that are brought to her via television. She finds it liberating to identify global figures to whom she can relate her local experiences. Kwame Anthony Appiah (1997) relates similar 'glocal' cosmopolitan identities in recounting words from his father about cosmopolitan citizenship. Appiah (1997:618) was told: 'Remember that you are citizens of the world' by which he meant, 'we could surely choose to live anywhere – we should make sure we left that place

3. The MDC is a political party in Zimbabwe that stands in opposition to the ZANU PF.

better than we found it'. Appiah (1997:618) notes that the philosophy of cosmopolitan identities is predicated on 'great love for mankind and an abiding desire to see mankind, under God, fulfil its highest destiny'. The bottom line here is that the content and quality of value addition to the self and self-perception ought to be enriching to the self and the environment.

The warm treatment of Trina in the salon and her participation in conversations with Yolanda, Memory, Fari, Mrs Khumalo and other customers is indicative of a society that has come to terms with its hybridised forms. Therefore, the exclusionary discourse of the Minister (who is also a minister's wife) is viewed with scepticism. She is counselled by people in the salon when she vents her dissatisfaction at the sight of Trina - a white woman. She states: 'If I had known that this salon catered for Rhodesians, I would have closed it down a long time ago. Zimbabwe will never be a colony again' (Huchu 2010:105). Apart from demonstrating deductive reasoning that because Rhodesia was ruled by white people, every white person in Zimbabwe is Rhodesian, the Minister goes on to mimic President Robert Mugabe's campaign cliché as a way of creating exclusions and inclusions. However, ordinary people in the salon tell the Minister that Zimbabwe belongs to all. Thus, the salon is portrayed as ritualised space where various configurations of identities are in the process of reformulating themselves. Turner (1991:6) points out that, 'Rituals reveal values at their deepest level … men express in ritual what moves them most' and drawing from this assertion, I read hair-stylisation in *The hairdresser* as a ritual predicated upon the packaging and reformulation of identities in a city that reconfigures alternative forms of the good life and human flourishing.

In *The hairdresser*, sensitivity to modes of dress and looks broaden the operational cultural spaces in the salon that are constantly being produced, modified and recycled. The salon foregrounds the portrayal of "an expressive subject" who constantly adjusts himself or herself to tap into, create or modify what s/he perceives as the good life and the idea of flourishing. Thus, '[h]air styles can also be seen as expressive genres … and the beauty salon can, by extension, be seen as an important site of cultural production where ideas regarding gender and identity can be discussed and operationalized' (Thompson 1998:239). Far from what Jeffreys (2014) terms 'women-only spaces', the salon exudes the multidimensionality of society with Charlie boy, the barber and several female characters who cut across colour lines and gender preferences.

Moreover, the salon is also a place where people enjoy different forms of music and dance, as evidenced by Mrs Khumalo who 'jiggled her hips in rhythm to the beat and in that instant looked like a young woman again' (Huchu 2010:14). Before Dumi comes in the salon to work as a hairdresser, Mrs Khumalo was interested in rhumba music and lyrics by Papa Wemba, Koffi Olomide and Kanda Bongoman[4] were constantly

played in the salon. With Dumi's arrival, the music changes to urban groovers as he introduces people to local singers such as Maskiri, Willom Tight, Rocqui and Extra Large, amongst others. Music creates a networked world where it is possible to talk of a 'cultural milieu' (Webb 2007). Peter Webb (2007:30) defines 'cultural milieu' as the articulation of 'a set of overlapping levels of meaning, relevance, disposition, and understanding. It then tries to illuminate the complex development of types of cultural activity within the stock of knowledge of an individual operating within a social grouping or number of groupings'. Like music, the salon is represented as having the capacity of carrying universal meanings with local mutations. In *The hairdresser*, the array of salons at the Sam Levy's village – a shopping centre in Harare – Catt's Beaute [*sic*], Devine Touch [*sic*], Goddess Hair and Beauty Salon, Village Beauty and the latest offering, Exclusive, provide a new way of reading the city as cosmopolitan with its particularities. The names of the salons are interesting in that they capture the sensuousness and aesthetic pleasure inherent in having one's hair tended.

Conclusion

In *The hairdresser*, the characters demonstrate novel ways of enjoying and creating happiness for themselves. This challenges the cultural spaces of the good life and enjoyment engendered by the traditional Shona culture in Zimbabwe and the discourse of authenticity predicated on the acquisition of land as championed by the ZANU PF government. I have argued that hair-stylisation is a productive process that generates diverse cultural spaces of enjoyment, the good life and human flourishing outside the politics of exclusions and inclusions that the Zimbabwean nation state privileges. The styles, like music lyrics, are part of circulating cultures that combine Africa, America, Europe and the Caribbean, and these add up to the creolisation of cultures. Thus, in as much as the characters are in the salon, they are actively engaged in negotiating and reworking both local and global circulating cultures, with the sum total becoming an entity that enriches humanity. The salon becomes the pivotal point around which people from different backgrounds, cultures, races, classes and diverse political and sexual inclinations enjoy multiculturalism, creolisation, and the ability to understand difference as good life and human flourishing.

4. These artists are musicians from the Democratic Republic of Congo who are well known for popularising rhumba as a musical genre. Rhumba now has global reach.

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Zanele Muholi's "Reading Room"

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ABSTRACT

In 2016, Stevenson Gallery (Cape Town) published 5,000 copies of a tabloid newspaper featuring the South African artist, Zanele Muholi's self-portraits. The magazine – lo-fi, lightweight, loose-leafed, portable and free – was accompanied by an essay by M Neelika Jayawardane (2016). I was immediately struck by the democratic nature of this venture, for here was a product not only relevant to those who attended Muholi's globally circulated exhibition – entitled *Somnyama Ngonyama*, and shown at the Stedelijk Museum, LUMA Arles, in the Netherlands, France, United Kingdom, United States, and elsewhere – but also of great relevance to those in schools, local communities and township libraries. This realisation has prompted me to share the magazine with my film, photography and journalism students at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, and to ensure its distribution in schools in the Western Cape.

Central to Muholi's images and Jayawardane's text are matters of race, sexuality, and, all importantly, the need to redefine and re-imagine the black body. Against the reactionary return to black essentialism, the further aggravation of "black pain", and the concomitant racial divisiveness which this declamatory, spectacularised, and even nihilistic return to black self-determination has fostered, Muholi's project brokered a more reflective, immersive and exploratory approach.

Her ongoing body of work – in which she theatricalises and re-imagines her identity in photographs recorded daily – is a vital alternative to a programmatic and reductive identity politics. At every turn her photographs make one aware of the criticality and dailiness of self-fashioning.

That Muholi expressly devised a "Reading Room" – as a context through which to read race and as a parallel space for her travelling exhibition – reminds one of the artist's resolute and long-standing activism. She, in effect, is asking her readers/viewers to re-evaluate the assumptions and prejudices which inform understandings of race and its representation within the art world. Through her Reading Room, she is asking one to reconsider how one reads oneself and others.

This deeply intimate yet pedagogic venture serves as an inspired mirror for concerns with and around race and racism inside South African educational institutions. It challenges the commodification of blackness in visual culture, and, I argue, proffers a credible "emancipatory possibility". Muholi's Reading Room, in brief, is a striking

answer to, and fulfilment of, Stefan Collini's (2012:8) vision of what the purpose of an education or the role of a university should be – a world, a place, in which future scholars are not shaped by 'an instrumental necessity', but by an education 'intrinsic to their character'; a realm in which one can pursue 'the open-ended search for deeper understanding' which fosters 'autonomy'.

Keywords: Raced optic; image-repertoire; opacity; disruption; soliloquy.

> Her look is self-possessed rather than seductive. She's looking ahead but not at the camera. It is the look of someone who is thinking about herself, simultaneously outward and inward. Teju Cole (2016:129).

Soliloquy

In his essay 'Portrait of a Lady', Teju Cole (2016) describes the portrait of a woman by the Malian photographer, Seydou Keïta, entitled *Odalisque*. How often have audiences been drawn to such enigmatic secrecy, and yet felt a similar communion? Is it because photographs, more than any other medium, possess the surest trace of a truth, because they seem so real? Perhaps. In this particular case – Cole's reading of Keïta's photograph – if the woman resists critical scrutiny and evokes some encrypted truth, it is because the woman felt and seen signals a vital reconfiguration of blackness. In this regard, according to Cole, sex and colour are not objectified. By way of explaining the photograph's intuited yet strange power, Cole turns to what he deems its implicit decolonising project. Cole argues that the photographs taken by Keïta or his Malian compatriot, Malick Sidibé, as well as those taken by Mama Casset of Senegal and Joseph Moïse Agbodjelou of Benin, are not seen through an appropriative or excoriating colonial lens. Rather, their photographs are 'ripostes to the anthropological images of *natives* made by Europeans in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries', which proved decisive in the shaping of Europe's perceptions of Africans (Cole 2016:128-129). But 'something changed when Africans began to take photographs of one another', Cole (2016:129) proposes; '[y]ou can see it in the way they look at the camera, in the poses, the attitude'.

If photography is inextricably rooted in culture, history and what Giorgio Agamben (1998) terms the 'bio-political', then it seems that it is also impossible to disentangle it from a raced optic. In this regard, however, I am not wholly convinced, for one thereby assumes that the taker of the photograph is indisputably also its maker. Susan Sontag (1977), however, has questioned this seamless logic. In striking contrast to Cole's subjective and moral vision of Keïta's photograph, Sontag (1977:86) notes: 'That photographs are often praised for their candour, their honesty, indicates that most photographs, of course, are not candid'. For Sontag, therefore, photographs are not oracular ciphers; they do not, as is commonly claimed, return the meanings imputed to them.

In effect, Sontag radically counters the pervasive view that photographs reveal the truth, be that truth oppressive or liberatory. Photographs, she argues, are not quite the portals to truth as is commonly assumed, for 'they do not simply render reality – realistically'; rather, through photographs 'it is reality which is scrutinised, and evaluated, for its fidelity to photographs' (Sontag 1977:87). This inversion, which mediates and qualifies any a priori truth, returns one to the ruthless partiality, indeed the impregnability of photographs. They are but the mute mirroring or triggers for feelings and thoughts. Their 'honesty', for Sontag (1977), resides in the fact that they can never be 'candid'.

Geoff Dyer shares Sontag's view. In *The ongoing moment*, he notes that, '[i]n photography there is no meantime. There was just that moment and now there's this moment and in between there is nothing. Photography, in a way, is the negation of chronology' (Dyer 2005:285). Yet there is still the persistent belief that photography contains and records a truth. But given that photographs are but a-chronological moments, in and out of time, why do people persist in supposing that they can explain the world? If they possess no hidden depth, no truth beyond their surface affect, then surely their value lies not in some oracular power but in the fact that they exist as fragments? In accounting for why he has written his book on photography – and Dyer (2005:258) emphatically reminds the reader that he does not possess a camera – he states that he wishes 'to find out what certain things look like when they've been photographed and how having been photographed changes them'. A photograph's value, therefore, resides in taking, and what that taking fails to tell of a time impossible to recover. Which is why Dyer (2005:258) argues that photographs are far more about other photographs, for 'often it turns out that when things have been photographed they look like other photographs, either ones that have already been taken or ones that are waiting to be taken'.

Now while the reader might dispute this view, I ask only that in moving forward, its potential veracity be held onto. For what Sontag and Dyer draw attention to is the unnerving realisation that photography as a mirror of reality may not in fact be the case. It is not that Sontag and Dyer suppose the imaging of the world to be a purely simulacral exercise – a photograph of a photograph. Rather, as Sontag (1977:112) notes, '[b]ecause each photograph is only a fragment, its moral and emotional weight depends on where it is inserted'. There is therefore no neutrality in the taking of a photograph; but then neither is it wholly subject to a photographer's social, cultural or political perspective. To state flatly that the colonial gaze is inescapably divisive and oppressive is therefore as debatable as stating that an African photographer taking photographs of other Africans is inherently enabling and empowering. What matters is where one thinks the "moral and emotional" weight has been "inserted". That this weight is never consciously applied makes one all the more suspicious of those who claim to know what it is they are imposing

or implying in the instant of taking a photograph. Indeed, as Sontag (1977:112) concludes, '[c]ontrary to what is suggested by the humanist claims made for photography, the camera's ability to transform reality into something beautiful derives from its relative weakness as a means of conveying truth'.

This view flies in the face of received opinion, typically expressed by Robert Frank (cited by Sontag 1977:122) as follows: 'There is one thing the photograph must contain, the humanity of the moment'. Whether or not one believes this to be the case on encountering a photograph is disputable, although, like Ansel Adams, I am certain that many will claim that 'a great photograph' must be 'a full expression of what one feels about what is being photographed in the deepest sense and is, thereby, a true expression of what one feels about life in its entirety' (Frank cited by Sontag 1977:118). Whether one ascribes to this eureka moment, whether one has truly felt this frisson and oneness with an image, and without being churlish, I wish simply to ask, after Sontag, that such certainty be weighed against the realisation 'that a person is an aggregate of appearances, appearances which can be made to yield, by proper focusing, infinite layers of significance' (Sontag 1977:159). A photograph, therefore, is an isolated instant within an aggregation, as revealing as it is recessive. If a photograph's 'weakness' lies in its inability to tell the full and unsullied truth, it nevertheless has the power to suggest, infer, commute or dream 'infinite layers of significance'.

With this caveat in mind, let me return to Cole's interpretation of Keïta's *Odalisque*. The look of the woman in the picture is thoughtful, he supposes. It is 'the look of someone who is thinking about herself, simultaneously outward and inward' (Cole 2016:129). Given that Keïta's photograph cannot speak, it is therefore its suggestive power – a power commonly ascribed to Johannes Vermeer's women – which, surely, provokes Cole (2016:129) to declare, '[a] portrait of this kind is a visual soliloquy'. Cole's decision to give a mute vision voice, while compelling, is nevertheless little other than metaphoric. A dramatic form, the soliloquy, most famously celebrated in Hamlet's existential reckoning – to be, or not to be – is a question posed through a theatrical ploy to which the audience alone are privy. The audience are therefore the eavesdroppers, the silent auditors of a secret publically conveyed but understood to be mute. Understood thus, Cole's transposition of this set-up and sleight-of-hand to photography is canny, for on looking – a silent act – one is also listening. The error, however, lies in the commonplace belief that an image is more articulate than any written or spoken word, when, in truth, it is never the image which speaks, but the longing within the viewer to sound a silent world.

It is this pervasive tendency to find speech where there is none, infer certain meaning amidst "infinite layers of significance", which has made the act of viewing a photographed image sacred and precious. No doubt there is something beautiful and heartening in

this ventriloquistic exercise, an exercise which must suppose some hidden depth, some rune of meaning, some emboldening balm. It is a viewpoint I do not care to demystify but one whose mystification I seek to understand. That Cole continues, in his essay (2016), to weave the images of Muholi into this African sanctum – the benign world in which great African photographers take pictures of fellow Africans – has prompted my own reflection.

Writing of Muholi's best known suite of photographs, *Faces and Phases* (2006-), Cole (2016:132) notes that 'like her African forebears' – Seydou Keïta, Malick Sidibé, Mama Casset and Joseph Moïse Agbodjelou – Muholi 'shows people as they wish to be seen'. Once again the subjunctive kicks into gear, for Cole (2016:132) imputes desire where desire can only ever be supposed:

> To look at their faces, in portrait after portrait, is to become newly aware of the power of portraiture in a gifted artist's hands. Muholi doesn't grant her sitters independence – they are independent – but she makes their independence visible. "Faces and Phases" is a complete world.

It is of course the right of the writer to make the claims that he or she chooses. That said, it must also be stated that what Cole provides is but a subjective claim. Readers of the work and fellow interpreters can therefore agree or disagree. And there is no doubt that a well-taken photograph, one shaped "in a gifted artist's hands", possesses an irresistible force. The photograph shot by Don McCullin of a gypsy watching as the police destroy his home and evict his family – reproduced as the cover image to the Penguin edition of Sontag's *On photography* (1977) – remains with me. I do not think, however, that its power resides in its controversial context. It is the man I see before me, unblinking, at odds with fate, voided, which, for me at least, possesses the greater purchase. That this electrifying power of photography has dizzyingly accelerated in an image-saturated universe reveals the degree to which photography has been embraced as the most sacred of arts. 'Having a photograph of Shakespeare would be like having a nail from the True Cross', Sontag (1977:154) chimes, and as I reread this unnerving sentence I nevertheless wonder if this should be the case. For as Sontag (1977:110) more cynically states elsewhere,

> Whatever the moral claims on behalf of photography, its main effect is to convert the world into a department store or museum-without-walls in which every subject is depreciated into an article of consumption, promoted into an item for aesthetic appreciation.

Here one finds oneself returning to a variant of the anthropological gaze, the gaze of one who, wittingly or unwittingly, immorally commodifies the complexity of a world shaped

by images. The colonial gaze, although it may no longer be called such, remains, as one finds oneself compelled to subtract, divorce, objectify or reduce all that thrusts itself into one's view. It is not surprising, therefore, that given a current saturated culture wired to ill-informed "alternative" or "post-truths", that it is enticing to cling avidly to the more enabling views posed by Teju Cole, Robert Frank or Ansel Adams. What concerns Sontag (1977:51), however, is that despite the numbing effect of an image driven world, that, '[p]hotography has the unappealing reputation of being the most realistic, therefore facile, of the mimetic arts' – a righteously and dangerously instrumental affliction.

A disrupting darkness

I contend that in the South African context this instrumental treatment of the photographic image has become abusive. Largely perceived as representative embodiments of a collective vision – namely the struggle for liberation – since the 1970s, the corpus of South African photography has predominantly been read through a political or ideological prism, its richly variable aesthetic rendered subject to the demands of a prescriptive liberatory narrative. In his critical study, *Rediscovery of the ordinary,* Njabulo Ndebele (1994) justly challenges what he perceives as the inflated and spectacular tendencies in South Africa's resistance arts – tendencies which Achille Mbembe in a 2017 seminar, entitled "Thinking South Africa", crisply dubbed a yen for 'hyperbolic excess'. It is therefore a photograph's overweening surfeit of meaning, its spectacularised or hyperbolically categorical imperative, that has determined its value. At the epicentre of this value has been the trials and tribulations of the pained black body. Perforce, the black body has been understood as a voided and indistinct category that must be named, enshrined, abetted and redeemed. However, human suffering, in this case black suffering, cannot, indeed must not, be reduced to a supplementary and excessive advertorial. It cannot or should not be framed, remade and galvanised solely through the spectacle of pain, for to do so is to re-actively enshrine the very problem one seeks to overcome. Which is why Ndebele counters the "spectacular" with what he calls the "ordinary".

In seeking a more prosaic optic that could harness the attenuated gradations of struggle and disaffection, Ndebele believes that one can capture a more human portrait of life in an embattled yet still engendering world. This romance with the ordinary has remained with me as a more productive optic through which to interpret South African life. That Toni Morrison, in *Playing in the dark* (1993), echoes Ndebele's yearning has further emboldened my own venture on behalf of a more enriching language with which to read South African photography. As she reminds all readers and writers – and here I include photographers – we 'are bereft when criticism remains too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before its eyes' (Morrison 1993:91). Morrison, here, is referring to

a 'darkness' which America's white literary imagination has failed to countenance in its bid to construct a hermetically sealed and inured blackness. The black body, she argues, has always hovered at the unthinkable limit of an exclusionary white optic. My further point, however, is that it is not only its delimitation within a white optic that is concerning, it is also the framing of blackness by black creatives that must be reckoned with.

Justly sceptical of a post-racial vision, Morrison (1993:46) argues that, '[t]he world does not become raceless or will not become unracialised by assertion. The act of enforcing racelessness in literary discourse is itself a racial act'. Therefore, if one is to challenge prescriptive readings of blackness one must be careful, in so doing, to suppose some utopian ground beyond an ongoing and cruelly aggravated raced debate. For if as Morrison (1993) notes, 'racelessness' remains a racial act, it is because she well understands that to think outside of colour, in the name of a universally inclusive human project, is delusory. Philip Roth (2000) concurs when he reminds that race is an inescapable 'human stain'. It is not surprising therefore that the repeated and obsessive return to the matter of race, while demeaning, crippling, compulsive and killing, will not miraculously disappear. A "disrupting darkness" can be discerned here, and, as I argue, this darkness is strikingly in evidence in the self-portraits taken by Muholi.

Morrison (1993:xi) also notes that polarised constructions of "whiteness" or "blackness" are afflicted ways of seeing, which must always be qualified, for 'the kind of work' she has 'always wanted to do' requires that she 'learn how to manoeuver ways to free up the language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined '. It is this proviso that needs to be held onto, for it will prove crucial as I move forward in my reflection on the photographs by Muholi, for hers is a body of work that has all too often been mistakenly imperilled by such a sinister, lazy or predictable critical language. Known as a "visual activist" committed to righting the wrongs inflicted upon those deemed other – black, queer – Muholi's image-repertoire, as a consequence, has largely been defined through a racially and sexually determined optic. In countering this optic, while recognising that there is no immune position outside of it, I aim to provide a more searching predication.

Muholi's photography, I venture, is as reflexively critical of a reductive raced and sexed optic as it is a quest for a greater understanding of its folly. If her photographs are disruptive it is because they refuse objectivity as adroitly as they refuse subjectivity. The disruption at a photograph's core, a disruption echoed in the moment of seeing – of insight – begs an interpretive language that refuses the ease of the prejudicial or lazily authoritative, for what Muholi seeks is an expression that could free one from the "chains" of received beliefs or attitudes. Her women are not *quite* representative or iconic, despite the photographer's claim that they are. Of *Faces and Phases*, Muholi (2010) declares

that the 'lesbians, women and transmen' she has photographed are 'queer icons'. This view has been widely endorsed. However, as I understand these images, they are not so much iconic assertions as they are probable improbabilities. They neither aggressively challenge indifference, nor do they assert difference. Instead it is their quest for normativity, against the odds, which gives them their disruptive force. Therefore, contra Cole, I would argue that while the women's worlds Muholi constructs are "independent", they are not, however, "complete". Rather, while seemingly intact, *in situ*, resolved, with eyes that challenge presumption, agreement or acquiescence, her women also insinuate an inescapable fragility. The strength of these photographs, therefore, lies in the discordance which amplifies their relative strangeness and estrangement, for the viewer is left in no doubt that what they are seeing is a series of women compromised not from within, but from without by values, tastes, beliefs, which have failed to absorb and embrace their world. This discordance or disruption allows Muholi room to challenge, manoeuvre and free her subjects. It is as though the photographer has protectively framed and engendered a loving difference in a world of relative indifference. At once all-too-real yet utopian, Muholi's images of black lesbian women – women who cannot be explained away through their sexuality – reflect a limit or threshold. They capture precisely what Morrison deems most necessary when thinking or writing or imaging blackness – the ability to "free up the language" of seeing. They also echo Dyer's realisation that the putative meaning of photographs, what "things looks like", come to be known in the instant of the taking. That certain photographs from Muholi's *Faces and Phases* series also echo McCullin's lone gypsy reinforces the communion between photographs – as photographs.

If, in my view, Cole fails to read Muholi's photographs effectively, he nevertheless provides the gift of two remarkable essays, entitled "Black body" and "A true picture of black skin" respectively (Cole 2016). What intrigues Cole (2016:144), in his reading of the photographs of Roy DeCarava, is 'the loveliness of its dark areas'. Echoing Ndebele's attraction to the prosaic and ordinary, Cole (2016:144) relishes 'just how much could be seen in the shadowed parts of a photograph … how much could be imagined into those shadows'. Here Cole's tone is not deterministic, for with DeCarava he recognises the greater value in a resistance to 'being too explicit in the work, a reticence that expresses itself in his choice of subjects as well as the way he presented them' (Cole 2016:145). DeCarava's is 'a visual grammar of decorous mystery' which centres principally upon the photographer's treatment of black skin (Cole 2016:145).

'All technology arises out of specific social circumstances', observes Cole (2016:146), before putting forward the forceful reminder that photographic technology 'is neither value-free nor ethnically neutral'. As recently as 2009, 'the face-recognition technology on HP webcams had difficulty recognising black faces', Cole (2016:146). notes, once again reinforcing an age-old reality 'that the process of calibration had favoured lighter

skin'. Given this technological conspiracy – a technology connected to a raced optic which predates the birth of photography – Cole's (2016:147) exploration of the absent-presence of black skin draws him towards the work of DeCarava who, 'instead of trying to brighten blackness … went against expectation and darkened it further'. Searching for the underlying logic of this decision, Cole (2016:147) concludes that for DeCarava, '[w]hat is dark is neither blank nor empty. It is in fact full of wise light, which, with patient seeing, can open our eyes into glories'. While I do not care for Cole's transfiguring prose, I nevertheless concur that what matters in the reading of blackness is its richly variegated complexity. It is this very complexity that comes into play when presented with Muholi's self-portraits. The key difference, however, is that Muholi has chosen to further and artificially blacken her body, as if she has emerged from a primal swamp or a vat of petroleum. I return to these images in my conclusion. For now, what compels me is Cole's reading of DeCarava's decision to allow his subjects to recede even further from an easy objectification. As he notes,

> The viewer's eye might at first protest, seeking more conventional contrasts, wanting more obvious lighting … But, gradually, there comes an acceptance of the photograph and its subtle implications: that there's more there than we might think at first glance, but also that, when we are looking at others, we might come to the understanding that they don't have to give themselves up to us. They are allowed to stay in the shadows if they wish (Cole 2016:147-148).

Here one is once again caught up in Sontag's (1977:159) perception of personhood as 'an aggregate of appearances … which can be made to yield, by proper focusing, infinite layers of significance'. Revelation, therefore, can also reside in the recessive. And if one splices these views with those of Frantz Fanon, for whom the black body needs to be redeemed from a zone of indistinction, one could also reasonably argue that redemption need not suppose a heightened clarification – the transubstantiation of object into subject – but that it can be achieved as compellingly through the enabling morphing of a punitive abstraction, because for blackness to possess its consciousness and its being need not suppose a newly minted visibility but the furtherance of its nocturnal complexity and "opacity". This last descriptor Cole derives from the philosopher of creolisation, Édouard Glissant (2016:148), who defines 'opacity' as 'a right to not have to be understood on other's terms, a right to be misunderstood if need be'. Within the South African photographic optic, it is precisely this recessiveness, this mystery, which needs to be embraced more urgently, because without it, blackness remains either glibly objectified or inchoately thrust upon the limit of the unknown.

Cole then turns to the cinematography of Bradford Young, best known for his films, *Mother of George* (2013) and *Selma* (2014), the story of the life and struggle of Martin Luther

King. 'Under Young's lens', Cole (2016:149) notes that the protagonists 'become darker yet and serve as the brooding centres of these overwhelmingly beautiful films. Black skin, full of unexpected gradations of blue, purple, or ochre, sets a tone for the narrative [for] moments of inwardness [which] open up a different space of encounter'. Here once again one is presented with a panoply of textures and tones, moods and inferences, yearnings and claims. If I find Cole's interpretation of the language of blackness especially compelling in the context of South Africa, it is because it offers a more searching hermeneutic, one which Muholi has taken up most forcefully and dramatically in her suite of self-portraits. For therein Muholi has finally challenged a limit which has long dogged South African photography. She has returned what JM Coetzee (1990:76) terms 'an air of looming mystery': 'No one has done that for South Africa: made it into a land of mystery. Too late now. Fixed in the mind as a place of flat, hard light, without shadows, without depth'. Coetzee's *Age of iron* was published in 1990. While his point still holds, still obdurately persists, it must, however, also be re-appraised in the light of photographs by Muholi.

Playing in the dark

While Muholi is best known for her portraits of others, as depicted in *Faces and Phases,* it is the suite of photographs entitled *Somnyama Ngonyama* (2016) (Figures 1-3) which, in my view, has pitched the most profound challenge to the received construction and representation of blackness in South Africa. If *Faces and Phases* "articulates a collective pain" and stages a "face-to-face confrontation" between the photographer and her subject, the image and its viewer, *Somnyama Ngonyama* more enigmatically skews the received socio-political axis of engagement. Through what appear to be self-consciously pleasurable re-enactments, Muholi announces a new state of play or, after Morrison, a new way of "playing in the dark". While an intractable seriousness, commonly associated with Muholi's photographs, remains in evidence, it is no longer *quite* as withering or exacting. Unlike her earlier works, which are earnest in their desire to be understood and recognised, the works in her *Somnyama Ngonyam*a series generate an exultation comparable to that which Cole experiences when confronted with DeCarava's photographs or Young's cinematography. The key to these works – if a photograph can truly be said to possess a key – resides in their paradoxically forthright yet recessive appearance. The images seem to hover between abstraction and declaration. Exercises in dress-up, it is not, however, only the wry and quirky pleasure which Muholi takes in accessorising her body that gives the photographs their immediate traction but the creature, the person who, in the midst of this dress-up, gazes implacably. Is she simply looking at the camera? Is she looking at an imagined on-looker? Or, like Keïta's *Odalisque*, does she inhabit 'the look of someone who is thinking about herself, simultaneously outward and inward (Cole 2016:129)?

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Zanele Muholi, *MalD in Harlem, African Market*, 116 St, 2015. Archival Pigment ink on Baryta Fibre paper. Image size: 50 x 40cm. Paper size: 60 x 50cm. Courtesy of Stevenson Gallery.

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Zanele Muholi, *Musa*, London, 2015. Silver gelatin print. Image size: 25 x 20.1cm. Paper size: 35 x 30.1cm. Courtesy of Stevenson Gallery.

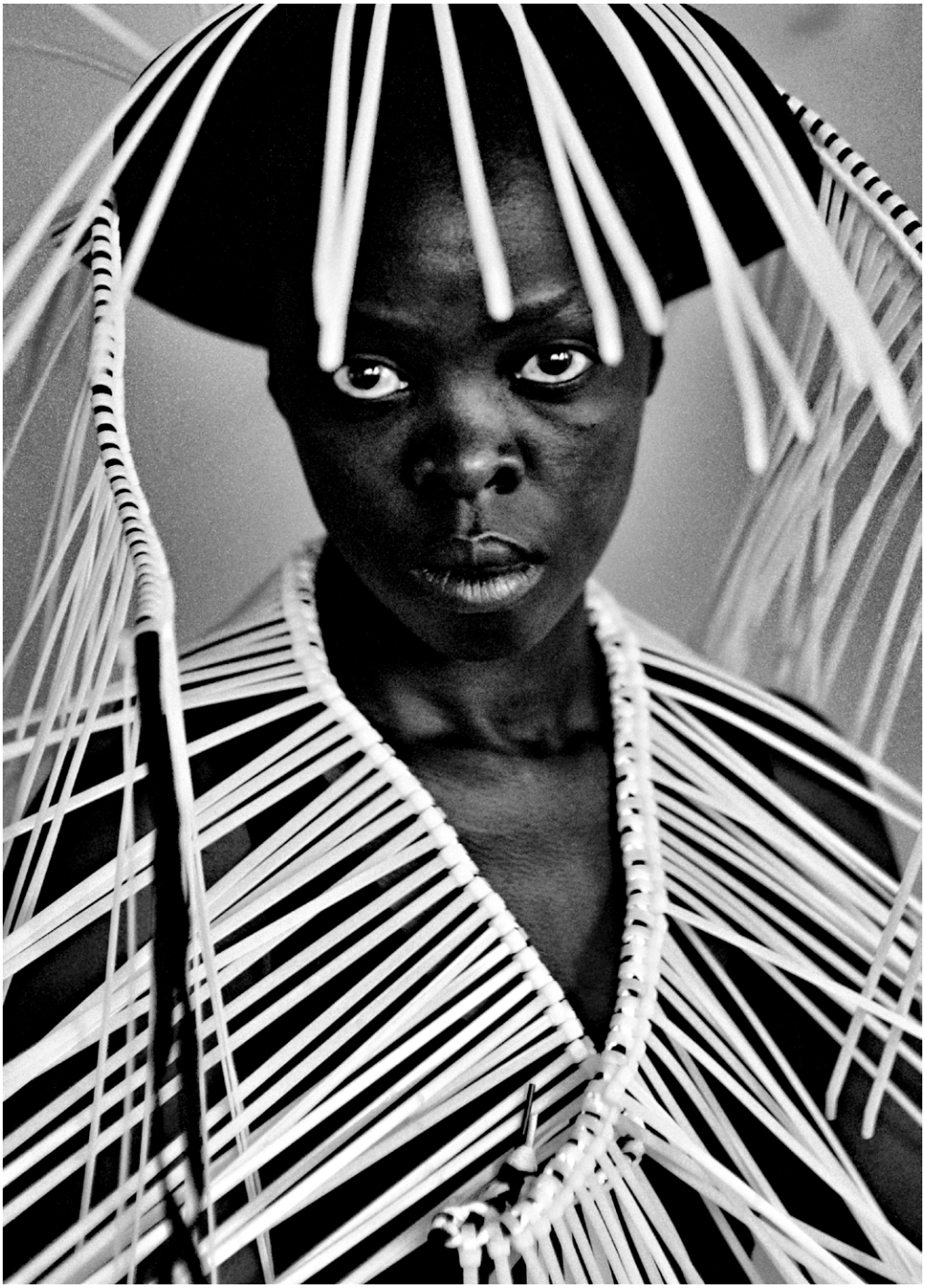

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Zanele Muholi, *Bhekezakhe, Parktown*, 2016. Silver gelatin print. Image size: 50 x 35.9cm. Paper size: 60 x 45.9 cm. Courtesy of Stevenson Gallery.

Unlike Cole, I am not quite certain. If these photographs can also be interpreted as a "visual soliloquy" it is not because they speak directly to me, their audience, but because, in their very muteness, they express a vital silence and a fight against the noise – the 'hard light, without shadows, without depth' – that has all too typically afflicted South African photography. For in this series of self-portraits there is lightness at the heart of blackness, a refusal, through self-objectification, of being objectified in turn. Here blackness is neither named nor framed, despite the fact that these images are clearly rigged.

In her essay on this photographic series, M Neelika Jayawardane (2016:3) notes that Muholi 'harkens to an inner voice, calling her to be unashamedly present to herself'. Does this mean that Muholi has transmuted her historical, cultural, racial and sexual burden? If so, then how has she shifted from shame to shamelessness? Because for my part, I can see no operable spectre of shame in these images. Such a reading is only possible if one chooses to interpret the images as reactive counterpoints to an *a priori* pathology. I, however, see these photographs as having radically traduced shame; no afflicting shadow lingers in these images in which blackness, applied like any other accessory – black on black – further deflects the photographs from a pathological engine room of meaning. And if, after Jayawardane, these are not narratives which claim to be recording an "authentic" Zanele Muholi, it is because it is the very ground upon which authenticity subsists that Muholi has thoroughly disrupted. These are not images which suppose a pre-existing community; they are not designed to entrench any prior rapport, no matter how vexed. Rather, after Glissant, these are exercises in "opacity" which assume 'a right not to have to be understood on other's terms, a right to be misunderstood if need be' (Cole 2016:148). It is this right, historically, culturally and perceptually denied the black body, which Muholi has for the first time embraced.

> Muholi heightens the contrast in each of her photographs, emphasising as high a glossy contrast to her skin as the silver gelatin technology will permit. The result is a sheer blackness, an impenetrable wall of skin that neither the person inhabiting that skin, nor the persons looking at her, can escape having to encounter (Jayawardane 2016:7).

Here Jayawardane's interpretation, echoing Joseph Conrad's *Heart of darkness* (2007 [1899]), errs on the side of impenetrability. Exchanging the categorical for the enigmatic, the nominal for the adjectival, Muholi dispossesses both herself and her viewer of the mistaken presumption of knowledge. For if blackness cannot be known, it is because it must refuse the abusive and reductive framework which has heretofore shaped it. By making her skin sheer, impenetrable, Muholi also reminds her viewer that she is not reducible to that skin. By compounding black-on-black, she also arrives at a fathomless and inescapable density. To what end? Are these images, after Jayawardane, simply

Conradian exercises in impenetrability? Or, does Muholi also present the viewer with a play, a soliloquy, whose purpose is to confound that seeming impenetrability? For to assume that Muholi has alienated herself from her own body is also to suppose, in a Brechtian act, that she has reflectively distanced herself from herself, and by extension her audience, the better to foreground a heightened consciousness of her being, its history and its future. Blackness, as I understand it here, is a performative and polemical act designed to restore its immanence, and not its ill-perceived affect.

If Jayawardane (2016:16) is correct in her reminder that prior to this series of works Muholi was haunted by the struggle to correct the misprision of blackness – queer blackness in particular – and that this struggle had, as a consequence, created in the artist a 'distance from love', a distance from vulnerability, a distance even from those who 'seek to give one unconditional love', does it follow that the artist, when confronted by 'the coalface of … dangerous work', should find herself incapable of finding 'a place where one can be luxurious and free with one's emotional self'? I am not so certain. While a struggle to right a wrong can be soul destroying, while it can threaten to evacuate all ability to hold fast to love, it does not follow that this is inevitably the case. This was Ndebele's point when he sought to free the South African imagination from its compulsive and perversely sacrificial relation to struggle and its virtual relation to redemption. Somewhere within this lacuna or intransigent maw, Ndebele (1994) commits himself to joining the broken components of South African psychic wiring. We [South Africans] need not be so incommensurably divided, he argues. Similarly, Morrison (1992:x) has also challenged this disconnect: 'Neither blackness nor *people of colour* stimulates in me notions of excessive, limitless love, anarchy, or routine dread', she declares.

> I cannot rely on these metaphorical shortcuts because I am a black writer struggling with and through language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissing othering of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work. My vulnerability would lie in romanticising blackness rather than demonising it; vilifying whiteness rather than reifying it (Morrison 1992:x-xi).

What matters all the more, therefore, is how blackness is inflected. Like Morrison (1993:xi), Muholi resists "metaphorical shortcuts", choosing through photography to generate a writing that would free her from a "sinister", "lazy" or predictable employment of "racially informed and determined chains". If this is evident in her capture of black lesbian life – a life intractably cast through portraiture – it is all the more evident in what I regard as her greatest work to date – *Somnyama Ngonyama*. In this series of self-portraits more so than in any other body of work, Muholi has freed up the photographic language of blackness. Having learnt to play in the dark and, after the black American photographer,

Roy DeCarava, produce a darkness more 'intensified … more self-contained, and at the same time more dramatic' (Teju Cole 2016:149), Muholi has finally arrived at that radical moment – blackness as innovation and pleasure, freed from a grotesque history of hurt. After Dyer (2005:258), I would further add that the best images which comprise *Somnyama Ngonyama* are not echoes of images which have already been taken, but the harbingers of photographs 'that are waiting to be taken'.

Reading Room

I first encountered Muholi's self-portraits in a tabloid newspaper format. Five thousand copies were printed to accompany exhibitions in South Africa, France, the United States, South Korea, the Netherlands, United Kingdom and Japan. What immediately struck me was its lo-fi light-weight loose-leafed portability. This was a publication with wings, designed for a multitude, and not only for the likes of those who visited the Stedelijk Museum, LUMA Arles, the Kyotographie photo festival or Autograph ABP in London. Here was a product that could reach the libraries in the townships, schools, community centres and colleges, coffee shops, streets, everywhere where South Africans gathered. In this ink-stained sheaf I found a vision more profound than any other which Muholi had ever realised.

Muholi wanted the look and feel of a newspaper which would be made available in a "Reading Room" alongside her exhibited works, Sophie Perryer, co-director of the Stevenson Gallery in Cape Town, informed me in 2017. In keeping with her activism, however, Muholi had also found the means to shapeshift the commodification of blackness and morally challenge and confound an art world enraptured by glut and gloss, provenance and authenticity. Here blackness was not a fetish to be bartered or championed but a phenomenological riddle – blackness as immanence. Against the grotesque obsessive-compulsive reversion to the black body in pain, an "excessive" body, anarchic, trapped in a "routine dread", Muholi provides what I consider to be the most allusively significant image-repertoire in South Africa's iconography of blackness.

I cannot overstate the global and local importance of these images. For in a country under siege, once again caught in a state of emergency, in which a divisive and stunted raced consciousness runs rampant, its secondary and tertiary educational systems held to ransom, its polity charged with "infrastructural racism", all the more do we, as South Africans, need thinkers and artists who can help us to temper hate and engender a greater humanity. The battle to restore the squandered Rights of the Freedom Charter is just one. Whether in the near future this is a truly realisable cause is however uncertain.

Nevertheless, as South Africans, we urgently need to reconfigure the education best suited to a nation psychically and morally in tatters. After all, what are universities or educational institutions for? Stefan Collini (2012:8) arrives at a chastening answer: 'The forming of future scholars and scientists is not just an instrumental necessity for universities, but intrinsic to their character. Educating someone to pursue the open-ended search for deeper understanding has to be a kind of preparation for autonomy'.

It is, finally, this "open-ended search" for autonomy which Muholi's self-portraits embody. Reflective, exploratory, her images compel one to rethink the scourge of race and racism, a scourge which has sickened sight and blunted art, marred education and issued forth a chillingly brutal instrumentality.

In asking for a Reading Room, Muholi also asks that her viewers/readers reflect upon what it is they read when reading about race, gender, sexuality, self-loathing or the loathing of others. Hate crime is witheringly ubiquitous, "anarchy" and "dread" viral. And yet, against the odds, through *Somnyama Ngonyama* – isiZulu for "Hail the Dark Lioness" – Muholi announces a greater, more loving, more restorative calling – outward and inward.

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Dress as a site of multiple selves: Address and redress in Judith Mason's *The Man who Sang and the Woman who Kept Silent* and Wanja Kimani's *You Have Not Changed*

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I explore dress as mediator or interface through which multiple surfacings of the self are activated. I examine the types of address that artists Judith Mason and Wanja Kimani make through the motif of a dress, focusing on Mason's triptych, *The Man who Sang and the Woman who Kept Silent* (1998) and Kimani's installation series, *You Have Not Changed* (2012-2014). I suggest that the artists negotiate personal sufferings by way of dress as both address, and an act of redress. I argue that the dress in each artist's work is a site of tension where narratives of artist, addressee and viewer come into play. I put forward a personalised approach to analysing dress and the stories it surfaces, instead of understanding it in terms of the macro-political (gendered, cultural, racial and socio-economic) identities it might evoke. This strategy is introduced with reference to Julie Botticcello's (2009:132) notion that, 'the nuances of identification in dress' are lost when 'a focus on the macro-politics of dressing' is maintained. I critique the limits of Barbara Russell's (2006:179) reading of Mason's blue dress as a signifier of femininity. Instead, I demonstrate the subtle manner in which Mason uses the dress as an address and act of redress to herself, rendering it a 'web of narratives' through which many 'tales' are 'told' (Benhabib cited by Coullie, Meyer, Ngwenya & Olver 2006:3). I carry this idea through to an analysis of Kimani's series and consider the personal and collective encounters that emanate from her dress. I contrast the manner in which Kimani's dress resonates with collective experiences of the African diaspora to Sarah

Kaiser's and Sarah McCullough's (2010:363) approaches to the diaspora through dress. Regarding dress with reference to the selves that each artist surfaces, I offer a fresh understanding of what seems to have become a tired interpretation of the macro-politics of dress..

Keywords: dress, macro-politics, address, redress, interface, web of narratives, Judith Mason, Wanja Kimani.

Introduction: Analysing dress as a mediator

'By maintaining a focus on the macro-politics of dressing, one tends to lose the nuances of individual identification in dress as addressed to the collective' (Botticello 2009:132). Julie Botticello points towards the potentially singularising effect of taking a semiotic approach to analysing dress as a signifier of culture, race, ethnicity, nationhood or gender (see Dogbe 2003; Kaiser & McCullough 2010; Tulloch 2010). She argues that dress can be read as a mediator between 'an individual and her community', rather than a direct signifier of the community to which the individual belongs (Botticello 2009:131). I relate Botticello's argument to a reading of two artists' works in which a dress, in the form of what might typically be thought of as a woman's "frock", is the central motif — Judith Mason's triptych, *The Man who Sang and The Woman who Kept Silent* (1998) (Figures 1-4), and Wanja Kimani's series *You Have Not Changed* (2012-2014) (Figures 5-8).

In the triptych and the series, the viewer is confronted with an un-embodied woman's dress. Mason's triptych incorporates a mixed-media installation of a dress, sewn together from a range of multi-hued, at times transparent, blue plastic bags, and two paintings in which the image of this same dress is at the front. Unlike Mason's artwork, Kimani's work is not fashioned into a dress from found objects, but rather the found object itself — a childhood dress belonging to the artist — is rendered an artwork via strategies such as embroidery, its display, and the contexts in which it is displayed. Both Mason and Kimani inscribe the dresses with an address directed towards a particular individual. Whereas Kimani embroiders an address onto the bottom half of her dress, Mason uses the same area of her blue dress to pen (paint) her own words. In this sense, both dresses appear to function as a canvas onto which an address is projected, and a conversation is imagined. The absence of a body to occupy the dress, together with the fact that were these garments to be taken down, they could be worn and could adorn the figure of a living person, points towards the possibility of these artworks functioning as sites into which different individuals might insert themselves. While Mason and Kimani may have directed their inscriptions towards specific individuals,

the imagined insertion of a viewer's body into the dresses activates further conversation between artist, addressee and viewer. I reveal how each (ad)dress is charged not only with the artists' ideas of self, but also with the selves that viewers may read into the artworks. Thus the interactions between artist, addressee and viewer render each dress a mediator between the 'individual and her community' (Botticello 2009:131).

Beginning with Mason's blue dress, I establish the idea of dress as a canvas in to, and on to, which an artist might inscribe personal narratives and notions of selfhood. I critique the limits of only analysing Mason's blue dress with regard to the gender constructs it may invoke or perpetuate - in other words, as a signifier of femininity. Rather, I describe the subtle ways Mason treats the dress as a mediator through which she can negotiate her identity as an "a-political" artist, or as she (Mason 1997:7) describes herself, a 'cowardly old lefty … slipping around on the side-lines and surviving when [others] didn't'. I nuance the discussion of Mason's dress as a mediator through the key terms "address" and "redress", and the artist's use of the dress both to make an address, and to perform redress.

Complicating the notion of dress as a mediator, I explore Kimani's installation series with reference to the relationship between dress, personal narrative and collective experiences. I analyse Kimani's use of a dress, as the central motif in her series, to evoke personal memories and encounters. I then examine the ways Kimani's dress, as both an artwork and evocation of events in the artist's life, resonates with collective experiences of displacement that relate to the African diaspora. In this sense, the dress itself is not treated as an explicit signifier of the diaspora, or the macro-political conceptions of nationhood and cultural identity that accompany the debates associated therewith. Instead, I extend the use of the terms address and redress, as discussed in relation to Mason's work, to look at how Kimani's dress performs an address of the artist's self, and the times during which this may intersect with broader macro-political arguments about identity. Tracing dress through the notions of address and redress in relation to Mason's and Kimani's work, I evoke dress as a site of tension, where various interpretations of the self intertwine. As such, I offer an alternative approach to dominant discourses on dress as a surfacing of, or challenge to, racial, gendered and socio-economic identities (see, for example, Dogbe 2003).[1]

1. For example, Esi Dogbe (2003:379) posits that dress, and specifically Ghanaian women's dress, is too often analysed in terms of cultured and gendered norms. However, Dogbe (2003:393) maintains a focus on the macro-political, as she unpicks how dress communicates Ghanaian women's socio-economic status.

Etymological considerations: dress, address, and redress

An etymological consideration of the words "dress", "address" and "redress", and the ways in which these words are understood, or might link and overlap, is important in framing this discussion of dress as a site of multiple selves. In English, the verbs "dress", "address", and "redress" all point towards the action of setting something straight, directing, and arranging:

> dress (v.): From Vulgar Latin *directiare* "make straight", from Latin *directus* "direct, straight".
>
> redress (v.): From *re-* "again" and *drecier* "to straighten, arrange" (see *dress* (v.)).
>
> address (v.): From *ad* "to" and *directiare* "make straight, direct" (see *direct* (v.), and compare *dress* (v.)) (Online Etymology Dictionary 2017:[sp]).

Individually, each verb carries a string of associated meanings: while dress most commonly means to put on clothes, it might also refer to decorating, cleansing or bandaging a wound, as well as treating, decorating and/or preparing something in a particular way. Address links to writing, or inscribing a location onto a letter, for example. It can also mean to speak to someone, or to grapple with and think about an idea. Although redress signifies to remedy or set straight an unfair situation, to re-dress can be to (ad)dress again, but this time doing things differently. On the other hand, "dress", as a noun that signifies a woman's garment, carries with it 'overtones of "made not merely to clothe but to adorn"' (Online Etymology Dictionary 2017:[sp]). The nouns "dress", "address", and "redress" nuance the way in which I approach Mason's and Kimani's work. Transforming the verb "address" into a noun denotes a speech directed at someone, an inscription, a location or place where someone lives. Redress speaks to the remedy or compensation that is offered to set straight a wrong or grievance.

While I have introduced the claim that, through careful analysis, Mason's and Kimani's dresses can be seen as canvases of address, it is important to establish the foundation from which I approach them as types of redress. Redress surfaces with particular potency in Mason's work, and the problematic implications of creating the blue dress as a gesture of atonement for the wrongs experienced by the *uMkhonto we Sizwe* cadre to whom the inscription on the dress is directed - I unpack this in detail below. I also look at the different stories that have been ascribed to Mason's work, and the ways in which the blue dress has been dressed, and redressed with conflicting meanings. In Kimani's work, redress operates on the level of the artist setting straight, or remedying her father's conception of her identity - a project which then necessitates multiple acts

of redress, as the artist negotiates, and re-negotiates, through a series of three artworks, different conceptions of who she is.

Engaging with dress through these terms allows for the subtleties of personal narratives to be revealed. This responds to Botticello's (2009:131) argument that a personalised reading of dress and 'its ability to embody meanings dependent on context but also on the perspective from which it is viewed, [renders] dress able to be read in many ways'. Susan Kaiser and Sarah McCullough (2010:362) describe these multiple readings using a theory of "knottedness", which I adopt and adapt to suit a discussion of dress in Mason's and Kimani's work, as 'a web of narratives' (Benhabib cited by Coullie, Meyer, Ngwenya & Olver 2006:3).

A symbol of femininity

Barbara Russell (2006:198) explores the ways in which the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC, 1996) hearings prompted media, authors, politicians and artists to represent anti-apartheid activist, Phila Ndwande's torture through 'an idealised model of womanhood'. Russell (2006:179) analyses Mason's triptych as a re-enforcement of 'conventional feminine moulds … without particular regard for the lives and activism of individual women'. She argues that Mason's selection of a dress to narrate Ndwande's story concretises Ndwande's popular representation as an idealised maternal figure, resembling Mother Mary. Russell (2006:191) asks why, rather than a dress, did Mason not 'fashion plastic bags into a military uniform, to express Ndwande's role as a soldier?'[2] Russell proposes the dress is a fashion statement that forces a feminine identity onto the cadre. In this sense, she reads the dress against, for example, former Constitutional Court judge, Albie Sachs's argument that it is one of post-apartheid South Africa's most poignant and significant evocations of 'an African woman guerrilla' (Sachs cited by Russell 2006:193). Russell's contribution is important because it unpicks a myth of womanhood, fragility and beauty that has been constructed from Ndwande's experience. However, her analysis of what 'appears from media reports to have been renamed *The Blue Dress*' is limiting - I contend that she opts for an obvious and arguably tired feminist approach to reading the dress (Russell 2006:193). Russell (2006:194) locates the blue dress within a feminine-mother, masculine-soldier dichotomy, acerbically commenting that, '[t]he Blue Dress is an empty symbol, silently waiting for the interpretations of those who deserve it'.

2. As the story goes: 'Phila Ndwande was shot by the security police after being kept naked for weeks in an attempt to make her inform on her comrades. She preserved her dignity by making panties out of a blue plastic bag. This garment was found wrapped around her pelvis when she was exhumed by the TRC' (Constitutional Court Art Collection 2015:[sp]).

It is in the very emptiness, which Russell critiques, that I propose the complexities of the blue dress lie. Mason's selection of a dress is a particular form of address in which her own conflicted identity competes with, and is projected onto Ndwande's. In the triptych, Mason surfaces pain through specific symbols of violence. The triptych comprises two oil paintings flanking a blue dress sculpted from plastic bags (Figures 1-3). In Figures 1 and 3, the dress is depicted as floating in mid-air, foregrounded by a barbed wire fence and a snarling hyena in the background. In Figure 1, the hyena tears away at a strip of the dress. In Figure 3, the hyena approaches the violent red glow of a brazier in front of him and three more burning braziers positioned at the forefront of the work. Refining Russell's (2006:192) statement that, 'the enormity of the violence overwhelms all else', Stacey Vorster and Kent Williams (2016:57) pinpoint the hyenas and braziers as signifiers that render the work a 'richly evocative example of a representational language of violence and trauma'. Upon first viewing the painting of the hyena attacking a strand of the dress, Sachs (cited by Mason 1999:[sp]) was overcome by a sense of harshness and devastation. Indeed, in the opening address for her exhibition, *A Prospect of Icons* (2008, Standard Bank Gallery, Johannesburg), Mason (2008:[sp]) expresses that her *oeuvre* is predicated upon a 'fundamental belief in the democracy of pain'. In contrast to the symbol of a dress, the artist tends to conjure pain through religious imagery and mythological creatures, such as the hyena. In fact, very little of her work deals with dress - *Goya's Hat* (c. 2010) and *Wardrobe* (2008) appear to be her only other two, somewhat veiled, references to clothing.

Although Sachs (cited by Mason 1999:[sp]) found the first painting too harsh, the second painting - which he commissioned in response to the exaggerated pain he experienced upon viewing the first - he thought was 'too soft … too kind … too reconciled'. Sachs and Mason decided that the two paintings together with the sculpture achieved the right balance of violence and reconciliation. The blue dress triptych hung in the Constitutional Court from 1995 until 2015 (Figure 4). The two paintings were positioned on a white wall one above the other. The painting depicting the row of braziers was positioned beneath them, while to the left of the top painting, the mixed-media sculpture of the blue dress was suspended in a plastic cylinder to preserve the flimsy plastic material from wear and tear. Because the triptych was created in response to a story that surfaced during the TRC hearings, this renders the dress more than an address to Ndwande, but a gesture of redress for the pain and humiliation she experienced at the hands of the security police.[3] Mason appears to perform an act of redress through the words inscribed upon the blue dress - she speaks to Ndwande through this inscription in a way that calls upon the cadre's

3. Douglas Ainslie (2016) traces the story of the blue dress and the plastic bags that Ndwande reportedly used to fashion a pair of panties for herself. Ainslie (2016:8) shows that, according to the original TRC report detailing the discovery of Ndwande's body, the plastic bags were not used by Ndwande as a pair of panties, but rather by her captors in an attempt to conceal her grave, after having shot her. An entire paper could be dedicated to the implications of debunking this element of the popular legend. Nonetheless, for the argument I construct here, the importance rests upon Mason creating a dress from plastic bags as a reference to the story she heard - Mason (2016) writes that when she created the dress she was only aware of the plastic pantie story. Therefore, for Mason the plastic bags arguably symbolised Ndwande's safeguarding of her dignity, and resistance to the inhumane torture inflicted upon her by the security police.

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Judith Mason, *The Man who Sang and the Woman who Kept Silent I*, 1998. Oil on canvas. 190 x 160 cm. Courtesy of Judith Mason Estate; Constitutional Court Art Collection; and Dramatic, Artistic & Literary Rights Organisation (DALRO).

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Judith Mason, *The Man who Sang and the Woman who Kept Silent II,* 1998. Sculpture (dress). 200 x 70 x 45 cm. Courtesy of Judith Mason Estate; Constitutional Court Art Collection; and Dramatic, Artistic & Literary Rights Organisation (DALRO).

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Judith Mason, *The Man who Sang and the Woman who Kept Silent III*, 1998. Oil on canvas. 166 x 122 cm. Courtesy of Judith Mason Estate; Constitutional Court Art Collection; and Dramatic, Artistic & Literary Rights Organisation (DALRO).

bravery, and in a tone so tinged with reverence and sorrow that Mason seems to be attempting to set straight the suffering that Ndwande experienced by addressing her as one would a hero:

> Sister, a plastic bag may not be the whole armour of God, but you were wrestling with flesh and blood, and against powers, against the rulers of darkness, against spiritual wickedness in sordid places. Your weapons were your silence and a piece of rubbish. Finding that bag and wearing it until you were disinterred is such a frugal, common-sensical, housewifey thing to do … Memorials to your courage are everywhere; they blow about in the streets and drift on the tide and cling to thorn-bushes. This dress is made from some of them. Hamba kahle. Umkhonto [sic].[4]

4. Upon whose part does Mason perform this act of redress? While I go on to discuss the manner in which the dress might act as redress for the artist's own lack of political engagement during apartheid, Mason seems, from a superficial reading of the inscription, to be speaking on behalf of history, and perhaps those who survived, or did not endure, history's brutality.

FIGURE **Nº 4**

Judith Mason, *The Man who Sang and the Woman who Kept Silent* (triptych), 1998. Constitutional Court, Johannesburg, South Africa. Courtesy of Judith Mason Estate; Constitutional Court Art Collection; and DALRO.

On the surface, Mason seems to be apologising to Ndwande for the "wickedness" to which she was subjected. She sees Ndwande's act of covering herself with a plastic bag as a 'house-wifey thing to do', which begins to explain the artist's decision to represent the cadre's story with a dress - and, following Russell's reasoning, the dress is an evocation of the mother, or in Mason's eyes, the housewife. However, the words "sister" and "*umkhonto*" [*sic*] suggest that a subtler form of redress is at play. "*uMkhonto*", meaning "spear" in isiXhosa, evokes one comrade's way of addressing another - so Mason is aligning herself with, and further adopting the identity of, a comrade. The ethics behind this specific term of address are questionable - Mason was a white female artist, not known to have been involved in acts of opposition to the apartheid government, or as a member of *uMkhonto we Sizwe*.[5] She, by her own admission, did not paint politicised images. While, particularly during the 1980s, Mason's white contemporaries - Paul Stopforth, Robert Hodgins, Penny Siopis, Sue Williamson and William Kentridge, to name a few - were creating art with an anti-apartheid message, Mason (1999:[sp]) states that she has always had

> a problem with political art in that I think that artists ought to perhaps pay their taxes or do other things that are more advantageously politically … [However] I've always had a great regard for heroic art that commemorates grand gestures. In these two stories I came upon, the two gestures were so grand. Two people are allowed — just because of other people's bad behaviour – to exhibit superhumanly beautiful, courageous behaviour, and that's what attracted me there.[6]

Although Mason evokes the dress as a grand gesture that stands somewhat aside from "political art", her address to Ndwande implies otherwise. Suddenly, an openly "a-political" artist adopts politicised terms of identification. To what extent is Mason addressing Ndwande or herself – that is to say, is the artist in fact trying to make amends for her own lack of political activism through the grand gesture of the blue dress? Less obvious than the dress as an expression of femininity are the levels on which it operates as an address, and a form of redress, by the artist to herself. Rather than being completely representative of Ndwande's story, the dress seems to be a medium through which Mason finds herself capable of identifying with Ndwande, a site that Mason can inhabit to negotiate her own pain. So, instead of trying to make amends for the pain Ndwande experienced at the hands of her captors, might Mason more pointedly be attempting to heal, or make right the guilt she feels for her own lack of resistance, though her art, to the apartheid government? Thus, what appears to be an empty dress is rather an interface through which Mason's a-political self, and imagined "comrade" self, surfaces and intersects with Ndwande's perceived role as mother, housewife, victim, and hero.[7] Seyla Benhabib's (cited by Coullie 2006:3) exploration of storytelling is pertinent in this regard: 'From the time of our birth we are immersed in a "web of narratives", of which we are both the author and the object. The self is both the teller of tales and that about whom tales are told'.

5. Translated from isiXhosa as "Spear of the nation", *uMkhonto we Sizwe* was the armed wing of the African National Congress (ANC).

6. As the title of the work suggests, Mason created the triptych in response to a story she heard about 'the execution of two liberation movement cadres by the security police – Phila Ndwande and Harold Sefola' (Constitutional Court Art Collection 2015: [sp]). However, the inscription on Mason's blue dress indicates that the work is addressed to Ndwande, much more so than being connected to the story of Sefola. I therefore focus on the story of the woman who kept silent, and the notion of the blue dress as an address to her.

7. Although I argue that the emptiness of Mason and Kimani's dresses is fertile ground for different individuals to inhabit, the idea of multiple selves surfacing and interacting through dress does not singularly relate to artworks of un-embodied dresses. Especially under the lens of dress as redress, one might extend this discussion to works by artists such as Mary Sibande, Zanele Muholi, Zamaxolo Dunywa, Nomusa Makhubu, Senzeni Marasela, Nandipha Mntambo and Yinka Shonibare to name a few.

Re-dressing the blue dress: Multiple meanings assigned to the artwork

Read together, Mason's, Sachs', Russell's and my understandings of the blue dress, and its different functions, reveal the web of narratives from which it is sewn.[8] This web of narratives might similarly be linked to redress, in the sense of the artwork being dressed and re-dressed with varying meanings. Mason's address, and act of redress – with specific reference to the inscription written upon the dress – is communicated with a tone similar to that which one might adopt to narrate a myth. In this regard, the artist arguably re-dresses Ndwande's story with her own disposition towards the mythological, towards a pre-occupation with the types of pain that recur throughout history.[9] The decision to create an un-embodied dress then further invokes the idea that Mason re-dresses this garment with the desire to be able to inhabit the same space as Ndwande, a comrade and anti-apartheid activist. Sachs (cited by Mason 1999:[sp]) then re-dresses the blue dress by positioning it as 'one of the great pieces of art in the world of the late 20th century' – clearly emphasising the mythological significance with which Mason imbues the work, and its function as a heroic gesture. Russell, on the other hand, critiques the dress itself for misrepresenting and manipulating Ndwande's identity to suit a story of the idealised woman. Yet, in both cases, Mason is regarded as the "teller of tales" and Ndwande as the person "about whom tales are told".

In contrast, I have thus far intimated that Mason, perhaps under the surface of telling another's tale, is in fact narrating her own. It would be superfluous to the aims of this article to trace the body of Mason's work, and the moments in which the artist seems to be using certain images or motifs to express her own story. However, it is worth noting that the blue dress is the only one to appear in the artist's *oeuvre*, and the only artwork that the artist would be able to physically embody. The blue dress could arguably have been worn by Mason, and Ndwande's resistance to the apartheid state – expressed directly through the plastic bags that she, according to the legend, used to cover herself – impressed upon the body of Mason herself.[10] Nonetheless, Mason's body is visibly absent from the dress – a factor that possibly indicates her non-existence in related acts of resistance to the apartheid government. Regarded in such a manner, Mason could be seen to simultaneously embed and evoke her own story of a desire to have resisted the violence of the apartheid state, coupled with a guilt for not having done so.

8. Kaiser and McCullough (2010:363) use a similar knot metaphor, however they do so to 'describe the entanglements of fashion' – in other words the focus is on fashion rather than dress as a site of knottedness. By aligning the knot metaphor more closely with Benhabib's (cited by Coullie *et al.* 2006:3) 'web of narratives', I focus on personal narrative and the selves that surface through the gesture of a dress.

9. Jacob Dlamini (2014:225-228) develops the idea of mythology in relation to Mason's blue dress. His comment, 'Ndwande did not die in silence' (Dlamini 2014:227), exposes the mythology of silence that has been constructed around the blue dress by critics and artists, and through titles such as *The Woman who Kept Silent*. On the other hand, Stephanie Marlin-Curiel (2005:54) notes that, 'Mason's art, however, is not silent. She fills the void with the words of others, displacing testimonies of the perpetrators as the only living memorial'. Marlin-Curiel's (2005:56) analysis creates a kind of bridge between Russell's, Dlamini's and mine, as she examines 'the imagined bond of feminism and mythological sisterhood' through which Mason identifies with Ndwande.

10. What would happen, on the other hand, if, hypothetically, Ndwande were to wear the dress? Here, Dlamini's observations might form the basis of an interesting analysis – Ndwande, a woman who did not in fact keep silent, would come into conflict with the mythologised "silent" version of herself. Dlamini (2014:227) explains: 'when Ndwande was interrogated she gave the police new information about MK operations and confirmed details already known to the police'. He argues that Ndwande 'responded to her torture in the best way she could, telling her captors some of what they needed to know. But she would not, did not, take that final step and become a traitor' (Dlamini 2014:228). Would imagining Ndwande into the dress, in this light, perhaps allow her voice to be heard louder than those of the commentators who have spoken through her story?

FIGURE **Nº 5**

Wanja Kimani, *You Have Not Changed*, 2012. Installation. Dak'Art Biennale, Dakar, Senegal. Courtesy of the artist.

A web of narratives

I extend and refine the idea of a dress as a 'web of narratives' by looking at Kimani's series *You Have Not Changed* (Figures 5-8), which shares structural and visual similarities with Mason's. In a series of three artworks, one specific dress is repeated. The first two artworks (Figures 5, 6) were displayed at the Dak'Art Biennale in 2012 and the last (Figures 7, 8) in 2014, in the Arthouse Window, a Wits School of Arts exhibition space, situated at the University, and visible from Jorissen Street, Braamfontein, Johannesburg. The dress is made of duckling-egg yellow material, accentuated and embellished with a top layer of embroidered lace (Figures 5). It is dainty and petite, reminding the viewer of a dress that a young girl might wear to her first holy communion. Like Mason's dress, it hangs without a body to fill it, suspended from a washing line. Where Mason inscribes an address to Ndwande at the bottom of her dress, onto the front of her own dress, Kimani embroiders the following words that are both snippets from, and a response to a conversation with her father: 'you have not changed, a father is there to give his children what he has, don't forget me, don't neglect me'.

In the first instance, the embroidered words render Kimani's dress an address to her father. The dress is a way for Kimani to evoke herself in relation to the image of an eight-year-old girl beyond which her father cannot see. Through an installation of a dress that she wore the last time they saw one another, Kimani invokes her father's memories of her as a girl in Kenya, before she moved to the United Kingdom, and later Ethiopia, and the two became estranged. The eight-year-old's dress, together with the embroidered address, sees her adult self occupy the same space as, and stand in conflict with, the childhood self onto which her father hangs. Her words "don't forget me, don't neglect me" are charged with poignancy – they underscore the wound inflicted by her father's absence and by the callousness of his statement that, after over 16 years of separation, she has not changed. Kimani (2012:[sp]) writes that the dress, as an artwork, negotiates 'the vulnerability of remembrance and longing for intimacy' with her father.

The second artwork (Figure 6) in the series is a performance during which viewers were encouraged to interact with the absence of the dress on the washing line – the dress was stolen shortly after the opening of the Dak'Art Biennale. Participants hung clothing items on the line, each with tags to indicate initial ownership. The title of the second artwork in the series, *You Have Changed,* with the notable omission of the word "not", indicates the artist invoking the dress, or the absence thereof, as a way to redress, and set straight the singularising effect of her father's words "you have not changed".

A photograph from the performance (Figure 6) shows three notes attached to the washing line, the one to the far right is an address typed by Kimani to the "Dear Person who has my dress". Juliet Moss (2012:24) explains that in this letter, Kimani asks the person to either return the dress 'with no questions asked', or to send her a photograph of the girl who now wears the dress. Moss (2012:24) argues that,

> as a place of reflection, the interaction emphasized our collective human need to move on, each participant bringing with them past experiences of loss, suffering, and healing. The intervention altered her memory of the event itself and soothed the pain of her loss.

> "You Have Not Changed" transcends boundaries to an experience common across cultures. Questioning the validity of memory in identity formation, her work reminds us that recollections are ephemeral, taking on false readings and interpretations over time. In addition, the fact that her work "changed" due to the disappearance of the piece itself cements this notion even further.

The absence of the dress in *You Have Changed* (Figure 6) offers Kimani a way to address her father's static memory of her, and to redress this grievance, or seek

healing for it. Moss demonstrates that the intervention refined this search for closure because the absence of the dress, in changing the original nature of the work, signifies a growth that Kimani's father refused to recognise. During the conference, *Sounds of Change* (2014), I listened to Kimani (2014:[sp]) reflect on how the ephemerality of the dress addresses the idea of time and displacement and the fragility of memory, particular to her experience as an artist of the African diaspora. Raimi Gbadamosi (2014:6) contextualises this idea by explaining that for those who form part of the African diaspora, home is a complex, slippery notion as it can be both an intangible recollection of memories, as well as a tangible place of return.

Earlier in this article I claimed to adopt a personalised approach to analysing dress and the stories it surfaces, instead of understanding it in terms of the macro-political identities it might evoke. Associating the ephemerality of the dress to Kimani's experience of the African diaspora might therefore seem contradictory to this claim. However, a brief extension of the term "address", as it links to Kimani's work, and to the idea of re-addressing, nuances this exploration of the diaspora in relation to the artist's self. There is another meaning of address, to which I have alluded through words such as site, location and home – that is the metaphor of "an address" as a place in which one stays, a home address, an abode, a place of "indwelling", or of belonging. The different places in which the series has been exhibited carry connotations that such an "address" might bear. The Dak'Art Biennale, for example, has an "address" and in that "home" one might expect certain types of "homeliness" and "belonging", where artists are perhaps residents, and viewers are seen as guests, or visitors welcomed into that home. When the third artwork in the series was exhibited in Johannesburg, a new address, or home, came to be associated with the work, and thus it was re-addressed. In a similar way to how redress can link to redressing in meaning, the relocation of Kimani's artworks has the potential to resonate with re-addressing place, space, belonging, and so on. When viewed with careful scrutiny beneath the lens of the term address, Kimani's dress starts to evoke experiences of the re-addressing of home that comes with the diaspora.

Complex iterations and collective experiences

Hence, the dress itself is not seen as a direct signifier of cultural identity or nationhood. Rather, it is treated as a medium through which the artist articulates different ideas of herself. These ideas, in conjunction with the contexts in which the dress has been displayed, resonate with sentiments that relate to the collective experiences of artists of the African diaspora. I expose this diaspora-dialectic in terms of the memories and events with which Kimani charges the dress, instead of looking at a particular item of

FIGURE **Nº 6**

Wanja Kimani, *You Have Changed*, 2012. Performance. Dak'Art Biennale, Dakar, Senegal. Courtesy of the artist.

clothing, as do Kaiser and McCullough (2010:363), who, referring to a suit from Michelle Obama's wardrobe, show how it 'intersects with the discursive journeys of the diaspora'. A personal-narrative approach to Kimani's dress responds to Okwui Enwezor's (1997) problematisation of the position placed on artists of the African diaspora in the international art market. Given the varied experiences of these artists, he argues for a complication of the diasporic art category and suggests that singular studies of their practice should be conducted. He posits that, 'the quest then, calls for an open-ended investigation of each artist, since their vision of the world is simply not reducible to the meagre insights that hierarchisation and categories allow' (Enwezor 1997:253).

Particularly relevant to a discussion of diaspora, displacement and the fluidity of identity, is Kimani's artwork entitled You Have Changed II (Figures 7, 8), which was exhibited for one day in the Arthouse Window.[11] A photograph of the original installation (the dress hanging on the washing line) is printed onto transparent vinyl plastic, and adhered to the centre of the window (Figure 7). Kimani's dress is both present and absent – while the photograph suggests its presence, the transparent medium evokes

11. At the *Sounds of Change* conference, Kimani and I spoke to each other about our individual explorations of ways to negotiate our identities in relation to the idea of "being African". We subsequently engaged in an email correspondence, the result of which was the decision for Kimani to create a third work in the series. In my facilitation of the display on the Arthouse Window in Johannesburg, with neither the artist nor the original artwork present, *You Have Changed II* made concrete the previous two artworks' resonance with displacement and with the slipperiness of identity.

its transience. The third artwork in the series is a lens and a mirror; although it allows the viewer to look through it and at that which appears behind it, the window on which it rests reflects the buildings and traffic on the street in front of it. The accompanying wall text evokes the journey of the dress in the series:

> I've seen this as a new piece because I have worked with alternative modes of display in my practice ... including spoken word walks and performances with individuals. I wouldn't want my work to be confined to specific places in the same way that I wouldn't want myself to be placed in one place (Kimani & Williams 2014:2). [12]

The title of the work prompts the memory of the original dress, whilst referencing its growth and change as it is (re)re-imagined in another context. Perhaps this context forms part of what Homi K Bhabha (1988:21) calls those intervening spaces of 'cultures in between'. As Bhabha evokes the fluidity of identity, so too is the transience of Kimani's original work evident, as it is activated in new contexts via altered iterations of its earliest form (Kimani & Williams 2014:2).

Two years after the Dak'Art biennale, *You Have Not Changed* is exhibited in a new African context, resonating with the constant relocation of home and renegotiation of identity that Kimani has experienced. Yet Kimani embraces the idea that her work, like her identity, is always in flux. A photograph (Figure 8) of the final work in the series visually activates what I mean by dress as a site of multiple selves in Mason's and Kimani's work. In the photograph, I stand behind the Arthouse Window, with the transparent photograph directly in front of me, so that it looks as if I am wearing Kimani's dress. Kimani (2014) describes the photograph as adding 'yet another layer …' to the series, and to the symbolic potency of the dress. Despite the different backgrounds from which Kimani and I come, I associate with her quest to negotiate her identity in relation to the idea of Africa as home. Gbadamosi (2014:18) captures this sense of commonality, suggesting that although it is important to recognise varying and conflicting interpretations of an "African" identity, it is also 'worth celebrating the idea of family' in order to grow. There is a powerful agency in the way that Kimani's focused engagement with a childhood dress, its disappearance and imagined re-appearance, speaks to the complex experiences that emanate from the African continent.[13]

As with Mason's un-embodied blue dress, Kimani's dress in *You Have Changed II,* as a transparent medium behind which an individual can figuratively "embody", speaks to the many meanings with which the dress can be dressed, and redressed. "Wearing" the dress, as I do in Figure 8, thus points towards two key details around which this article is structured: Firstly, dress acts as an interface through which the artist, and viewer may explore their ideas of self. Secondly, these ideas of self can be seen as the re-dressing of diverse meanings onto the artwork, and by extension, the dress.

12. Both Kimani and I authored the wall text because of the role I played in actualising the display of the artwork on the Arthouse Window.

13. Yinka Shonibare, whose work deals directly with the diaspora, would be an interesting artist to introduce to this discussion. His sculptures often display headless mannequins, clothed in outfits created from Dutch wax printed cotton textile. He explores the macro-political issues of race and class through works in which Dutch wax print, an ironically "African" textile, is central (Shonibare 2017:[sp]). In sculptures like *Mrs Pinckney and the Emancipated Birds of South Carolina* (2017), to what extent could one draw out the personal identities that surface in the work? Would a reading of Shonibare's sculpture through the lens of address and redress nuance and refresh the ways Shonibare's work is described and related to the African diaspora?

FIGURE **Nº 7**

Wanja Kimani, *You Have Changed II*, 2014. Photograph on transparent vinyl plastic. Arthouse Window, Jorissen Street, Johannesburg, South Africa. Courtesy of Kent Williams.

FIGURE **Nº 8**

Wanja Kimani, *You Have Changed II*, 2014. Photograph of the author standing behind *You Have Changed II* Arthouse Window, Jorissen Street, Johannesburg, South Africa. Courtesy of Kent Williams.

Conclusion

The analysis of Kimani's series helps to clarify the claims I make with respect to Mason's dress. I have adopted an approach to dress that focuses not on the nature of the identity that it might express, but on the multiple identities that surface, interact, and become knotted with it. Whereas Russell (2006:194) argues that Mason's blue dress is 'an empty symbol, silently waiting' to be filled by those who interpret it, the final photograph I discuss in relation to Kimani's *You Have Not Changed* series, complicates this critique – I reveal the "empty dress" motif as an interface where the identities of artist, subject and viewer intertwine. Embedded in this approach is how I unravel dress as a form of address and redress. I look at the strategies adopted by Mason and Kimani to activate the dress in each of their artworks as an address to certain individuals. The act of address then becomes a means to redress personal sufferings. By focusing on the individual nature of each artist's address, I offer a renewed understanding of dress, and show that there is a way to look at it beyond an expression of collective gender or cultural identities, and rather as a site of tension where a range of selves surface.[14]

14. This approach has further implications for renewed ways in which to understand dress as it appears in the work of artists thought mainly to deal with the macro-political – from Mary Sibande, to Yinka Shonibare, Nandipha Mntambo and beyond.

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The collector's asylum: The politics of disposability in the work of Julia Rosa Clark

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ABSTRACT

The South African artist Julia Rosa Clark's (2015) collage-based practice is driven by what she terms 'traditions of improvised practice' — haruspex or soothsaying for example — that enable the practitioner to conceptualise new connections between past and present. Tracing these traditions across Clark's *oeuvre* in this article, I compare them with the German philosopher Walter Benjamin's (2006) philosophy of history. Benjamin's commitment to the destruction of tradition unearths a politics within Clark's practice, just as her work opens avenues to consider Benjamin's work as haunted by colonialism. I conclude the discussion by considering the implication of colonialism's haunting for Clark's post-apartheid practice.

Keywords: Julia Rosa Clark, archive, post-apartheid, Walter Benjamin, psychoanalysis, Dada, haunting.

> A philosophy that does not include the possibility of soothsaying from coffee-grounds and cannot explicate it cannot be a true philosophy. Walter Benjamin as told to Gerschom Scholem (1981:59).

In the wake of radio and cinema's emergence as dominant forms of mass culture, the German philosopher Walter Benjamin's (2002b) oft-cited essay, "The work of art in the age of its technological reproducibility" emphasises technology's liberating capacity. Cinema and radio make 'simultaneous collective reception' possible, creating a new social spectatorship that breaks from the tradition, uniqueness, and originality — what Benjamin (2002b:103-106, 116) terms 'aura'— that had previously severed art's relation to politics. Art in an age of reproducibility, Benjamin (2002b:118-119) continues, 'create[s] a demand whose hour of full satisfaction has not yet come'; a revolutionary potential

exemplified in Dada's reconfiguration of the refuse of everyday life that jolts the viewer into outrage and political consciousness. Benjamin locates Dada's tactile engagement with modernity in Charles Baudelaire's poetry, yoking the poet to the *chiffonier* or ragpicker. The poet and impoverished scavenger alike sift through society's refuse, cataloguing and collecting the 'capharnaum of waste' (Benjamin 2003a:48). Baudelaire's urban experience is innervated by the sheer accumulation of excess; further considered through the imaginative capacities of the child at play. Benjamin (2006:156) comments on his own childhood collections:

> To renew the old — in such a way that I myself, the newcomer, would make what was old my own — was the task of the collection that filled my drawer. Every stone I discovered, every flower I picked, every butterfly I captured was for me the beginning of a collection, and, in my eyes, all that I owned made for one unique collection. "Tidying up" would have meant demolishing an edifice full of prickly chestnuts that were spiked cudgels, tinfoil that was a hoard of silver, building blocks that were coffins, cactuses that were totem poles, and copper pennies that were shields.

The Dadaist, poet, *chiffonier*, and child collect, simultaneously protecting and reinventing the narratives of the waste they encounter. The experience of collecting slows modernity's rapid economic turnover, allowing for the object's past and present to exist simultaneously. Collecting reframes history, exemplifying Benjamin's (2003b:396) belief that the object is a constellation whose past serves as a code to understand the present. Benjamin sees the constellation as characteristic of a 'messianic' philosophy of history that resists the triumphalist narratives of progress and newness. Instead of the unbridled belief in society's advance, a 'historical materialism' retains revolutionary potential through the image of past struggles, whose memory, like the practice of soothsaying, holds the possibility for a radical change in the future (Benjamin 2003b:394-396).

This philosophy of history places the object at its core. Benjamin's "messianism" can be understood through his interest in the Kabbalist narrative of the Tikkun — a sacred, but broken vessel whose future restoration creates a new harmony in the world — that Benjamin transposes from the religious to the secular in anticipation of the redemption of the working class (Buck-Morss 1989:235-237). Redemption makes the vessel whole, but its reparation recreates the urn differently from its original form. Dada's reframing of the fragments of modern life provides one example of how the Kabbalist concept moves into Benjamin's historical materialism. Delving into the past, Benjamin further exemplifies his philosophy through a number of ancient traditions whose interpretive strategies are borne from waste. As the epigraph to this essay suggests, the counter-intuitive strategies of soothsaying through coffee grounds, equally at work in Kabbalism, forces one to reconceive one's relationship to the world (Scholem 1981:59). Soothsaying's counter-intuitive interpretations and collecting equally define the South African artist Julia Rosa

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Julia Rosa Clark, *but there is a storm blowing from paradise*, 2016. 6-colour screen print on archival 75% cotton paper (205gsm Zerkall) with collage 'objects' printed on archival deep black paper, 56 x 76 cm. Courtesy of artist and 50ty/50ty prints.

Clark's (b. 1975) practice. Clark's obsessive collecting enters her art-making through an amassed horde of junk: cut-outs from magazines, advertisements and product packaging; scraps of tulle fabric and discarded clothing; old board games; stickers; stock film footage; and many other objects populate her collage-based practice. Like Benjamin, turning to the outmoded to analyse the rapidity of change in modernity, Clark's (2015) obsessive reworking of the disposable scraps allows her to understand the self in an age of 'information overload'. The frenzied excess of waste and repurposed treasure bursts from the surface of her print entitled *but there is a storm blowing from paradise* (2016) (Figure 1).

In this work, Clark silkscreens varying shades of turquoise silhouettes including heads, ballerinas, HIV/AIDS ribbons and biomorphic abstractions onto the surface of white sheets of paper. These silhouetted forms become a substrate for Clark to fastidiously fix hand-cut silkscreened images — whose illustrations evoke outmoded school primers — and pieces of tulle. The silkscreened reproductions of illustrations: jewels — a leitmotif in Clark's work and a homonym of her nickname 'Jules' — banded stacks of currency, femur bones, pills and the palms of hands are affixed to the surface of the page with plastic pins used to attach price tags to clothing, which emphasise the work's relationship to commodification.[1]

[B]ut there is a storm, as a silkscreen, is infinitely reproducible — diminishing the aura of the work — and yet its tactile quality, hand-cut and laborious, brings the viewer close to the materiality of the objects Clark depicts. This move between Clark's personal collection and the mass-produced nature of the work reinforces the formal explorations of what Clark (2015) calls 'traditions of improvised practice'; a diverse set of techniques guided by off-the-cuff spontaneity including MacGyver's hastily made gizmos, or the interpretive work of scatology, haruspex, reading tealeaves, or scattered bones. Each practice assists people in decision-making; a correct coin-toss confirms the choice and likewise an incorrect one re-affirms the subject by doubting the veracity of the 'tradition' (Clark 2015). These traditions rework the detritus of the past in the present; they function, according to Clark (2015), as 'tools to help us feel the present, not to see the future'.

Clark's 'traditions' — guiding principles for seeing the self within the material conditions of the present — appear throughout Benjamin's fragmented *oeuvre*. Benjamin's interest in haruspex is but one example of an overlap with Clark's traditions. Additionally, Benjamin (1996:206) turns to divination and physiognomy whose interpretation 'striv[es] for analytic complexity', freeing character from the fixity of fate, reading entrails and astrology as primal examples of the mimesis of written word (Benjamin 1999e:722), the clearing away of tradition, the passing down of social situations the oracle inspires in "The destructive character" (Benjamin 1999b:542), as well as photography as a 'descendent of the augurs and haruspices — to reveal guilt and to point out the guilty in the pictures'

1. Benjamin (1999a:181) describes the price tag's attachment to the garment as the moment when an object's material history gives way to a '"ghostly objectivity" and leads a life of its own'.

(Benjamin 1999d:527). In each instance, Benjamin's reading of law, tradition, and the auratic condition of inheritance are shed, reconstituting the relationship between past and present.

Clark's traditions, marshalled by Benjamin to read 'history against the grain' (2003b:392), lead me back to *but there is a storm* where Clark takes the print's title from Benjamin's (1940) last completed essay "On the concept of history". Characteristic of Benjamin's use of appropriation in *The arcades project* (1999a [1940]), and his belief in montage, Clark references Benjamin's title via a lyric in Laurie Anderson's song *The dream before* (1989), who evokes Benjamin's (2003b:392) famous metaphor of the 'angel of history'. The angel of history is a figure tasked with the burden of making a destroyed past whole again, and while witnessing such wreckage, is unable to repair it; the angel is hurtled forward by the ideologies of progress. The angel's task thus mirrors Clark's desire to 'feel the present' through a reworking of tradition, by unearthing the hidden meanings in the object. Discovering these hidden meanings, Benjamin (2003b:390) sees the angel's work as redemptive; it results in mankind being 'granted the fullness of the past'.

The reparation of wreckage, equally evocative of the *Tikkun*, understands the present in relationship to its past, further binding Clark's work to Benjamin's. These interpretive traditions, including soothsaying, understood in the practices of the collector, unearth a complex narrative of colonial haunting in their work. Drawing from Latin American studies scholar John Kraniauskas's (1994:151) description of Benjamin's work having a colonial 'unconscious' that discloses the simultaneous presence of psychoanalytic theories of the dream and an underdeveloped examination of imperialism, Clark's (1999a:9) traditions expose the colonial implications of consumption Benjamin examines in Europe. Moreover, as Benjamin (2002b:104) describes collecting as 'the asylum of art' — an act of protection against the disposability of the outmoded — his metaphors for collecting lend themselves to the complexities of post-colonial nationalism that Clark explores in her work. Given the importance of psychoanalysis to Benjamin's anthropologies of modernity, and the "asylum" that motivates collecting, I conclude by turning to the psychoanalytic study of the Lithuanian-born, South African, Wulf Sachs's *Black Hamlet* (1937). Sachs's study of a tribal healer — whose own practice employs many of the same techniques that drive Clark's work — merges the analyst and tribal healer's practice, thus bringing traditional knowledge to bear on the scientific progress of modernity. Significantly for my reading, these interactions often take place within the asylum and engage the complexities of national identity; where Clark's improvisation understood through Benjamin's philosophy of history reframes questions around the determinism of progress, critically motivated by a haunting found in the asylum and phantasmagoria of the Parisian alike. Given the fragmented condition of Benjamin's

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Julia Rosa Clark *Flying and falling,* 2015. Installation, whatiftheworld Gallery, Cape Town. Courtesy of the artist and whatiftheworld gallery.

writings, which often proceed in short aphorisms, or as in *The arcades project* (1999a), collected fragments whose meaning is elicited via montage, and Clark's use of collecting and dispersal as an underpinning motif throughout her numerous installation-centred exhibitions, my reading necessarily moves through a number of works in both Benjamin's and Clarke's *oeuvres* to develop the themes of collecting and imperialism in particular.

Collecting and destruction

Collecting, Benjamin (2002b) argues, is an act of recreation. Exemplifying this in a reading of the German historian Eduard Fuchs's collections of caricature, erotica and genre painting, Benjamin (2002b:268) contends that Fuchs's collections are guided by a personal interest whose meanings are derived from the desire of the collector and the juxtapositions between objects in the collection. Significantly, Fuchs's work as a collector happens outside the rigid hierarchies of academic disciplines, and as such, breaks with tradition and unearths a new materialist history of art (Benjamin 2002b:261). Like the messy hordes of Benjamin's childhood, the collector continually reinvents the

object's meaning through perpetual contact with the ever-changing collection (Benjamin 1999a:461). The non-hierarchal display of collecting equally guided Clark's work on her installation *Flying and falling* (2015, whatiftheworld, Cape Town) (Figure 2) where she dispersed ephemera, at random and 'without premeditation', until reaching a feeling of satisfaction, exemplifying her 'traditions of improvised practice' (Clark 2015).

In the installation, one finds sewn garlands of ivy whose leaves are formed from outdated atlases, hordes of advertisements for cosmetics and cuts of meat dangling from t-pins on bright pink tulle fabric, and hand painted cut-outs of paper appearing as rock sediment that mottle the gallery space. The experience of the installation moves between the gigantic proportions of the room and the intimate details of each object placed on display. Just as *Flying and falling* shifts between scales of gigantic and intimate, overwhelming and exiting, the installation points to the malleability of meaning evoked in the juxtapositions found in a collection. For example, Clark's strands of ivy are cut from the pages of old atlases, whose information is rendered useless in the age of Google maps and GIS imaging. However, the maps, in their outmoded condition, point to the complexities of mapping and naming space at work in both colonising and decolonising space.[2] Like Benjamin's reading of Fuchs, Clark's reworking happens through the display of the collection, changing the context of these maps away from the official registers of the archive or library, into natural outgrowths that colonise the gallery walls. Working without the logic of an academic discourse — biology, geology, or geography for example — Clark removes the object's utility for these fields, pointing to the possibility of contemplating how these discourses frame the natural world represented on the maps. To collect means not only to preserve the histories of these systems, again disposable in the age of satellite mapping, but also reframes their relevance to the present.

Clark archives a different set of disposable images, namely protest signs documenting decolonial activism in South Africa and the United States (US), in a series of ten watercolour and collage works entitled *Figure & ground exercises (Möbius strip, or how can a continuum have two sides?)* (2015) (Figure 3). Here, using a number of watercolour splotches, many of them similar to the bedrock collages in *Flying and falling*, Clark pastes slogans — whose letters are cut from photographs of black models Clark purposed from old magazines — taken from images of protest signs left behind at Black Lives Matter and Fees/Rhodes Must Fall protests.[3]

Instead of the image of the protests, Clark working with refuse that remains after the protest's end suggests the ability of police or government to disperse the protestors, consigning their demands to the past. And yet, with many of the protestor's demands

2. For an excellent history on colonial mapping in India, see Ian Barrow (2003); Margaret Cartwright and Elri Liebenberg (2003) give an introduction on the history of surveying in South Africa.

3. Black Lives Matter was founded in 2012 in response to the killing of an unarmed African American, Trayvon Martin, by a neighborhood watch volunteer named George Zimmerman. The movement addresses systemic racism in the US, including the deaths of many African Americans by the police. Rhodes Must Fall began in 2015 as a student movement, to decolonise education in South African universities, originally directed against the removal of a statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town. More broadly, the movement, which is ongoing, is working for equal access to university and for greater diversity in its faculty and students.

FIGURE **Nº 3a**

Julia Rosa Clark, *Figure & ground exercises (Möbius strip, or how can a continuum have two sides?) Placards 1-5*, 2015. Found texts, collage, watercolour and gouache on paper. 59 x 41.5 cm (each). Courtesy of the artist and whatiftheworld gallery.

she quotes on the placards such as: 'where is the better life promised to us' — challenging progress — or 'we shall overcome' — evoking the 1960's Civil Rights movements in the US, Clark's collecting unearths their persistence in the present. The protest posters are haunted with the demands of the past. Likewise, Clark's use of black skin cut from advertisements, evokes the images of progress rendered through the access to disposable capital that might wash over such strife, such as the dream of middle-class affluence, but equally so, the relationship such demands talk to the inequalities of capitalism. The narrative of disposability wrought by Clark's work follows the post-colonial scholar Ranjana Khanna's (2008:184-185) definition of disposability: a simultaneous condition of disposable wealth — disposable plates or nappies — and the disposability of people through governmental and industrial machineries of violence. By showing disposability

FIGURE **Nº 3b**

Julia Rosa Clark, *Figure & ground exercises (Möbius strip, or how can a continuum have two sides?) Placards 6-10*, 2015. Found texts, collage, watercolour and gouache on paper. 59 x 41.5 cm (each). Courtesy of the artist and whatiftheworld gallery.

as a two-fold function of the erasure of the protestor and their historical condition as a disposable labour force in South African history, the bedrock Clark paints in the series becomes a surface to be exploded, much like the narratives of progress that would consign the political demands of the slogans to the past.

The capacity of collecting in Clark's practice is borne from the valueless and disposable — an inventiveness Benjamin also celebrates in Picasso's stereometry, Klee's interiority, Brecht's *v-effekt*, Loos's rejection of ornament, and above all, Mickey Mouse's improvisation. The inventiveness of these modernist tactics, Benjamin (1999c:731-736) argues, rises from the blank slate left by the ruination of the First World War and the mass inflation of the Great Depression. These artists, congruent in the a belief in a

vanguard narrative of modernity and radical rupture, communicate 'in a completely new language … arbitrary, constructed nature, in contrast to organic language', shaking off the shackles of tradition and seek to speak from the poverty of everyday life (Benjamin 1999c:733-734). Within the radical reworking of the rubble of modern life in Benjamin's essay, the Marxist philosopher Esther Leslie (2013) notes the curious absence of the Dadaist Kurt Schwitters. In his collage-based practice, Schwitters continually reworks capitalist excess; his *Merz* practice – associated with the German *Kommerz*, or commerce – comprises obsessive collecting, and, as in Clark's practice, re-arranging such refuse into works of art. Schwitters's *Merz* practice reaches its apotheosis in his construction of *Merzbau* (1937), where the whole of the artist's Hannover home is transformed into an artwork. Schwitters's reworking of the home, affixing junk to the structure's interior, is both the asylum in the sense of preserving his hordes of collected junk and symbolic of Schwitters's experience of exile: the original *Merzbau* was destroyed in 1943, and the artist constructed new versions in Norway and then Britain while fleeing the Nazis (Cooke 2013).[4] Within this pile of wreckage, Schwitters's work both exemplifies the protective and transformative condition of the collector's asylum; as Leslie (2013:424) describes *Merzbau*, it is 'a ghost to itself … overwritten with a new context'. Thus it is unsurprising, given Marx's comments on the spectrality of capitalism, that asylum addresses such haunting, by 'divest[ing] things of their commodity character' (Benjamin 1999a:10).[5]

Schwitters's reworking, an asylum, preserves the objects' fore-histories, taking them out of economic circulation, and placing them in new contexts. Clark potentiates a similar experience in *Flying and falling*; dwelling with the objects in her installation becomes a contemplative strategy of reinterpreting agency through 'traditions of improvised practice'.[6] In this shuttling between the present experience of the object and the histories of its reception – what Benjamin describes as the object's demand on the present – the past haunts the present. Haunting, as in Schwitters's reworked hordes of waste, calls attention to Benjamin's use of phantasmagoria to explain the uncanny, spectral conditions of the commodity found in the arcades, but also in the histories of universal exhibitions, including the 1851 Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace where Europeans were rapidly coming into contact with imported goods from its colonies.[7] Later, Khanna (2003:261-263) turns to haunting as a form of melancholia, potentiating a post-colonial, nationalist critical agency in her reading of Sachs's *Black Hamlet* (1937), returning to psychoanalysis as method for confronting the residues of imperialism that continue to condition the present.[8] Despite Benjamin's use of the phantasmagoria to explain the commodity's spectral qualities, his critiques of capitalism do not extend fully to the fantasies generated by imperial goods appearing in Europe's markets, leaving imperialism a complex blind spot within his work.

4. For detailed information on *Merzbau*, see Elizabeth Gamard (2000).

5. Karl Marx (1974:128) describes commodities as having 'a phantom-like objectivity'.

6. Dwelling's relationship to thinking is a central component to Martin Heidegger's essay "Building, dwelling, thinking" (1971). On Dada practice in South Africa, see Roger van Wyk and Kathryn Smith (2016).

7. On imperialism, consumerism and gender see Anne McClintock (1995). Margaret Cohen (1989) examines Benjamin's interest in the phantasmagoria as a form of dialectical critique of European enlightenment narratives of progress. She explains phantasmagoria's conceptual roots in Benjamin's psychoanalytically inflected use of the collective dream; she argues that Benjamin turns to the phantasmagoria to evoke the reifying force of the commodity more clearly.

8. Khanna (2003:ix) mentions a further overlap between the "dark continent" as Freud's metaphor for female sexuality and Henry Morton Stanley's metaphor for Africa. Stanley's use of the metaphor helps extend the metaphor of haunting as a shadow in the European enlightened discourses of progress Benjamin that critiques throughout his work. In this way, one can see imperialism as a further form of haunting in European modernity.

Visualising colonial excess

Montage, which lies at the core of Dadaist collage, and influential in both Clark's and Benjamin's work, re-appears as a rhetorical strategy to explore modern life in both the *Arcades project* and *One-way street* (1928). In both texts, investigations into modernity allude to imperialism, and yet leave its conditions under-developed. Throughout *One-way street* Benjamin writes aphoristically to explore the spatial transformations of modern life: the interior explodes into a gigantic scale, and exterior worlds miniaturise into a toy set. In several entries, Benjamin makes reference to contact with non-European nations coloured by the politics of colonialism. Kraniauskas's (1994) reading of Benjamin's "colonial unconscious" examines one entry entitled "Mexican embassy", where Benjamin (2016:29), inspired by Baudelaire, recounts a dream in which he is on an expedition that encounters an ancient religious sect whose mass culminated in a wooden bust shaking its head in denial at a Mexican fetish. Kraniauskas emphasises the dream-like nature of Benjamin's entry as informed by psychoanalysis and Surrealism, and yet its reference to mythology emerges from the consumer culture of European markets. The entry is coloured by capitalist consumption, and thus has its origins in Europe; it begins with an epigraph from Baudelaire where the fetish is witnessed, presumably in a market, among many other idols exotic to France (Kraniauskas 1994:146, 150). The market place as a zone of contact with imperialism emerges again in the *Arcades project*, where Benjamin emphasises how such goods are reduced to mere style and drained of their histories at world exhibitions. His observations lead Caitlin Vandertop (2016:718) to contend that Benjamin 'responds both to the rise of fascism in Europe, and attendant geopolitical events elsewhere, including the colonial war in Ethiopia'.

By citing the presence of imperialism filtered through commodities, and yet placing the idol's origin in a mythic geography and time, the problems in "Mexican embassy" echo Theodor Adorno's (2007:118) famous critique of the *Arcades project* exposé of 1935, in which he urges his colleague to consider the 'categories of world trade and imperialism … the arcade as a bazaar … antique shops as world-trade markets', and insisting that Benjamin's approach would 'unearth' this material from the 'refuse, remnants, [and] debris' of nineteenth century Paris. Adorno's critique, along with his own close reading of "Mexican embassy", leads Kraniauskas (1994:151) to conclude that colonialism remains 'unconscious' within Benjamin's work.

Kraniauskas's reference calls to mind psychoanalysis, whose analytic work to understand the ego is similar to Clark's insistence that 'traditions of improvised practice' elicit an understanding of the self. Benjamin's interest in psychoanalysis and Surrealism that guide his anthropological studies of the rapid transformations of modernity, Kraniauskas (1994:149-

FIGURE **Nº 4**

Julia Rosa Clark, *Exchange/Gift/Theft*, 2012. Found objects, paper, paint. Dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist and whatiftheworld gallery.

150) argues, link to his larger project of historical awakening, and Clark's traditions of improvisation – understood as a critical history – offer a similar potential to unearth the histories of imperial trade.[9] Clark addresses colonial appropriation and claiming in her 2012 exhibition entitled *Booty* (whatiftheworld, Cape Town). Its central component, an installation entitled *Exchange/Gift/Theft*, features a bounty of trinkets ornamented with her painted jewel-like appliques arranged atop a cheap plaid blanket and strip woven cloth.

In *Booty*, Clark's exploration of exchange and consumption evinces the economic systems of appropriation and circulation in Benjamin's reading of Paris where exotic goods, including woven bowls, looms, jewellery, fruit, and the jewel-like forms are displayed. Clark emphasises their relevance to imperial appropriation in her notebooks for the exhibition, where images of indigenous peoples in North America and European colonisers meeting, roadside salesmen, etchings of London's Crystal Palace, Picasso collages, Orientalist paintings, and hordes of gold coins represent colonialism's place within systems of disposable wealth and modernist creativity.[10] The centrality of Orientalist consumption is further alluded to in *Voyages into the night (the orientalist)* (2012), where Clark layers cut-out images of Persian rugs from an exhibition or shop catalogue – their

9. Andrew Benjamin (2013) compares psychoanalysis with Benjamin's relationship between present and a future to come.

10. For details on Clark's source material used in *Booty* see jrcnotebooks (2012).

excess and multiplicity is more evocative of the eternal hell of a Saturday at Ikea than the Orientalist's fantasy-driven journey into the Levant – flanked by long strands of Clark's painted jewels that evoke beaded curtains. These curtains further underscore the consumption of otherness central to Benjamin's Europe that can be found in the curio stands that populate Clark's hometown of Cape Town. The disposability of the curio – an empty signifier of "Africanness" purchased by the tourist – merge with further images of disposable excess in Clark's studies. For instance, Andreas Gursky's photograph *99 Cent* (ironically itself a luxury object crafted from the largesse of a 99 Cent store), merges with images of wreckage and disaster – wreckage from airplane crashes, floating garbage in the ocean, dwellings altered by hording, and ephemera piled at roadside memorials to the dead – that feel at home in the rubble of Benjamin's "Experience and poverty" (1933), or with his angel of history.

And yet, like Benjamin's association with the fecund creativity of modernism that comes out of such devastation, and arms a political response to the ideologies of tradition and authority, Clark's reworking of waste locates another critical tradition that considers the redemptive discourses of post-apartheid nationalism. In several works on *Booty*, Clark considers the history of the Asafo Flag – a hastily and improvised banner of local Fante (Ghana) companies who appropriate images of the coloniser such as the Union Jack – to craft separate images of identity from the order imposed by the coloniser. In *Black flag (Uhuru)*, Clark uses ephemera to expose the signifiers of national identity in post-colonial African states. Uhuru's socialist liberation philosophy referenced in the work's title is redoubled by other images of black power; a soul record peeks out of the green central stripe of the flag recalling its vitality in articulating black identity across the diaspora. Clark's use of a black, green, red and yellow colour scheme found in the flags of many African nations reminds the viewer of nationalism itself as a tradition of improvisation – suggested in the Asafo Flag as a symbol of affiliation – that continually reworks the histories of its pre-colonial and colonial histories to understand itself in the present.

Clark equally uses the Asafo Flag as a tradition to explore the conditions of settler colonialism through a similar collage entitled *White flag (squall)* (2012) (Figure 5). In *White flag (squall)*, Clark uses an old surveying map as a substrate to layer the page's surface with a mass of cut-outs – whose oval shapes give the effect of fossils – that reference exploration. The map is bounded by two painted sheets of paper, a dusty rose band at the bottom and an orange band at the top, calling the apartheid-era South African flag to mind. By using surveying maps and the historical textbook images of exploration, Clark evokes the settler mentality of mapping as a form of claiming and possessing a colony and the racial policing of land ownership further realised in South Africa through legislation such

FIGURE **Nº 5**

Julia Rosa Clark, *Black flag (Uhuru)* (left) and *White flag (squall)* (right), 2012. Glitter, found image, paper, paint and wood (*Black Flag*), found images, paper, paint and wood (*White Flag*). 64 x 94 cm (*Black flag*), 84 x 188 cm (*White flag*). Courtesy of artist and whatiftheworld gallery.

as the 1913 Natives Land Act. By titling the exhibition *Booty*, Clark both refers to treasure – akin to the hordes of silver in Benjamin's childhood cabinet or Benjamin terming Baudelaire's poetry 'rhyme booty' – and piracy as a form of reclamation and resistance. Akin to the flags, in the detritus of *Flying and falling*, one encounters images of Roman sculpture, suggesting archaeological digs and colonial appropriation, and its reworking in symbols such as the royal crown affixed to the wall. The crown also references British dominion over South Africa and its repurposing as a motif in Basotho blankets as a signifier of Sotho culture, providing yet another example of reworking and refashioning the past.

Clark's deliberate reference in *Booty* to the improvisations inherent in fashioning Asafo flags reframes the intimate archive of her studio practice to interrogate the conditions of nationalism and history, suggesting an urgency to reconstructing history in the face of a redemptive post-apartheid ideology. By reworking waste in this context, Clark suggests ways of re-interpreting and reframing the collector's archive as a way of considering the post-colonial condition of nationalism. In this post-colonial condition, the asylum takes a radically different form and improvisation, evoking Benjamin's philosophy of history to reframe questions of determinism and fate.

In the above discussion, I have framed two separate questions bound between the traditions of improvised practice that drive Clark's work: one that considers how improvisation, thinking with Benjamin, unearths a historical materialist practice, and the second, how turning Clark's practice into Benjamin's materialist philosophy of history, exposes what Kraniauskas may consider the colonial unconscious within Benjamin's work. While both these questions may be explicatory, they equally return to Khanna's definition of disposability – both as comfort and as disposable people – figured through psychoanalysis. Specifically, Khanna (2008) discloses disposability's link with psychoanalysis through Freud's reading of faeces as the primal form of gift, where he compares it with gold. Disposable wealth and the disposability of the person are represented through defecation as a gift to the mother which 'demonstrates an attempt to control the disposability of life itself' (Khanna 2008:184), and return to Clark's interests in scatology and the hordes of gold, piles of money, and precious jewels represented in *but there is a storm*.

Attentive to the political and social overlap between 'capital and its excess' and the disposability of people, the asylum emerges as an architecture whose function is to contain disposable people – labourer or refugee, in particular women – who exist as remnants, the excess, of capitalist comfort and the bystanders of its architecture of war that renders the inmate in a permanent sense of haunting (Khanna 2008:184, 194).[11] Khanna's analysis of disposability is certainly topical in present-day South Africa, facing a climate of xenophobia, social stratification, and demands to restructure South Africa's universities; all evoked in Clark's *Figure & ground exercises*. Moreover, the asylum as a site of haunting at play in Clark's, Benjamin's and Schwitters's uses of collecting to re-engage the destruction of modern life, and the excess of capital, also indicates how Benjamin's psychoanalytic inflections may enjoin Clark's own work on nationalism in post-apartheid South Africa.

Faeces as a signifier of loss, obsessively dug through symbolically in psychoanalysis and practically by the scatologist, becomes a symbol of the self that one cannot easily let go of – a process manifest in Clark's and Schwitters's obsessive collecting – which introduces the condition of melancholia. The melancholic – a central concept in Freud's and Khanna's work – whose continual grief-work unceasingly tests the limits of loss leaves the melancholic as an 'unwilling critic of the status quo' (Khanna 2008:196). Developing a notion of 'critical melancholia' through the need for constant testing of the relationships between present and past, Khanna (2003) turns to a close reading of Sachs's *Black Hamlet*, a psychoanalytic study of a Rhodesian tribal healer named John Chavafambria. *Black Hamlet*, like *Booty*, places the question of traditional filiation and national identity at the centre of the text: through Sachs's position as a Lithuanian Jewish émigré to South Africa and Chavafambria as a traditional healer working as a

11. Khanna explains this through a reference to a *New York Times* article about the uninterred cremated remains of 3 489 inmates of the Oregon State Hospital in the United States. One former patient advocated for the remains to remain in the closet they had always been stored in as an 'honest representation of where we were', in a condition that Khanna (2008:184-185) argues would leave the hospital haunted with the reality of the disposability of life for former inmates. On the spectre, also see Jacques Derrida (2006).

labourer in a modernising Johannesburg, *Black Hamlet* renders belonging uncertain, and collapses the distinctions between organic and traditional intellectual, the civilised and primitive (Khanna 2003:236-237, 243-244). What further binds the two, is the interpretive work they do (which at one point takes place in the asylum): Sachs's work as psychoanalyst and Chavafambria's practice as a traditional healer through throwing bones. Their practices are akin to Benjamin's interest in dream-analysis and Clark's work with traditions such as reading entrails or faeces as a form of testing reality.

Finally, Khanna argues that Chavafambria's sense of self remains haunted between tradition and 'Bantu nationalism', a reading realised through the materiality of the discarded bones whose object is both material and messianic by enjoining past and present. This testing of limits, and an inability to be fully incorporated into European discourses of nation-statehood, renders a critical melancholia, by which the post-colonial nation state, and its archive, remains perpetually haunted by its pre-colonial and colonial histories (Khanna 2003:246-247, 261-263). Clark's work, constructed in a very different time of national transition – post-apartheid euphoria – remains equally obsessive in its attempt to reconcile the fragments of the archive, to repurpose the outmoded and to unearth the fossils and images of a history that the post-apartheid archive attempts to lay to rest.[12] The Asafo Flag provides one avenue to rework these symbols of national identity, just as the loose tulle crowded with advertisements finds different images of bones, cosmetics and mapping – all of which are associated with traditions of improvisation, imperial domination and capitalist consumption that overload Clark's sense of self.

Each of these materials – tulle or the flag as fabric – returns to Benjamin one last time. In 'Fate and character', Benjamin ([1919] 1996:204-206) describes fate as an ever-tightening mesh of fabric; locating the potential of its other, the inventiveness of character through a process of divination that undoes the fixity and juridical determinism of fate. By picking up the single thread, or loose object in Clark's scattering, her archive prompts one to work through its materiality, to invent new readings borne from the object's contact between past and present, personal and public that equally inform Benjamin's materialist histories. The methods espoused in *Flying and falling* may not make direct reference to the political. However, their interpretive work turned towards the haunting of the disposable – advertisement and person – in *Figure & ground exercises* creates a collector's asylum by which repurposing the discarded remainders of unrest construct a perpetual haunting, always already present within South Africa's history, make a demand akin to Benjamin's angel turned towards the past to potentiate a future to come.

12. See Derrida (2002) for a discussion of the archive in South Africa.

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Refocusing the traumatic past (an essay in two parts)

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ABSTRACT

In the greater landscape of South Africa's traumatic past, the South African War of 1899-1902 is arguably "old history", surpassed in time and importance by more pressing traumas. Moreover, because it was usurped by Afrikaner nationalism as a myth of national origin and used to justify claims of Afrikaner sovereignty, it is also often seen as "old *Afrikaner* history": at best, an episode of limited relevance to the many South Africans effectively written out of this narrative; at worst, a platform for nostalgic hankering by a conservative few.

The following is an attempt to reconsider the South African War in a manner that addresses both the assumptions pervading this history and the prevalence of its residues and traces in a present-day, "decolonising" South Africa. My premise is that the War, like all traumatic pasts, is neither stable nor resolved – less a closed chapter than an open book, subject to perpetual rereading. Precisely because this past is unfinished, looking again has the potential to focus past and present relationally, illuminating not only the vicissitudes of what has been, but also the co-ordinates of the seer, here and now.

I first encountered this history (in a resonant way) through the eyes of a witness: my great-grandmother, Maria, who was captured by British soldiers in 1901 and interned in the Winburg Concentration Camp. Shortly before her death (in 1946), Maria distilled her experiences into a handwritten, 56-page memoir, which was passed down through subsequent generations. I recall immersing myself in this document, with its brittle pages and fading ink, a vicarious spectator inserted into the space behind Maria's eyes.

Later, I came to see Maria's narrative differently: refracted through other archives and narratives; through critical accounts of the War; through the agendas and ideologies pervading the time of its writing (some four decades after "the fact"). I saw it as a belated "memory log", where memory is a pliant repository shaped by the context of remembrance and, in Maria's case, necessarily occluded by trauma. What her narrative evinces is not the unequivocal "truth" of experience, but the visage generated by her own sense-making, mediated by time and language, to be mediated again and again by the reader's interpretative lenses.

In taking the motif of "refocusing" as a starting point, this article – essentially a reflection, in two parts, on my own ambivalent apprehensions of the War – considers the literal and figurative technologies of looking that both enable and imperil access to the elusive past. I suggest that "doing history" is a mediated, subjective, embodied experience, one that both *locates* and *dis-locates* the researcher. For the very act of looking back (and looking again) shifts the vantage point from whence one looks, reciprocally. In this sense, "refocusing" could be seen as productively estranging, transforming both seer and seen. It does not "return" the researcher to a stable and familiar past (and its illusory "home truths"), but opens up mutable, multiple sightlines to (and from) a precarious present.

Keywords: South African War, refocusing, "doing history", photography, estrangement, embodied research.

1. A matter of wanton damage (Whereas ... and whereas ... Now therefore I)

PROCLAMATION.

Whereas small parties of raiders have recently been doing wanton damage to public property in the Orange River Colony and South African Republic by destroying railway bridges and culverts and cutting the telegraph wires, and whereas such damage cannot be done without the knowledge and connivance of the neighbouring inhabitants, and the principal civil residents in the districts concerned, [sic]

Now therefore I, Frederick Sleigh, Baron Roberts of Kandahar and Waterford, K.P., G.C.B., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., V.C., Field Marshal, Commanding in Chief Her Majesty's Troops in South Africa, warn the said inhabitants and principal civil residents that, whenever public property is destroyed or injured in the manner specified above, they will be held responsible for aiding and abetting the offenders. The houses in the vicinity of the place where the damage is done will be burnt, and the principal civil residents will be made prisoners of war.

ROBERTS, F. M., Commanding in Chief, South Africa.

Army Head Quarters, South Africa, Pretoria, 16th June, 1900

'Now therefore I …' says Field Marshal Frederick Sleigh Roberts, Commanding in Chief of Her Majesty's Troops in South Africa. He is warning the Boers that he will reciprocate their damaging of infrastructure by burning civilian homes. Why? Because it is June 1900, and the South African War/Anglo-Boer War/Boer War/Second War of Freedom

is underway. Because the British have just taken Pretoria, but the Boer guerrillas – fighting for the independence of their two republics – are proving a resilient enemy. Because the logic of war is to answer damage with damage.

I found this proclamation in the Western Cape Archives on the 1st of February 2016, a sweltering summer's day in South Africa. In a small, airless room, under unforgiving fluorescent light, I captured it with a macro lens, click-click. I was drawn to its distress (literally and metaphorically). I had no idea what I would do with it at the time.

'Now therefore I …' says Roberts. With these words he literally made history, declaring it permissible for Her Majesty's Troops to wage their war by burning homes. In the process, Roberts set in motion the notorious "scorched earth" policy, which devastated the Boer republics. Over the next two years, 30 000 farms were razed, crops and livestock destroyed, entire towns torched. Those swept from the veld were rounded up by the British and taken to hastily-constructed, epidemic-riddled concentration camps, where they died by the thousands. Records list 27 000 casualties in the Boer camps – which, to put things in perspective, constituted ten per cent of the total Boer population, and far outnumbered their battlefield casualties. Perhaps as many died in separate camps created for Africans, although the legacy of these camps was suppressed and forgotten to the same extent that the legacy of the Boer camps was mythologised and entrenched.

Click-click. Often I photograph to see things, using the macro lens to magnify, to isolate and inspect; depressing the shutter to register on my retina what it is that I am looking at. I hone in on a gilt-framed family portrait, with a crack across the mother's face. In the margins of certain documents, ink spills morph into bloodstains, and pins pierce and mutilate pages. Observing these things with my camera facilitates intimate inspection. But it also shows up the lenses that mediate my looking (thus pushing me further away). I examine, zoom, focus, depress the shutter, import to laptop, zoom, examine. Amplified sufficiently, every digital image devolves into pixels.

In November 1900, five months after the Roberts proclamation, Field Marshal Horatio Herbert Kitchener picked up where Roberts left off, and expanded the concentration camp system. His stated aim (*lens 1*) was to deprive the Boer fighters of access to food and information, and to pressurise them into surrendering (Nasson 2010:243-244). Amongst the defenders of camp policies (*lens 2*), the Boer camps were justified as humanitarian, set up to house the vulnerable refugees who would otherwise be left alone and unprotected on the open veld (Nasson 2010:243). For many of the Boers themselves (*lens 3*), the camps were deliberately genocidal, administered by a hostile enemy intent on their extermination (Dampier 2008:369).

Here are some other lenses:

a. Knowing what happened next makes it impossible to see the Roberts proclamation untainted by the devastation that followed (and it is impossible to know if Roberts himself could anticipate what he was about to unleash).

b. The term "concentration camps" invites immediate association with the Nazi death camps of World War II, although there are patent and important differences. Reich Minister of Propaganda, Paul Joseph Goebbels, is largely responsible for this lens. He purposely labelled the Nazi camps "concentration camps" after the British "concentration camps" in South Africa, in order to 'deflect criticism of the Nazi ones onto the earlier British founding of camps that were apparently "the same"' (Stanley & Dampier 2005:94).

c. As a "born and bred" South African, I cannot contemplate this history unfettered by my heritage, which involves a great-grandmother who survived the Winburg concentration camp (but buried four of her children there). Neither can I sidestep my ambivalence as a white, Anglicised Afrikaner, as a Boer descendant raised to speak the coloniser's tongue.

After the War, from the ashes of "scorched earth", rose a new Afrikaner identity. The Boers had lost the War and entered into the Treaty of Vereeniging in May 1902. But for Afrikaner religious leaders, interpreting the War in sacrificial terms, it was not a disaster. Rather, it was God's means of testing his chosen people, of forging Afrikaner national unity, and, ultimately, of endorsing Afrikaners' claims to sovereign statehood over all the people of South Africa (Boje & Pretorius 2011:60). As such, the War became a 'narrative of nation' (De Reuck 1999:79) complexly complicit in the development of apartheid – as a political system premised not only on Imperialist ideas of white supremacy, but also (and more specifically) on notions of Afrikaner sovereignty.

To sustain the 'aftermyth' of the War (to use John Boje & Fransjohan Pretorius's term (2011:60)), Afrikaner nationalist leaders trained a highly selective and partisan lens on the issue of the concentration camps, foregrounding tales of Boer suffering, exacerbating supposed British cruelty, and downplaying completely the existence of the black concentration camps, which would detract from their own "nation-forging" narratives of sorrow and sacrifice. What evolved was an Afrikaner 'historiography of aggrievedness' (Boje & Pretorius 2011:60), fuelled by the proliferation of increasingly bitter testimonial writings, which evinced and perpetuated a decidedly occluded perspective on the past.

Click-click. I am adjusting and re-adjusting my tripod; balancing the documents on towers of angled foam bookrests, and attempting to align the macro lens exactly to this gradient. But the alignment is fractionally out: bits of my images keep slipping out of focus at the corners. Under my breath, I curse the limited facilities, recalling (in comparison) the banks of "proper" camera stands running the length of the Reading

Room windows at the United Kingdom National Archives. I try angling my camera directly down, the documents lying flat on the narrow bench, but the requisite proximity of camera to subject proves disastrous. The details I hope to capture disappear in a patch of shadow, cast by the camera body in the path of the overhead light. It is a particular conundrum of macro photography that the device for making visible is so often what obstructs and obscures.

Click-click.

Predictably, the Afrikaner nationalist 'aftermyth' was cultivated and sustained by a myopically partisan remembrance of the War – one which, for successive decades, 'carried not a trace of acknowledgement of the experience and losses of the thousands of black people who were caught up in the hostilities in one way or another' (Nasson 2000:150). This calculated blindness was maintained not only by Afrikaner popular history (folklore, poetry, music, commemoration, and so forth) but also by *volksgeskiedenis* – a branch of scholarship supposedly wedded to 'objective-scientific' truth but which was, in fact, heavily ideological (Van Heyningen 2013:20).

In effect, *volksgeskiedenis* legitimised its bias under the guise of assumed objectivity, donning the emperor's clothes of empirical historical inquiry. Empiricist history, as it emerged in the nineteenth century, presented itself as a scientific tool for uncovering the "truth" of the past. Its exemplars insisted that objective historical knowledge is both desirable and attainable; it requires only that historians dispense with their prejudicial lenses and apply their minds impartially and diligently to 'the facts' (Tumblety 2013:3). But for relativist historians – after the likes of Hayden White, whose critique of empiricist history in *Metahistory* (1973) caused lasting controversy – there are *always* lenses and blind spots that mediate looking, despite one's most valiant efforts. There is no neutral position outside of subjectivity to look from; no impartial vantage point untainted by context, belief and inference. In the words of Alun Munslow (2010:36), '[w]e cannot be "in touch" with the past in any way that is unmediated by historiography, language, emplotment, voice, ideology, perspective or physical and/or mental states of tiredness, ennui and so on … there is no possibility of bringing the past back to the present'.

Day Three in the archives. I am wading through boxes of documents; looking for synergies; reading; photographing; trying to understand. It is slow going. I am tired and impatient, undone by the incessant heat and the sudden onset of toothache. The word "damage" catches my eye, in a Public Works Department box. I start seeing bits of damage everywhere – tears, stains, ruptures. Click-click. An entire dog-eared folder on the "Burgher concentration camps" (another name; another lens). Later, flipping

through my jpegs, I return to the wording of the Roberts proclamation, where he threatens those Boers doing "wanton damage" with fire and incarceration. What makes damage "wanton" is a matter of one's perspective, surely.

Later still, I am tweaking my images in photo-editing software and am struck by their malleability. If I sharpen the photograph digitally does it remain "true" to the source? If I darken, lighten, crop and recolour? At what point does the seemingly "truthful" photograph become a fabrication?

For Munslow (2010:139), history is inevitably a fabrication – a 'fictive, self-conscious, subjective-emotional, imaginative and carefully authored expression' not unlike an artwork. Munslow's insistence on the subjective nature of history is certainly not unique. But where many historians would uphold the pursuit of "truth" as a worthy aspiration (if not an attainable goal), Munslow advocates that this ambition should be relinquished altogether. Instead, one ought to embrace the potential of 'the-past-*as*-history-*as*-artwork' (Munslow 2010:127), cut loose from the ballast of "truth". 'In one sense', ventures Munslow (2010:139), 'the most responsible attitude of the future historian is to acknowledge that history is always about morphing the past'.

To describe the work of this future historian, Munslow (2010:189) coins the term 'experimental history' – a way of "doing history" that is, by definition, 'opposed to the concept of correspondence (to the past) in conventionally understood ways'. Experimental history does not pretend to offer up the "truth" of the past; it does not endeavour to "tell it like it was"; it does not mask its fabrication beneath a semblance of objectivity. Rather, it declares itself as performative, subjective, open-ended; a grappling with the past as process. In precisely this way, according to Munslow (2010:193), experimental history 'constantly forces the issue of ethical choice'; prompting recognition that 'all we have in the face of an unknowable past are … ethical choices'.

Back home from the archives with a data bank of images, the fruits of a necessarily failed endeavour to "bring the past back to the present". What now? After countless false starts, tests and rejections, reworkings, rethinkings, erasures and repeats, I believe I may be *onto something*. I am working on a slideshow titled "DODGE AND BURN", after the "dodge" and "burn" functions in Photoshop that I am using to manipulate areas of my images, and in reference to the British "scorched earth" policy.

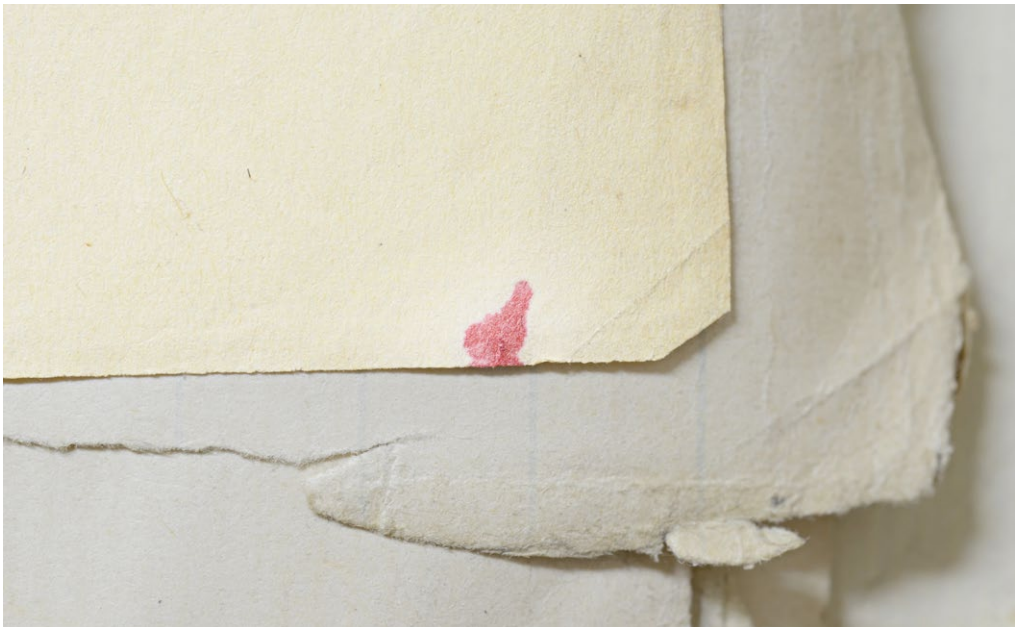

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Ink spot (dodged). Record PWD 1/2/21 (KAB). Photographed by the author, 3 February 2016.

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Ink spot (burnt). Record PWD 1/2/21 (KAB). Photographed by the author, 3 February 2016.

As I work, I think about aftermaths and 'aftermyths'; the malleability of evidence; the ways in which history morphs the unknowable past. In the background, almost as an aside, I mull over the brutal logic of the Roberts proclamation: 'Whereas … and whereas … Now therefore I'. If *A* and *B*, then *C*. If *damage (wanton)* and *damage (intentional),* then *damage (justified)*. A formula to incite a war. These are the "big" thoughts informing my practice. But at the micro-level, zoomed in, manipulating my images "simply" enables me to re-animate the inert, forgotten detritus of the past – not to revive it as some kind of "truth", but to engage its very elusiveness. On the screen, close-ups of brittle archives morph and pulsate. Dodged, as if under the bright light of interrogative scrutiny, and then burnt, burnt, burnt. Pushed and pulled in Photoshop, to the point where pixels start to lose information, where the veracious image is destroyed.

Is this wanton damage? Who is to say?

2. Serendipitous encounters in the Archives (a personal narrative of belonging)

My first trip to the United Kingdom National Archives, in October 2015, was riddled with anxiety. What did I know, the infrequent traveller from South Africa, accustomed to the ebb and flow of fuzzy, ad hoc systems? Unmoored and disarmed by the cool authority of British efficiency, I felt myself coming undone, quite viscerally it seemed, just trying to negotiate the security checkpoint into the Archives Reading Room. 'Which way do I swipe my card?' I asked, fumbling. This was my third attempt at clearance. I had failed the first time for attempting to take in a jacket (and am hazarding a guess that I was not the first South African to do so). I had failed the second time for neglecting to unsheathe my laptop from its protective pouch. Back downstairs to the locker room, twice, to deposit the offending items.

What is it about officials in uniform that unnerves me so? Just a few days prior I had suffered the same disquiet in the limbo of Heathrow passport control, where, unwashed and exhausted, I had come under the scrutiny of a disbelieving Border Force officer. Evidently, the dishevelled apparition that stood before her bore scant resemblance to the placid, bright-eyed youth in my passport photo. 'Is this you?' she demanded, thrusting her finger at the image of the younger Maureen. 'Yes it is', I replied, deeming it safer to answer in the affirmative even though I had never felt more estranged from myself.

Months later (and with a few more anxious border-crossings behind me) I began to feel slightly more at ease. I could slump into a seat on the number 65 bus to Ealing Broadway and *almost* drift off, no longer gripped by panic that I would miss my stop at Mortlake Road and lose my bearings to the Archives. And once inside, I at least knew the drill (jacket off; laptop out; reader's card ready to swipe). I could finally settle into my research, even testing a smile on the guards now and then (with limited success).

But the sense of estrangement, of being out of place, still trailed at my heels like a shadow. It tripped me up intermittently, reminding me that "home" was across the equator, 6 000 miles south as the crow flies. "Home" was almost the polar opposite of where I was, geographically. At the same time, being a stranger in London also threw into sharp relief the abundant ironies of "home". One of the closest neighbouring cities to where I live is "East London", just 100 miles to the east. My hometown is Grahamstown, founded by Lieutenant-Colonel John Graham in 1812 as a military outpost. Like so many places in South Africa, it is steeped in violent colonial history, arising as part of British efforts to protect the eastern frontier of the then-Cape colony against the local amaXhosa. Indeed, my charming little town was 'built up on land which belonged to the Xhosa' (Grahamstown 2016:[sp]; see also Wells 2003:82), a fact which unsurprisingly provoked significant hostility. In the legendary Battle of Grahamstown of 1819, the guns and muskets of modest British troops rapidly overpowered vast armies of Xhosa warriors armed with traditional weaponry.

So, in this sense, the question of belonging – of being "at home" in Grahamstown – has never been entirely self-evident. My own home looks out onto the hillside where that long-ago massacre occurred. "Egazini", as it is known to this day: "The place of blood".

Months later still … It is July 2016, to be precise, and I am starting to find my way around the Archives with increasing familiarity. I am calmer and more confident, a Reading Room regular, with a well-swiped card and a favourite seat (33D, at the window). Today I have ordered Record WO 32/8063: a folder of telegrams from British High Commissioner Alfred Milner to Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain, regarding the alarming mortality rates in the South African War concentration camps. Milner, seemingly more concerned with explaining away the figures than proffering proposals to curb them, is preoccupied with the word "mortality", which I read as "official-speak" for "death". "Mortality" is what happens to other people.

I take out my digital camera; attach it to the camera stand; switch it on. Recently I have been using a remote control to autofocus and activate the shutter, to avoid pushing buttons on the camera body. But before I can even touch the remote, my camera

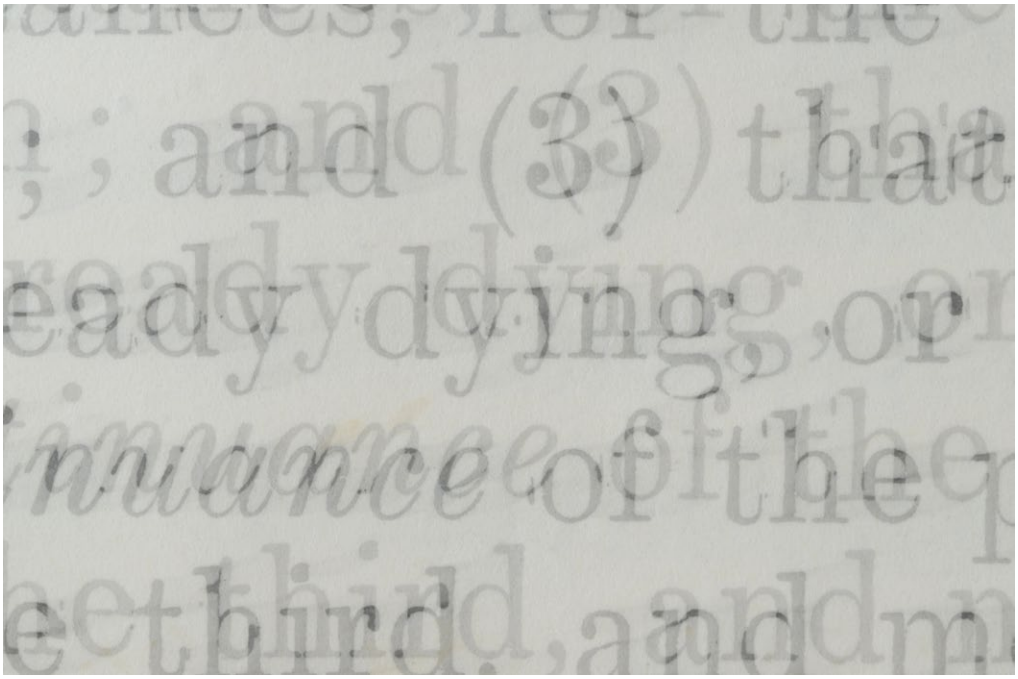

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Already dying. Record WO 32/8063 (TNA). Photographed by the author (and an unwitting accomplice), 1 July 2016.

zooms into focus and clicks, again and again, intermittently taking photographs as if of its own accord. I switch it off, check the settings, switch it on. At first, nothing … and then: zoom-click … zoom-click … zoom-click-click-click … like a thing possessed. I switch it off, completely flummoxed. What is happening here?

Eventually it occurs to me that a neighbouring photographer must be using the same type of remote as mine, and that *his/her* remote is inadvertently triggering *my* camera. I have an unwitting accomplice … the serendipity of this intrigues me so much that I opt to make the most of it, relinquishing control, for the whole afternoon, and allowing my unsuspecting collaborator to take my photographs for me. My own process is merely to pass the telegrams below my mounted camera, reading them in the LCD display as if through a magnifying glass. When I get stuck on a portentous word, I centre it in the display and wait (and wait) for the inevitable zoom-click to follow. Otherwise, I simply continue moving the pages beneath the eye of the macro lens, letting the incidental photographs register this blur.

Some concluding thoughts on Milner. Although he eventually conceded that the concentration camps were a 'sad fiasco' (letter to Lord Haldane, 8 Dec 1901, Milner cited in Women and children … 2011:[sp]), this realisation seemed slow to arrive. In a letter to Chamberlain dated 7 December 1901 (almost a full year after the introduction of the camp system), he writes,

> The black spot – the one very black spot – in the picture is the frightful mortality in the Concentration Camps. It was not until 6 weeks or 2 months ago that it dawned on me personally ... that the enormous mortality was not incidental to … the sudden inrush of people already starving, but was going to continue (Milner cited in Women and children … 2011:[sp]).

Note that, for Milner, the issue of concentration camp deaths is the only "black spot" in the picture. One might surmise that the "picture" itself – the South African War and imperialist agenda underpinning it – is otherwise without blemish, in Milner's eyes. An 'arch imperialist' and self-declared 'British race patriot' (Van Heyningen 2013:81), Milner cared little for the Afrikaners and even less for the Africans. After the War, he was instrumental in brokering the Union of South Africa in 1910, instituting a united British and Afrikaner government that excluded Africans, Coloureds and Indians from political processes (Lord Alfred Milner … 2012:[sp]). As such, he effectively co-authored a system of governance based on white supremacy, one that dominated South African politics, in some form or another, until the watershed elections of 1994.

On paper, South Africa's hard-won democracy seems a far cry from Milner's 'white segregationist state' (Nasson 2010:256). South Africa now boasts one of the most inclusive constitutions in the world. But the legacy of political and economic disenfranchisement endured by black South Africans – under Union and then apartheid – is in evidence everywhere. To add insult to injury (for some), there is at least one "Milner Street" in every major city. The plush Cape Town suburb of "Milnerton" was named in honour of Milner, formerly Cape Governor from 1897-1901. A Google search on "Alfred Milner Legacy" directs one to a site called "LEGACY INSPIRES", which profiles Milner's former residence (now a five-star hotel) in the most effusive, romanticised terms. It is worth quoting from at length:

> The leafy suburb of Parktown has played host to an incredible history of days gone by when gold rush fever took hold of Johannesburg … Built in 1895, the Sunnyside Park Hotel is a Victorian-style icon that, should it be able to speak, would be able to walk us through the history of the country, the province and the city itself.
>
> Originally built for [an] American mining consultant … it later became the residence of Lord Alfred Milner, the British High Commissioner to

> South Africa … Today the hotel stands as a living legacy in the heart of Johannesburg, Gauteng, and offers the best in top notch elegance, fantastic dining experiences and an old-world allure all in the heart of one of Africa's busiest cities.
>
> … One look at the gorgeous structure and you will be transported to a time when carriages arrived en masse to enjoy croquet on the lawns while taking in one of the many garden parties it once played host to.
>
> In fact, during his residency at the Sunnyside between 1899 and 1905, Lord Milner was reported to have said in a letter to family in England, "The abundance of room, the brilliant air, the open surrounding country [is] of great nature, beauty and fertility still unspoilt …". It is no wonder that Milner refused to move to the political capital of Pretoria during his tenure as Governor of the Transvaal and rather preferred to stay at the Sunnyside (Milner cited in A living legacy 2014:[sp]; A living legacy 2014:[sp]).

And so the article gushes, on and on. But in it lies an appalling irony: at the very time that Milner was relishing the "brilliant air" and croqueting on the lawns, Boer women and children were bumping up mortality rates at the Turffontein Concentration Camp, a mere 10 miles to the South of Milner's lavish residence. In the Transvaal alone there were 36 concentration camps for black Africans – essentially forced labour camps, with no shelter or rations provided at all. How does one even begin to reconcile this massive discrepancy? Later in the article, the author breathlessly conjures the 'old world charm' of the turret that housed Milner's study (where 'he poured [*sic*] over his plans for the colony') (A living legacy 2014:[sp]). 'Many believe that his spirit has never left what was believed to have been his most loved home', s/he intones.

On this point, at least, we concur.

While I write this (in October 2016), volleys of stun grenades resound nearby. At the university where I teach – and indeed at most universities across South Africa – public order police are engaged in increasingly violent clashes with student protestors, who are demanding not only a free education, but also an education that is *decolonised*. It is debatable whether these ideals are attainable. With regard to the latter, it remains to be seen if Milner's spirit can indeed be expunged, along with the spirits of those of his ilk. It remains to be seen what a "decolonised" South Africa might look like. And it remains to be seen what further price this exorcism might exhort from all South Africans – inhabitants, in one way or another, of the place of blood.

Postscript

In September 2015 I embarked on a practice-based Fine Art PhD, through a university in London. At the time, I thought my PhD would be "about" the South African War, a traumatic history in which I have a vested interest (for reasons articulated above). But as my research gained momentum (alongside various forays into the archives in South Africa and the United Kingdom), I came to realise the peculiar elusiveness of my subject – in part, because there are so many versions of the War that it defies being tied to a singular "truth". It is, as Liz Stanley and Helen Dampier (2005:92) observe, a site where differing accounts continue to '"speak" past each other, demonstrating something of the epistemological gap that exists concerning what is understood to be knowledge and truth from competing perspectives'.

Because of this "epistemological gap", the operations of history as a "truth-finding" discourse – in relation to the South Africa War but also in general terms – have necessarily come under scrutiny, in turn deepening and informing my understanding of the value of practice-based research. For if history is where knowledge of the past is subjectively constructed rather than objectively discovered, then the most appropriate research tools with which to "know" and to "make known" the enigma of the uncertain past are themselves open-ended, exploratory, and self-consciously subjective. This is where and why practice-based research, as aligned with Munslow's 'experimental history', can afford new insights on "old" material.

The preceding text-explorations are attempts at "doing history" performatively, in a manner that foregrounds the relational flux between past and present, between researcher and subject. Both texts evince a commitment to embodied research, premised on the assumption that the vantage point of one's gaze conditions what one sees, inasmuch as what one sees conditions the vantage point of one's gaze. To this extent, both texts reflect on the traumatic past by invoking (rather than supressing) the vicissitudes of subjective looking. They suggest that any perspective on past events is always already a partial view: mediated, occluded, differentially focused, supported and intercepted by the variable lenses and glances of self and others.

At the same time, both texts evoke the discomfort of belonging and not-belonging; of being "positioned" not only in relation to a history (one way or another), but also in relation to a precarious present, marred and marked by past trauma. In them, I question what it means to be "at home" (with certain versions of events, inherited assumptions, the compulsion of legacies and lineages) against a backdrop of visceral damage, where "the truth" has all too often been used to hurt.

"A matter of wanton damage (Whereas… and whereas… Now therefore I)" is a revised version of a paper initially presented to peers, supervisors and a Faculty committee, reflecting on the progress of my first year of PhD study. The slideshow to which it refers, entitled "DODGE AND BURN", was projected onto the wall behind me as I spoke. "Serendipitous encounters in the Archives (a personal narrative of belonging)" was written as a soliloquy, a text to be memorised and performed. Its first performance was to an audience of peers (in a small, intimate theatre at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London) after the screening of a slideshow which I compiled titled "PROOF".

As such, the "refocusing" of these works here – in a different format and in implicit conversation – embraces and extends the logic of the partial view. They are themselves mere glimpses of something larger, something else, interpretative ventures that are morphed by the variables of context (inasmuch as they lend shape to the contexts within which they emerge). They are mutable bodies, not stable truths, shape-shifting in relation to each other, to other texts, to the perspectives that readers bring to bear. They are not only about history but *like* history, in this sense.

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Snapshots of freedom: Street photography in Cape Town from the 1930s to the 1980s

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ABSTRACT

In this article, I look at the "ordinary" (or "everyday") archive of the racially oppressed, viewing it as an entry point into apartheid afterlives, while arguing for a rethinking of humanness and freedom after racial oppression. I consider the photographs produced by "Movie Snaps" – a street photographic studio of Cape Town, South Africa, that operated between the 1930s and the 1980s – and suggest that looking to previously marginalised narratives can offer insight into larger questions of self-representation, belonging and freedom. The contents of this article are based on a larger research project on forced removals in Cape Town, out of which several exhibitions and two documentary films have been produced to date.

Keywords: Apartheid, forced removals, photography, archive, freedom, representation.

> They just snapped you out of nowhere ... came up to you and said, "Here's your card! Come and collect it at Movie Snaps" (O'Connell 2015).

> Sounds do not disappear, not ever, not really … What happens when they appear to fade away, like the sounds of the bell from the square, particularly at night, is that they grow very small in order to fit into a hiding place where they cannot readily be found by those who do not know how to listen (van Zyl 2002:39).

Since the emergence of Algerian-born theorist Jacques Derrida's formative text entitled *Archive fever* (1998), the question of "the archive" has been theoretically debated, with a focus on practices of reading the relationship of the colonial archive to power and on the gaps within the institutional archive (see, for instance, Hamilton, Harris, Taylor, Pickover, Reid & Saleh 2002). How can the scholar who is interested in the overarching question of life after racial oppression trouble the notion of archive and make room for those

archives that are constructed not by colonial and racial power – such as state archives and museums – but instead by the subaltern, the colonised and the racially oppressed?

In this article, I consider how ordinary street photographs of Cape Town residents taken between the late 1930s and the early 1980s can be read as a response to novelist André Brink's (2003) call for contemporary South Africans to listen to the past and allow it to speak, while thinking through why representations of this kind matter for how freedom is imagined in post-apartheid South Africa.

Archive

In 1994, Derrida presented a paper that was later published as *Mal archive: Une impression freudienne*, the English version of which became *Archive fever* (1998). Here Derrida lays the groundwork for his argument about the nature and construction of archives (van Zyl 2002). Derrida not only discusses what an archive is, how it works, what its roots are and how it may be reconfigured, but also looks at the archive of psychoanalysis, its trajectories and history, and how it is constituted through a particular set of writings, histories and moments.

The archive is considered as a location, and Derrida emphasises that the political power of the *archon*, the house of the magistrates, is essential to its definition. The archive needs institutional authority to shape these traces – the contents of the archive that are the physical remnants of lives lived – which it selects, censors and marginalises, and which can be erased and destroyed. This paradox is central to the archive: it destroys that which it supposedly safeguards. This destruction, this 'burning into ashes the very trace of the past', sums up the archive for Derrida (1994:44). An archive is not about remembering, then, but about forgetting. It is through this 'fever', this 'passion' to destroy or deny, that 'we know that something in us, so to speak, something in the psychic apparatus, is driven to destroy the trace without any reminder' (Derrida 1994:44).

So what is it that has been destroyed, denied or filtered out in the archive of apartheid and its aftermath? More crucial, perhaps, is the question of power, for the archive:

> [i]s a place where things begin, where power originates, its workings inextricably bound up with the authority of beginnings. … There, the *archon* himself, the magistrate, exercises the power of procedure and precedent, in his right to interpret them for the operation of a system of law … In Derrida's description, the *arkhe* – the archive – appears to represent the now of whatever kind of power is being exercised (Steedman 2001:1159).

For Derrida, the *mal* ("fever") of the archive is in the order and structure of its establishment, it's beginning, as well as the feverish desire to possess the archive. It is about power, a 'sickness unto death' – a desire not just to enter the archive, but also to have and own it (Steedman 2001:1159). As part of a Western obsession with finding beginnings, the drive of the archive is to seek out the beginning of things. "Archive" encompasses all the ways and means of state power. It is substantially more than, and distinct from, a place that merely stores documents. More than what is included in archives, Derrida challenges the reader to consider what is written out of them, and what is left behind. In this regard, he writes that, 'this subtraction leaves a mark of erasure, a reminder which is added to the subsequent text and which cannot be completely summed up within it' (Derrida cited by Hamilton *et al*. 2002:9).

The author of these texts, "the archivist", is the one who gives life to texts and restores their 'papers and parchments to the light'; as Jules Michelet (cited by Steedman 2001:1171) wrote of his first days in the Archives Nationales in Paris in the 1820s: 'As I breathed in their dust, I saw them rise up'. Whether Michelet was referring to the dust of manuscripts and parchments or whether he was speaking metaphorically is uncertain, but his words prompt an investigation into the notions of authorship, power and death within the archive. As Benedict Anderson observes, 'the silence of the dead was no obstacle to the exhumation of their deepest desires' (Anderson cited by Steedman 2001:1171), and historians and archivists indeed find themselves 'able to speak on behalf of the dead and to interpret the words and the acts they had not understood' (Steedman 2001:1171). What does the resulting archive deny and conceal? What are its secrets?

The practice of collecting – by missionaries, travel writers and ethnologists – has produced a vast network of knowledge that currently forms the basis of national (and other) archives, with colonial collections playing a vital role in determining how history is constructed. Premesh Lalu (2007:36) makes the critical point that,

> [i]n Southern Africa, the constitutive relations of power and the further exercise of that power was founded and enabled by a vast disciplinary apparatus. Since the nineteenth century, and in some instances much earlier, vast archives of discipline and punishment paint a harrowing picture of the complicity of knowledge in achieving social subjection. The archive was never far from the needs of colonialism … Whereas in Europe, knowledge of these distant places of empire functioned to normalise power, in the distant places themselves it served to intensify its grip on the subject.

The archive in reconfiguration should not only be about the past, but should 'also [be] something which is shaped by a certain power, a selective power, and shaped by the future, by the future anterior' (Hamilton *et al*. 2002:9). How can the archive come to terms

with its archivist, given that it is always considered a site of retrieval, representation, power and history (Lalu 2007:28-29)? The apartheid archive was a site of meticulous record-keeping,[1] but it was also pivotal to the practices of racial subjugation and division, as a cursory visit to any of the South African archives will confirm. There are hundreds of images of "black"[2] bodies, countless pages of missionary accounts, notes on local languages by anthropologists and travellers that attest to the inferiority and difference of the "black" body, and all these efforts are fundamentally tied up with notions of power and inequality. Any refiguration of the archive that does not take its power distribution into account is doomed to exist only as an academic exercise that maintains the status quo. As Lalu (2007:37) explains:

> The colonial archive reflects a particular mode of evidence that is a consequence of the rise of new disciplines in the nineteenth century and the requirements of Empire … The emergence of the archive in southern Africa did not only emerge with the rise of new disciplines, but also power. In southern Africa, the conditions of conquest were propelled by the will to know and the will to power.

Is the archive able to relinquish its definitions and conceptions of knowledge when focused on one singular event? Can the archive disrupt its idea of temporality and, in so doing, challenge its own power?

Movie Snaps

In homes along the upmarket and largely "white" Cape Atlantic seaboard, through to the dusty and forgotten "black" townships of the Cape Flats, hidden in cardboard boxes or displayed in well-thumbed family photo albums, it is possible to find Movie Snaps photographs that speak to the city of Cape Town and its citizens in particular ways. The small photographs (about half the size of a postcard), which are kept safe by ageing owners and handed down as priceless keepsakes, appear at first glance to be banal, but in fact prompt conversations around remembering and forgetting, ways of life in the city and ways of self-representation. The images are often faded, with curling edges, and all have either a serial number or the Movie Snaps stamp on the reverse (or both). Apart from a few, hand-painted colour images, they are all black and white. The Movie Snaps studio, opened by Lithuanian Jewish immigrant Abraham Hurwitz at the beginning of the Second World War, in a nondescript building at the edge of the Grand Parade in Cape Town,[3] provides a photographic frame that speaks, on the one hand, about Jewish families in South Africa, and, on the other, about the imminent annihilation and fragmentation of lives through legislated apartheid in 1948 – the ramifications of which are still felt and sustained in contemporary South Africa.

1. See the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa (national.archives [sa]).

2. I have been profoundly influenced by Frantz Fanon's *Black skin, white masks* (1967), and I struggle with racial categories. Having lived my entire life as a "coloured" woman, I refer to racial designations in scare quotes throughout this article as an acknowledgement of the arbitrary apartheid categorisation and hierarchisation of people according to their skin colour.

3. Originally known as "*Wapen Plein*" (Square of Arms), and the site of Jan van Riebeeck's original fort in the 1650s, the Grand Parade has always been closely associated with its immediate neighbour, the Castle of Good Hope. For centuries, the Parade was a place where people gathered to celebrate, protest or seek refuge.

According to Richard Freedman, Director of the Cape Town Holocaust Centre, Jewish presence in South Africa dates back to the earliest days of "white" settlement, with records attesting to Jews arriving during the Dutch occupation in the seventeenth century (Freedman cited by O'Connell 2015). The largest wave of immigration came in the late nineteenth century, with approximately 40 000 Jews coming from Eastern Europe, particularly Lithuania (Freedman cited by O'Connell 2015). According to Zelma Singer, the great-niece of Abraham Hurwitz, the Movie Snaps founder was born in Lithuania in 1893, and came to Cape Town via Cork, Ireland, in the early 1930s (Zinger cited by O'Connell 2015). Freedman (cited by O'Connell 2015), makes the important point that Jews, although 'nominally "white" people', were still subject to racism in South Africa, in the form of anti-Semitism and xenophobia: 'They were told that they were coming into this country to steal jobs. These immigrants were mostly shopkeepers, goldsmiths and photographers'. Situated opposite the Cape Town Post Office, a building with colonial and apartheid histories etched on its walls, Hurwitz's studio and its multi-racial street photographers snapped thousands of people from Cape Town, who, once they crossed the photographer's chalk line,[4] were photographed and given a ticket, in the hope that they would purchase their image a few days later from the kiosk. The studio photographers plied their trade on the block surrounding the studio and along Adderley Street, with its statues of the Dutch settler Jan van Riebeeck and Portuguese explorer Bartholomew Dias.

The port city of Cape Town is commonly referred to as the "Mother City": Jan van Riebeeck set up a refreshment station for passing ships in 1652, and it gradually became a halfway point for trade between the East and the West (Worden, Heyningen & Smith 1998). Cape Town was viewed as the birthplace of modernity in South Africa, and the base from which those endowed with power ruled the country (Pieterse cited by O'Connell 2015). It is a city that has been shaped by waves of regulation, evacuation and displacement, especially around health scares such as the smallpox outbreak in the 1880s and the bubonic plague in 1901 (Smith 1995). The same rhetoric of contamination and control was used to justify the forced evictions of District Six that began in the 1960s. It is against this centuries-old backdrop of segregation that Movie Snaps is imagined, and in turn, imagines and images the city and its inhabitants.

These snapshots show people of all races: women resplendent in tulle dress and flared bell-bottoms, little girls in crisp smocked pinafores, and young men showing off their à la mode fashion sense. They illustrate moments of ordinary living in extraordinary times, given that the photographic studio witnessed the introduction of legislated apartheid in 1948, and the forced removals and city divisions that slowly attended it. The snapshots offer a contrasting view of the apartheid archive, as well as of the preceding decade of the 1930s. Apartheid is usually documented via violence and injury, but these kinds of

4. According to Noor Ebrahim (cited by O'Connell 2015) of the District Six Museum, who was a Movie Snaps photographer, each day the studio photographer would draw a chalk line about six metres from where he would be positioned. He would set his focus, shutter-speed and aperture accordingly, so that he would be able to photograph his subjects quickly.

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Street photograph by Movie Snaps Studio, 1950s. From the Buirski family. Image courtesy of the Centre for Curating the Archive.

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Movie Snaps street photograph of Gairowesha Manuel, 1969 (front and back). From the family of Zaynnonesa Manuel. Image courtesy of the Centre for Curating the Archive.

images serve as a strong reminder that apartheid violence, enacted through the expansive mechanisms of the state, could only have been exercised on those who were not considered human. In the Movie Snaps images, it is precisely the framing of the apartheid and colonial subject that now paradoxically provides an avenue into a new archive. In looking at these traces and listening to the muted cries, one may 'begin to glimpse alternate possibilities in relation to the historically catastrophic event' (Bogues 2010:58) – possibilities of freeing the spectres and ghosts of "black" and "other" bodies, previously denied and destroyed, into a humanity of equals.

From the early 1960s, the studio, which operated a satellite branch in the seaside suburb of Muizenberg, employed "coloured" photographers. As Noor Ebrahim comments, these photographers were offered jobs despite having no training, and the experience afforded them the chance to hone their skills in the trade (Ebrahim cited by O'Connell 2015). Many of the photographers lived in nearby District Six and, by all accounts, they relished the opportunity to receive skills-training from "white" photographers, secure employment, and gain the minor local-celebrity status that came with being a Movie Snaps photographer. Referring to Hurwitz as "Mr Snaps", Ebrahim says that he and three of his friends were simply handed cameras and put to work. However, racial divisions were still in play, as

a comment by Lorraine Knight, who worked in the Movie Snaps darkroom for over 20 years, suggests: '"they" never came to the back, and we never went to the front' (Knight cited by O'Connell 2015). Ebrahim stresses that the photographers snapped subjects of all races and genders, and that any biases in subject-selection were financially motivated: 'I want to tell you [that] we took photographs of people because colour didn't mean anything to us. We focused on the women as they would be more inclined to pay!' (Ebrahim cited by O'Connell 2015). Movie Snaps managed, therefore, to capture a cross-section of Cape Town society that showed diversity as well as common interests and practices. As fashion scholar Erica de Greef contends, Movie Snaps subjects blur boundaries, as culture, race and religious differences are almost indiscernible in how people dressed (de Greef cited by O'Connell 2015).

For me, looking at the Movie Snaps images today is much more than an exercise in nostalgia, for these images speak about histories that are currently unrecognised and unexplored. One only has to look carefully at the beautifully hand-stitched dresses and perfectly coiffed beehive hairstyles worn by "coloured" and "black" women to imagine the lives and futures forever destroyed by apartheid legislation, as enacted by the Group Areas Act of 1950. The Movie Snaps of "coloured" and "black" subjects are particularly telling, since they capture the agency of *humans* who carved their own lives and moments of freedom. In so doing, they invite critique of a particular "victim" narrative of the lives of the oppressed. The ways in which subjects are imaged in these street photographs intervenes in the subjugation of bodies and lives that were legislated and classified as non-human. The chalk line that was drawn each morning by the photographer can be seen as a dividing line that would forever change futures and pasts: currently, and depending on their specific racial classifications and experiences, the subjects in these photographs and their descendants most likely sit on opposite sides of history.

The chalk line is felt most intensely in those Movie Snaps images that are found in the homes of Cape Town residents who were forcibly removed, where the subjects are painfully aware of where they came from and where they now are. For these subjects, the images will always be etched with a sense of loss, a sense of a future that never happened and a future over which they seem powerless. As Brian O'Connell, former rector and Vice Chancellor of the historically "black" University of the Western Cape, says,

> black and coloured people had to live a particular life, put on a particular mask, accept particular things, no matter how much it hurt them, and the fact that it hurt them is, of course, manifest everywhere. I believe it is an important way of understanding South Africa today. It destroyed males, fathers in particular who found it very hard to be fathers in a loving, caring way (O'Connell cited by O'Connell 2015).

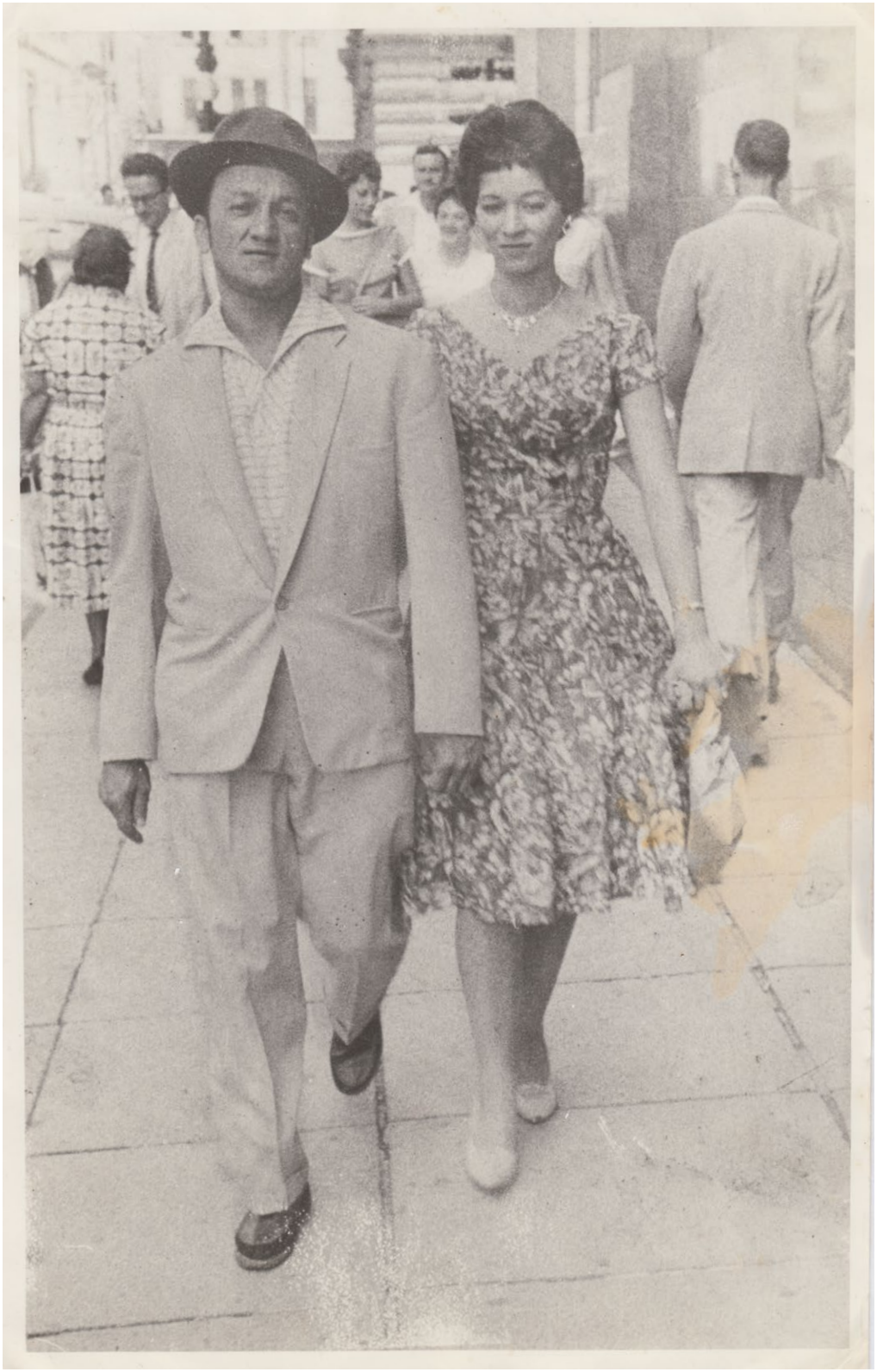

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Street photograph by Movie Snaps Studio, 1950s. From the family of Faizal Allie. Image courtesy of the Centre for Curating the Archive.

Memory and its representations now appear inadequate, falling short in the wake of catastrophe. As a mnemonic device, these photographs cannot match the violence of racial oppression they at once attest to and seek to address. The Movie Snaps images offer the chance to revisit that chalk line, and to recognise what it meant to live in a moment when the South African government was intent on dehumanising the majority of its citizens. They offer a glimpse of future possibilities and an opportunity to think through other memories and histories, as many contemporary South Africans continue their urgent quest towards freedom, in the light of past injustices.

Street photographs

As Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer (2009:13) show, street photographers could be found in many European and American cities in the decades between the First and Second World Wars. Eastern-European Jews were photographed as passers-by on the Romanian streets of Czernowitz/Cernauti – the 'Vienna of the East' (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:13) – by photographers using 2.5″ x 3.5″ direct-positive paper, which was processed on the spot to produce a print. Hirsch comments that this process, a precursor of instant Polaroid technology, allowed photographers the opportunity to quickly convince passers-by to purchase an image or order enlargements. The images that Hirsch and Spitzer (2009:13) found show Romanian Jews in the years leading up to the Holocaust displaying a 'sense of confidence and comfort' in candid, often spontaneous images taken in spaces that were becoming hostile to their presence. The images also show how these Romanian Jews situated themselves in terms of class and cultural and gender norms, with their willingness to be photographed and to purchase the images functioning as a public assertion of their membership in a certain class and level of affluence (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:13).

These photographs show that Jewish subjects publically performed their "freedom" by claiming spaces and moving 'through them, *flâneur* like, glancing about but also ready to be looked at and to be seen' (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:13). Importantly, these pre-war images do not 'even hint at the existence and rapid and virulent growth of Romanian anti-Semitism and Fascism in the 1920s and 1930s – the increasing restrictions, quotas, discriminatory exclusions, harassment and violence that Jews faced' (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:13).

Two photographs that I find most interesting in Hirsch and Spitzer's collection are two street images that show Jews wearing the yellow star in 1943 – two years after approximately 40 000 Jews were deported to the ghettos and labour camps (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:22-23). These images therefore depict members of the remaining Jewish

population, who were forced to wear the yellow star, and who faced heightened surveillance and restrictions. Despite these restraints, the Jewish subjects in the photographs appear to stroll freely through the city, even purchasing their photographs as a confirmation of this fact. As Hirsch and Spitzer (2009:22-23) observe, '[t]heir stroll seems "normal", as though the temporal and political moment in which their photos were snapped, and the mark of "otherness" that they were publically forced to display with the yellow star, were hardly relevant'.

These local images suggest a similar place and space to the one claimed by the subjects of the Movie Snaps photographs in defiance of the dictates of their apartheid-segregated city. The Cape Town images speak of life in the city both before and after the implementation of the Group Areas Act in 1950. They reflect a very particular space in the city, with the landmark General Post Office, street vendors, other shoppers, and street and commercial signs in the background. Walking purposefully through the city, as opposed to strolling, "*flâneur* like", the subjects in these photographs bear testimony to Patricia Holland's comment that 'personal photographs are made specifically to portray the individual … as *they would wish to be seen* and as they have chosen to show themselves' (Holland cited by Bliss 2008:866-867). They speak, in the Holocaust and apartheid contexts, 'of the will to normalcy in times of extremity' (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:16).

The Movie Snaps photographs and Hirsch and Spitzer's images of Jewish subjects have in common a refusal of victimhood on the part of their oppressed subjects, who enact resistance through their confident stride, their firm gaze and the meticulous attention they pay to the clothing they wear for a day out in the city. These images bypass the dominant images of the oppressed in South Africa as "victim" and as "other". While they resemble any of the millions of ordinary photographs found around the world, they are inherently different, because what they reflect are ordinary moments within extraordinary times. These mnemonic street images are haunting. They draw the eye to mothers and grandmothers who took their offspring into a city whose restrictions were blatantly intended to make them feel unwelcome. These women dispelled any notion of the oppressed as victims, and of the oppressed viewing *themselves* as victims.

While oral testimony and diaries record subjective reflections and private experience, photographs taken in urban spaces tend to document public acts and encounters. The incongruity is therefore not in the images themselves, but in the events these images record and evoke in those who look at them – the events of their production, the careful and considered "getting dressed for town", of their purchase, and of the viewer's retrospective looking. Perhaps, ultimately, the images 'speak' more about what one might want and need from the past than about the past itself (Hirsch & Spitzer 2009:16).

Disavowed archives

What role do these private family images play in the post-apartheid constitution of the apartheid archive? Do these images show a "normalcy" of lives in a divided city? Do they articulate the fullness of lives lived and of lives still to come? Crucially, why have theorists and archivists largely neglected these images, given their ability to prompt questions around the representation of the past through the capturing of everyday assertions of identity, dignity and affluence?

My questions are echoed in Laura Wexler's (1999) examination of nineteenth-century photographs of American servants and slaves. In particular, Wexler focuses on the ability of the "black" woman to claim her space in the frame and escape the subjugating white familial gaze, foregrounding herself and disrupting the narrative of the female servant as unable and unwilling to resist. In this analysis, Wexler draws attention to the unwillingness of cultural critics to read and acknowledge the capacity of photographs to embody resistance. Within regimes of colonial and apartheid domination, the domain of cultural production is where a certain contestation, which in itself is political, occurs. Culture becomes critical and central to life and meaning-making (Hall 1982). By considering the subjects in the Movie Snaps photographs who choose to dress "to the nines" and purchase their images, one can begin to think of their performances as a cultural production of contest and a self-representation of humanness.

Thinking about how the archive may be refigured in a post-apartheid context raises the question of whether an archivist is able to renegotiate the power of the archivist as gatekeeper. While this question holds currency, perhaps the emphasis should rather be on expanding the archive beyond an understanding of it as merely a storeroom, imagining it instead as a multiplicity, with an infinite number of narratives, experiences and texts. It could be that, in looking at the "black" body – the site of injury and differentiation – as an archive, one may begin to make some inroads into how a radically different post-apartheid archive may emerge. Moreover, it is in turning to the body and the lived experiences of the oppressed that the archive can be redeemed, becoming a constantly shifting text – at times elusive and ambiguous, but mostly a reminder that there are multiple pasts, presents, contestations and points of view.

As Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harris, Jane Taylor, Michelle Pickover, Graeme Reid and Razia Saleh (2002:7) astutely note, 'the archive – all archives – is figured' – a comment that gestures towards the understanding that the archive gives rise to how bodies, lives and power are configured. I believe that these "new archives" of disavowed bodies can challenge certain long-held meanings of life and death, of pasts and futures. First, though, the archive

FIGURE Nº 4

Street photograph by Movie Snaps Studio, 1950s. From the family of Ghadieja Samson. Image courtesy of the Centre for Curating the Archive.

(and the archivist) must push beyond boundaries, escape gatekeepers and locate those texts, experiences and sounds that belong to those so recently deemed inferior.

Regarding this attempt at reconfiguration, Derrida (cited by van Zyl 2002:39) suggests that 'a science of the archive must concern itself not only with the way in which the archive becomes an institution and the laws that govern this institutionalisation, but also with those who authorize (in both senses) this process'. This is important, for the archive is not only the concern and domain of the academy and the state. The challenge is to acknowledge the everyday practices of the oppressed that have been excluded from mainstream archives. These attempts matter, for not only do they have to do with thinking through ideas of democracy, equality and freedom, but they also force the hand of the supposed will to inclusivity espoused by the neoliberal post-apartheid South African state.

An archive of the oppressed

The archive of the oppressed compels one to recognise the modes of survival of those who were dominated, and to consider how they reconstructed/reconfigured a world for themselves in which they could see themselves as human. These archives provide apertures through which to peer at habits, gestures, movements, moments and sounds, all of which, although at times elusive, transform the idea of the archive as a place to enshrine a dead past into something that speaks of the present. This transformation is particularly evident in those images conventionally considered to be compositionally "poor", showing perhaps a random hand moving across the frame – photographs that depict natural motion and unguarded moments. A sense of being alive is detectable in the composure, confidence and pride of a young woman with her head thrown back while walking with her beau, as it is in the firm hand-hold and resolute posture of a proud mother walking her young son through a divided city.

If one is to understand how these photographs are significant to a history and a theory of oppression, it is imperative to destabilise dominant and established narratives. It becomes important to rethink – particularly with regard to the photograph – ideas of realism and subjectivity, and western modes of "truth", history and identity. There is a need to think about the function of the archive, for inasmuch as these images speak about the local, the mundane and the particular, they are also about loss and death, power and empowerment, contestation and affirmation. The archives, in all their renditions and complexities, command a space in the imaging of South Africa, from the early ethnographic images of the colonists to the socio-documentary images of apartheid South Africa that revealed to the world just what the day-to-day atrocities of the system entailed.

These snapshots are not about a single event or a single series of events; they are about life that is ongoing. Photographs given life and narrative, such as these Movie Snaps found in the home, must be considered outside of conventional archives. Indeed, they signal what is missing from the history texts. They are traces of moments that will not dissipate, inviting a reflection on oppression and the after-lives of oppression. It may be that endeavours such as these will not, in the end, fit into the notion of archives, for as Achille Mbembe (2002:19) writes,

> [t]he term "archive" first refers to a building, a symbol of a public institution, which is one of the organs of a constituted state. However, by "archives" is also understood a collection of documents – normally written documents – kept in this building. There cannot therefore be a definition of "archive" that does not encompass both the building itself and the documents stored there.

Perhaps, then, what is required is to view the everyday practices of the oppressed as a response to Anthony Bogues's (2010) notion of historical catastrophe, where the events of the past reverberate and shape the present. An image of the social lives and vitality of the oppressed challenges the way knowledges of the past are produced. As experiences of the "now", they prompt the telling of different narratives. As Hamilton *et al*. (2002:16) observe, 'alternate visions require alternate archives'. Were these images taken with the intention that, somehow, they might end up not only *in* an archive but also *as* an archive? Were they meant to be coded, classified, categorised and exhibited according to the criteria of collectors and institutional archivists? Were the photographs and the narratives they contain meant to 'escape the boundaries' of the archive, and the 'status and power that is derived from this entanglement of buildings and documents' (Hamilton *et al*. 2002:16). After making a film and an exhibition about the Movie Snaps studio, I returned the images I had gathered from households across Cape Town to the sanctuary and stewardship of their owners, bolstered by their spectacular power and the unabashed desire of their ghosts to be free.

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Exhibition Review

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The Arrivants

A solo exhibition by Dr Christine Checinska produced in association with the Visual Identities in Art and Design Research Centre (VIAD)

30 July – 26 August 2016. FADA Gallery, Bunting Road Campus, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa.

First, I feel the dark, then the cold. The underground, black-walled space below the main FADA gallery is crypt-like in midwinter. Or perhaps I am underwater. As the three acts or tableaux of Christine Checinska's *The Arrivants* unfold around me, I come to feel that I am swimming through semi-conscious and buried memories, from an individual and collective history. These surface through Checinska's trawling and deployment of cloth, stitch, text and oral testimony. A first-generation Briton and United Kingdom (UK)-based artist, designer and academic, Checinska explores the intersections of culture, race and dress by challenging the invisibility of the immigrant African diaspora and calling up the traces of these subjects and how they negotiated a racialised visual gaze. The Empire Windrush arrived in London's Tilbury Docks in 1948 carrying approximately 500 Jamaican passengers, invited by the British government to assist in rebuilding post-war Britain. How these migrants negotiated their new environment is told in the exhibition's three tableaux: the customs hall waiting area (Figure 1 & 2), the suits and stories (Figure 2), and the parlour (Figure 4). Found objects, projected photographs and oral testimonies flesh out the scenes, but it is dress that provides the narrative for these negotiations of identity.

Checinska's (2012:143) practice-led and theoretical research is directed towards, in her words, 'the absence of the African-Caribbean within the fashion theory canon'. A disrupted, displaced and 'broken' history of enslavement and colonialism is too easily constructed as a 'historyless-ness' and an 'implied cultureless-ness' (Checinska 2012:143). In this situation, Checinska (2016) considers that mobilising fashion is 'a way of pushing back against invisibility, stereotyping and the erasure of personhood'. Being

FIGURE **Nº 1**

Christine Checinska, *The Arrivants*, 2016. Detail of installation. Courtesy of Thys Dullhaard.

Anglicised colonial subjects meant that Afro-Caribbean people in the 1950s were neither English/British, yet largely lived by 'the values of [their] mother country' (Checinska 2012:146). The "Windrush Generation" of Afro-Caribbean immigrants to the UK brought widespread change to the cultural and racial dynamics of British society in the decades following the Second World War, as they established communities in major cities such as London, Birmingham, Bristol and Manchester. It was in the performance of identities in the theatre of fashion that these initial encounters would often have taken place. The importance placed upon being "well dressed" was a crucial assertion of dignity and respect for self and others, where the "only way to dress was up". Many of these creolised colonial subjects may have recognised themselves in the black South African subjects in Europeanised clothing in the early twentieth century that forms Santu Mofokeng's *Black Photo Album/Look at Me 1890-1950*. Similarly to Mofokeng's historical reclamation project, Checinska (2012:147) demonstrates that creolisation was not a process of blending, but rather one of contention. A well-cut and pressed suit served as a sartorial signifier: 'By choosing to wear a suit, paradoxically the ultimate hierarchical form of male dress apart from the military uniform, and the ultimate sartorial assimilator, these men hoped to be regarded as equals and looked on with respect' (Checinska 2016).

FIGURE **Nº 2**

Christine Checinska, *The Arrivants*, 2016. Detail of installation. Courtesy of Thys Dullhaard.

Any of these men could have been – were – Checinska's own father, who arrived in the UK in 1956, wearing his Sunday best suit, grasping a single cardboard "grip" suitcase. This arrival scene was played out many times in Southampton custom's hall and at London's Paddington and Victoria train stations. In the customs office waiting room installation, found objects including cardboard grips, recycled banana boxes, packing materials and various personal effects are collected on a platform. As Checinska (2016) explains, this part of the exhibition creates 'an archive which houses artefacts that speak to the stories of migration and the recreation of self'.

A frothy white wedding dress that spills out of an opened suitcase seemingly speaks to a bridal innocence, openness and hopeful expectation about a new life, in a new country. The audio narrative that may be accessed through headphones here is that of 'Bernice', who describes her wedding day. Here is a woman's voice, in an exhibition that is weighted to the male African diasporic experience. Describing her mother dressing her 'unruly virgin hair', the listener hears the complexities of identities that negotiate the racial politics of hair, Christian moral codes, European conventions of respectability, the historic spectre of slavery that disallowed bonds of dignity and affection, and marriage as a transition for a young woman as great as the crossing to another country. Stencilled on the exhibition entrance wall is an extract from Kumau Braithwaite's poem entitled "The Emigrants". As part of his trilogy *The Arrivants* (1967), from which Checinska's exhibition draws its title, the poet describes Afro-Caribbean people venturing out across the diaspora:

> So you have seen them
> with their cardboard grips,
> felt hats, rain-cloaks, the women
> with their plain
> or purple-tinted
> coats hiding their fatten-
> ed hips (Brathwaite 1967:50).

In her Tedx EastEnd talk, Checinska (2016) asserts that 'women, especially, shrink' and that there is 'nothing dignified in shrinking'. Bernice's preparations for her wedding day and the immigrant women whose coats 'hid[e] their fatten-/ed hips' present the negotiations that occur not only with the adoption and transformation of Europeanised cultural conventions, but also the reception and perception of these creolised people to a Britain that largely perceived of itself as culturally and racially homogenous. The photograph in dialogue with the poem extract shows immaculately dressed people

waiting with their suitcases and possessions, but also the uncertainty, vulnerability, courage and "chaos" of migration. That was replayed in tabloid newspapers as the arrival en masse of "coloured people" threatening an invasion of "difference".

I recall *my own purple coat, my new and best coat, its lukewarm protection against the liquid cold I am seeped in. I wait on train platforms, in a place both familiar and alien. For the first time, I see white men sweeping the streets; I realise that, here, white men are street cleaners*. My own long-ago and short-lived experience of transplanting myself to London shares only a few common elements with these subjects. But in conversation with the artist, she says that she hopes that the exhibition fosters an introspective environment, one that draws the viewer into the experience of others through a delving into the self. The fragments and extracts of verse and text stencilled on floors and walls contextualise and theorise the specific history of Afro-Caribbean migration, with quotes from, amongst others, Homi K Bhabha, Braithwaite and Ralph Waldo Emerson. Their placement seems to acknowledge and enact dispersal as well as a threading together of a frame for understanding experience. They also seem like fragments of memory, recalled.

I would have found it more powerful and evocative to have heard all the stories rippling through the whole space, in a low interweaving murmur, while still allowing the visitor to bring one story into focus at a time by donning the headphones provided. As it was, the headphones slung over individual chairs encouraged the visitor to sit down and spend time with each person's story, as Checinska did when she interviewed the subjects. From 2003 to 2006, Checinska conducted a series of interviews and focus groups with African-Caribbean elders and local, white Hackney Londoners. The stories here are the reminiscences of five Afro-Caribbean men, focusing on the role that personalised fashion choices played for them. Listening to the stories between the suspended suits, with flickering ionic projections of historic photographs playing over them and my own body, the presences of these suits grew cathedral or monument-like, subjects claiming their place in a national fabric.

I became particularly interested in Checinska's choice to display the suits folded precisely in full-length profile, suspended upright, pinned invisibly to pieces of white board. While her research focuses on analysing the dressed body (Checinska 2012:141), these suits do not create the illusion of a body within. Clothing is frequently used as a skin substitute or surrogate, and often comes to be seen primarily for the whole body that the skin enfolds, as well as the perceived shade or spirit of the person. Displaying wearable items bulked out by wiring or mannequins to hold space for a body is a practice I have been accustomed to see, to good effect, in the work of numerous South African artists, including Hentie van der Merwe, Nandipha Mntambo, Mary Sibande or Nicholas Hlobo. The (human) body is present despite its physical absence. The presentation of Checinska's

FIGURE **Nº 3**

Christine Checinska, *The Arrivants*, 2016. Detail of installation. Courtesy of Thys Dullhaard.

suits struck me because they present the possibility that they need not be conceived of as held finitely within the terms of the bodies and subjectivities that they may have clothed. These suits seem to foreground and validate the act of archiving and documenting. It is as if they were drawn out of drawers in the stores of the National Fashion Museum or the Victoria and Albert Museum where they should be (and, I hope, are) maintained as part of the nation's history.

The suits dominate the exhibition visually: pinstriped, double-breasted, tapered trousers, boldly patterned ties, sharp accessories like the folded handkerchief in the breast pocket, the rolled London newspaper, the service medals. With all these details, the "British" suit is creolised. The Afro-Caribbean influence on the 1950s English "Rude Boy" suit is an example of how the Afro-Caribbean came to be the trend-maker. These visual cues embody and express 'a principled clash of patterns' as cultures collide, co-exist and coalesce (Checinska 2012:149).

The final tableau mocks up a modest 1950's parlour with two settees and the centre-piece television in its period stand. Here the empire has literally come home; here is the space where the immigrants sit and watch the nation, watching them. On the television, black and white reruns of "black" and "white" interaction apparently on news and current

FIGURE **Nº 4**

Christine Checinska, *The Arrivants*, 2016. Detail of installation. Courtesy of Thys Dullhaard.

affairs programmes and sitcoms roll on. This scene spoke to Michael McMillan's exhibition entitled *The Front Room 'Inna Jo'burg'*, which was installed above it in the FADA gallery. Yet Checinska's room appeared to me to present an experience more intentionally destabilising. She dives down into the memory bank of a community and a nation, taking with her a sketch pad, notepad, tape measure and sound recorder to detail and sensitively interpret the acts of representation and self-representation that she finds there.

This exhibition also resonates with its place here in Johannesburg. The destination for many migrants and refugees from other parts of Africa, the city's creolised and assimilatory behaviour, fashions, and cultures is diversely reflective of the welcome, as well as the xenophobic rejection and subtly institutionalised discrimination, that the city affords newcomers. Lolo Veleko has documented vibrant and sartorial fashion expressions of young, black, contemporary, South African urbanites. With Checinska's historical project, the losses that time must bring, and the now iconic, even mythical, associations of the Windrush Generation, could have resulted in this exhibition sinking into sentimentalised nostalgia. But it is not only the deep sea cold of the exhibition space that disallows nostalgia as a cosy force. Checinska has produced an exhibition that performs as well as documents the sartorial wit, the sharp pain, the warm courage, and the fuzzy emotional negotiations

and compromises that informed immigrant Afro-Caribbean identities, which continue to ripple out to the artist herself, and to many others in Britain and around the world. The atmosphere seems to warn me equally not to stay too long and not to fear descending.

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Editorial policy and guidelines

Image & Text has been published annually since 1992 (primarily then as a journal for design) and was accredited by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training in 1997. Since 2011, it has been repositioned as a multi- and interdisciplinary journal that orbits around the nexus of visual culture. The aim of the journal is to draw perspectives from a broad field of interests and subjects: visual anthropology, material culture, visual arts, design culture, visualising sciences and technologies, art history, philosophy, fashion, media and film studies, architecture, literary studies, tourism studies, new media and cyber theory, and so forth. The grounding provided by visual culture studies as a comparative and enabling premise for all these approaches, subjects, interests, fields and theories is located in the global South, not only geographically but also critically.

The editors invite papers that address or intersect with the visual from any of the fields mentioned above. One of the aims is to showcase new and young academic voices, as well as more established voices.

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Amy Kirschke is Professor of Art History, and chair of the Art and Art History Department at UNCW. She is the author of *Women Artists of the Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), *Protest and Propaganda; DuBois, The Crisis and American History*, Amy Kirschke and Phil Sinitiere, co-editors (University of Missouri Press, 2014), *Art in Crisis: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Struggle for African American Identity and Memory* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2007) (SECAC BOOK AWARD for excellence in research and writing, 2007), *Aaron Douglas: Art, Race and the Harlem Renaissance* (Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 1995). Kirschke is currently working on a book on Romare Bearden's political cartoons of the 1930s.

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Jacques Lange is partner and creative director at Bluprint Design, publisher and editor of *DESIGN*> and www.designmagazine.co, and part-time lecturer in Information Design and Visual Communication at the University of Pretoria. Throughout his career Jacques has actively engaged in design practice, profession management, education, research, design promotion, policy advocacy and design journalism. His professional output has earned him many industry awards and his work has been featured in numerous international publications and exhibitions. He is an experienced industry juror, widely published author and speaker on design issues internationally. He is a past president of the International Council of Communication Design (Icograda, 2007-2009), founding co-chair of the International Design Alliance (IDA, 2005-2007), and advisor to various governmental institutions and NGOs. His research interests include the creative economy, talent mobility and creative diaspora, design policy, profession management, and contemporary design from lesser-known regions. Jacques is also one of the founders of *Image & Text*.

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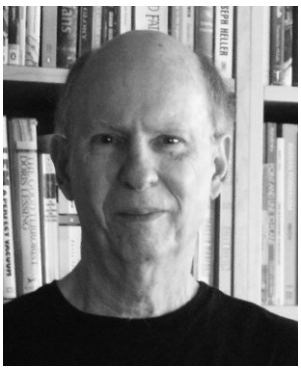
Jenni Lauwrens teaches in the Visual Studies division in the Department of Visual Arts at the University of Pretoria. She teaches from first year to Masters level students visual culture studies, research methodologies and key texts in visual culture. Jenni has published in local and international publications on the relationship between visual culture studies and art history. Her research interests include the aims and protocols of visual culture studies and art history, art education, art historiography, spectatorship, embodiment, phenomenology, neuro-art history, neuro-aesthetics and practices of seeing. Her PhD deals with the historical and theoretical implications of the viewer's particular forms of embodiment.

Victor Margolin



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Nicholas Mirzoeff

Nicholas Mirzoeff is a Professor of Media, Culture and Communication at New York University, New York. After more than a decade of writing about and teaching visual culture, most recently at SUNY Stonybrook, Mirzoeff decided to join the Department of Art and Art Professions in order to create a cross-departmental and cross-disciplinary visual culture program. The new program in visual culture also signals the primacy of the visual image, he believes, which affects our lives to a greater and greater extent each day. Mirzoeff's recent book, *Watching Babylon: The war in Iraq and global visual culture*, enlarges upon this intriguing notion. His first book, *Silent poetry: deafness, sign and visual culture in modern France*, was about sign language and its relationship to painting. Mirzoeff is also the author of *An introduction to visual culture*.

George Pfruender

Georges Pfruender is a Swiss national who has spent a significant amount of time living abroad in Africa, Asia, America and the Middle East. He received his Master of Fine Arts from San Francisco Art Institute in 1991. While continuing to produce his own body of work, for the past decade he had also been Director of the Fine Arts University Ecole Cantonale d'Art du Valais, Switzerland, President of the Swiss National Board of Art and Design. Vice President of the Swiss UNESCO Commission, and since 2009, Head of the School of Arts at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. As artist and researcher he has participated in conferences, panels and residency programs in Europe, USA, South Africa, Venezuela, and Taiwan, and is presently involved in projects engaging artists in migrant communities of the inner city of Johannesburg. At the Wits School of Arts he has been responsible for the coordination of arts programs at undergraduate and postgraduate levels (MFA, PhD) concerning the disciplines of music, drama, fine arts, film and TV, digital arts and cultural theories.

Annette Prichard

Annette Pritchard is Professor of Critical Tourism Studies and Director of the Welsh Centre for Tourism Research at Cardiff Metropolitan University. Annette has a long-standing interest in the relationships between places, representations and identities and she has published 15 books and over 40 papers on these connectivities. Much of her work is driven by a commitment to transformative research and she is one of the originators of the hopeful tourism agenda and co-chair of the biannual Critical Tourism Studies Conference Series. Annette was formerly Convenor of the *Leisure Studies* editorial board and her current editorial responsibilities include serving as joint Research Notes Editor of the *Annals of*

Tourism Research. She is also an advisory board member of the Copenhagen Business School's Creative Industries Research Centre and a regular invited speaker at events and conferences.

Marian Sauthoff

Marian Sauthoff retired as Executive Dean of the Faculty of Art, Design and Architecture at the University of Johannesburg in 2013. Prior to this, she was professor and head of the Department of Visual Arts and also chaired the School of Arts at the University of Pretoria. She completed her master's (cum laude) and doctoral degrees through the University of Pretoria. Prof Sauthoff is the founding editor of the accredited journal *Image & Text: A Journal for Design*, which she edited from 1992 to 2010. She has also served on the editorial board and as guest editor of a number of international journals. She has published extensively in her field of expertise and regularly acts as a peer referee for articles and conference papers. She has served as a member of advisory boards to industry and government and as an adjudicator for national and international design awards. Her career includes design consultancy and a period as a senior researcher at the Chamber of Mines.

Annie van den Oever

Annie van den Oever is Extraordinary Professor for Film and Visual Media at the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Free State, South Africa. She is also director of the Film Archive and director of the Master in Film Studies at the Department of Arts, Culture and Media, Faculty of Arts, University of Groningen, The Netherlands. She is an editor of several academic journals and book series in her field, among them: board member of *Film and Media*, *Amsterdam University Press* (since 2003); series editor of *The key debates: mutations and appropriations in European film studies*, with Ian Christie (Birkbeck College, London), and Dominique Chateau (Paris I, Sorbonne Panthéon); chief editor of the new educational books series for Film and Media studies (since 2011), and Editor-in-Chief of the European Journal for Media Studies NECSus (since 2011). Her last two books are *Ostrannenie* and *Sensitizing the viewers*, both published at Amsterdam University Press.